



CLOSE THE GAP

MEDIA RELEASE

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Our Choices, Our Voices **Celebrating Success on National Close the Gap Day**

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner June Oscar AO and the Co-Chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples Rod Little, will today release the 2019 Close the Gap report – *"Our Choices, Our Voices"*.

The report, prepared by the Lowitja Institute, is being released at a community event at Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation – Aboriginal Medical Service South Western Sydney, as part of National Close the Gap day events around the country.

"The report highlights the incredible work being carried out by Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

"The stories in the report clearly demonstrate that when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in the design and delivery of the services they need, we are far more likely to achieve success," the Co-Chairs said.

The report comes one month after the Commonwealth Government's Closing the Gap report was tabled in Federal parliament, showing a lack of progress on most targets.

In his address, the Prime Minister restated the government's commitment to work collaboratively in a formal partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Commissioner Oscar said the report highlights the need to have genuine and meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the decision-making process.

"We have a right to self-determination and full participation in decision-making about matters that affect us. We need to invest in and support on the ground voices and solutions. An investment in our community-controlled organisations is an investment in success," Commissioner Oscar said.

Rod Little said he hopes that National Close the Gap Day will encourage further commitment to address the challenge of health inequality.

"Health outcomes and life expectancy in Aboriginal communities are affected by many different factors, such as housing, educational opportunity, access to community-controlled primary health services, a culturally safe workforce, racism, and trauma and healing.

“I want Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to have the same opportunity to live full and healthy lives, like all other Australians,” Rod Little said.

Among the case studies included in the report;

The Birthing on Country Project provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women access to culturally and clinically safe, inclusive care that incorporates cultural birthing traditions within mainstream maternity services. It is currently piloting two programs;

- South East Queensland in collaboration with Indigenous Urban Health Institute and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Services Brisbane and
- Nowra, New South Wales, alongside Waminda South Coast Women’s Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation

Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Academy is taking a new approach to education and training. This is a community-led learning model focussed on re-shaping and re-designing the way training is delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students.

IndigiLez Leadership and Support Group offers support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer (LGBTIQ) women.

Yawuru Home Ownership Program was established in 2015 after the Yawuru people in highlighted housing as a key priority.

The Co-Chairs said the over-riding principle throughout the stories is that the success of these initiatives is based on community governance and leadership, which is imperative to the success and longevity of the programs.

“These stories illustrate that ‘our choice and our voice’ is vital if we are to make gains and start to close the gap.

“We are optimistic that by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led initiatives and a commitment to working in genuine partnership, that we can close the gap,” they said.

Download a copy of the 2019 Close the Gap report *Our Choices, Our Voices* visit <https://www.antar.org.au/close-gap> ;

Further information on National Close the Gap Day visit the ANTaR website; <https://antar.org.au/campaigns/national-close-gap-day>

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The Close the Gap Campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality is a coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous health and human rights organisations. The Campaign's goal is to raise the health and life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to that of the non-Indigenous population within a generation: to close the gap by 2030. More than 250,000 Australians have signed up as supporters of the Campaign.