

**Monday 18<sup>th</sup> August 2014**

## **Cabinet must rethink Indigenous budget cuts not just fuel excise and Medicare co-payment**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy organisation ANTaR today called on the Cabinet to rethink the suite of budget cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services.

National Director Andrew Meehan said that with Cabinet meeting tomorrow it was time to discuss alternatives to the \$534 million of cuts to Indigenous affairs, with a view to negotiating changes with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

"It's a good sign that Government has signalled a willingness to negotiate Budget measures, but cuts to Indigenous affairs must be on the table," Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan said that across every social and economic indicator, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as a group are the most disadvantaged in Australia.

He said that government should listen to the public outcry over the \$165 million cut from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs, the \$130 million cut from anti-smoking programs, and discontinuation of the Closing the Gap in Health and Early Childhood Development National Partnership Agreements.

He added that the impact of the \$7 Medicare Co-Payment, and cuts to preventive health programs are mainstream measures that will further compound government's ability to close the gap in health.

"Put simply, these measures as currently constituted won't help close the gap in health," he said.

Government should also rethink the widespread cuts to specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (\$13.4 million), Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (\$3.6), and cuts to 38 Aboriginal Children and Family Centres (\$78 million).

"These cuts are already biting. Vital Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are shutting their doors, and staff are leaving," Mr Meehan said.

"Cutting of such programs and services isn't the approach that we expected from the Prime Minister who said that Aboriginal affairs would be at the heart of a new government, in word and in deed," Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan said that Cabinet should commit to sitting down with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives including National Congress of Australia's First Peoples, and work out an alternative approach to these unprecedented cuts.

*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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