

**Wednesday 11 February 2015**

## **Government must match commitments with investment to close the gap**

As the Prime Minister delivers his closing the gap address to parliament today, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation ANTaR is calling for increased investment and certainty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and organisations.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said while the close the gap commitments are welcome, they must be backed by targeted action – in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and that means investment in, not cuts to, programs.

“Closing the Gap should be among the first places government should look to deliver a fairer budget in 2015,” Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan said that the Federal Government needs to continue to lead the national effort to close the gap, and ensure improved access to primary health care services to detect, treat and manage chronic health conditions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people suffer chronic disease at twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. Addressing chronic disease means more prevention, more treatment, more accessibility to services,” Mr Meehan said.

He said that 2014 had been a year of upheaval in Indigenous Affairs which involved \$130 million being cut from the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program, discontinuation of the National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development, rationalisation of programs through the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, and more than \$500 million in funding cuts.

“What’s needed now is certainty, clarity of approach, and real investment, otherwise government will be falling short of its commitments to close the gap,” he said.

“Government should align its Indigenous Advancement Strategy with the Closing the Gap Strategy; restore and increase investment in Indigenous anti-smoking initiatives; provide certainty of funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations including professional bodies and peaks; and finalise an implementation plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan,” he said.

Mr Meehan also called for government to meet its commitment to develop Closing the Gap Justice Targets to reduce imprisonment and create safer communities.

He said that all political parties and almost 200,000 Australians have committed to close the health equality gap and it is clear that this is a national priority which requires real action and investment.

ANTaR is a foundational member of the Close the Gap Steering Committee and supports the full implementation of its 2015 Progress and Priorities Report recommendations.

*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.*