

MEDIA RELEASE

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Government at risk of failing on close the gap without renewed commitment and an address to racism in the health system

National advocacy organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights – ANTaR, today expressed concern that government's closing the gap strategy would not work without dedicated funding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, new targets, and stamping out racism in the health system.

National Director Andrew Meehan said "closing the gap in health equality is something all political parties have agreed to, but leaving the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan unfunded in an election year, isn't good enough. It shows a lack of commitment which needs to be addressed."

Government is at serious risk of allowing close the gap to wander off track just at a time when it needs to support its commitment with renewed action. That means funding, introducing justice and disability targets to fill a gaping hole in the closing the gap strategy, and addressing racism in the health system," he said.

Mr Meehan said that the Close the Gap Campaign's call for a senate inquiry into racism in the health system and its contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality should be heeded as a matter of urgency.

"We can't allow a situation to continue where First Peoples are avoiding seeking health care because they've been treated in a racially discriminatory way. A situation where racism is literally making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sick," he said.

Mr Meehan said that ANTaR, as a foundational member of the Close the Gap Campaign, calls for government to implement all of the recommendations in the Close the Gap Campaign's 2016 Progress and Priorities Report.

"This is the 10th Anniversary of the Aboriginal led Close the Gap Campaign, as distinct from government's Closing the Gap Strategy, and its time for a recommitment of all political parties to what they signed up for in 2008."

"We're at risk of efforts to close the gap drifting. In an election year, or any other year, we can't allow that to happen," he said.

*ANTaR has launched a **Change.org petition** calling on the Senate Select Committee on Health to establish an inquiry into racism and institutional racism in health care settings, and hospitals in particular, and its contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequality. <https://www.change.org/p/help-stop-racism-in-our-health-system>*

ANTaR is the only incorporated non-Indigenous organisation dedicated solely to supporting the aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and working to educate the wider community, shape public opinion and speak up for justice, rights and respect for Australia's First Peoples.