

**Wednesday 14 May 2014**

## **ANTAR: government must explain how Indigenous policy overhaul will close the gap**

ANTaR today called on government to show how the budget measures in Indigenous affairs will close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

National Director Mr Andrew Meehan said that there are sweeping changes to the way government will be working in Indigenous affairs contained in the budget, including a \$534 million cut and a new 'Indigenous Advancement Strategy' approach.

"This consolidation is a big change that appears to move away from closing the gap." He said.

"The government has made strong commitments to closing the gap but it is unclear how the changes will meet them." He said.

"Government needs to explain this and how they will engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representatives on the overhaul which will see the 150 Indigenous programs consolidated into just five." He said.

He said that while ANTaR supported changes that ensured more investment reached Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through reduced red tap, there was real concern at the \$165 million to be cut from Indigenous health and the absence of detail around how the cut would be made.

"We need greater clarity on a range of these measures." Mr Meehan said.

He also said that some of the changes to mainstream health services, including cuts to preventative health and the \$7 Medicare Co-payment would have a disproportionate impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The previously announced cuts to Aboriginal Legal Services were also of deep concern given that Aboriginal people were incarcerated at 14 times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. "These cuts don't support governments commitments to reduce incarceration rates and will impact on frontline services."

"The defunding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations such as the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS), and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service should be revisited." He said.

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*ANTaR is the only 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.*

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