

CLOSE THE GAP

Investing in a healthy future

Ian Thorpe asks

Australian governments not to forget Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health



Photo: Jason Malouin/OxfamAUS

Dear state, territory and federal government leaders,

I got behind the Close the Gap campaign because I believed it's totally unacceptable that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples die 10–17 years younger than non-Indigenous Australians.

I believed that long-term commitments to programs and services will dramatically improve people's health outcomes and quite literally save lives.

Thankfully all sides of politics agreed and five years ago the commitment of federal, state and territory governments through COAG to close the life expectancy gap by 2030 was a watershed moment for the nation.

So as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) prepares to meet tomorrow, I urge all state and territory governments to commit to continuing to invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The policies behind the commitments made by COAG in 2008 are just starting to have an impact, with mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples aged less than five years starting to fall.

But the fuel that is driving efforts to close the gap — the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes — is due to expire this June.

The Federal Government has indicated that it will continue funding its share of the agreement.

We now need all state and territory governments to contribute their fair share and commit to renewing the 'National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes'.

The continued funding is required to:

- provide access to critical chronic disease services;
- further develop child and maternal health services;
- develop and implement healthy lifestyle programs and education;
- improve access to smoking programs;
- provide better resourced, more accessible and relevant health services;
- provide more affordable medicines;
- support Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations; and
- train more Aboriginal health workers, allied health professionals, doctors, nurses and health promotion workers.

Australia can't afford to delay. Continued investment is essential if the nation is to build upon the work of the last four years.

I have seen the need and I have seen the impact that quality services can bring. I believe that we can be the generation to end the national disgrace that sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples die more than 10 years younger than the broader Australian community.

Ian Thorpe, Close the Gap Campaign Patron



The Close the Gap Campaign Coalition:

CO-CHAIRS

- Ms Jody Broun, Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples
- Mr Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission

MEMBERS

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
- Australian Indigenous Psychologists' Association
- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia Inc.
- Indigenous Dentists' Association of Australia

- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association
- National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Physiotherapists
- National Congress of Australia's First Peoples
- National Coordinator — Tackling Indigenous Smoking (Dr Tom Calma AO — Campaign founder and former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner)
- National Indigenous Drug and Alcohol Committee
- The Lowitja Institute
- Torres Strait Island Regional Authority
- Australian College of Nursing
- Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW
- ANTaR
- Australian Human Rights Commission (Secretariat)
- Australian Medical Association
- Australian Medicare Local Alliance
- Fred Hollows Foundation
- Heart Foundation Australia
- Menzies School of Health Research
- Oxfam Australia
- Palliative Care Australia
- Royal Australasian College of Physicians
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Professor Ian Ring (expert adviser)

Join Ian by writing to your state or territory leader at oxfam.org.au/closethegap