

Wednesday 18th June 2014

Government must deliver on its assurances not to cut Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander frontline services

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights organisation ANTaR today called for government to provide certainty for ongoing funding of frontline services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

National Director, Mr Andrew Meehan, said that government had repeatedly said that the \$534 million cut to Indigenous Affairs announced in the Federal Budget would not affect frontline services.

"This week we've seen reports of imminent cuts to 38 Aboriginal Children and Family Centres, NSW and ACT Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS) programs, and a Belonging to Family program for Aboriginal children." Mr Meehan said

The cuts - effective from 1st July - will affect children and family centres providing integrated education, family support, childcare and health services to children and families; support for reintegration for ex-prisoners; and support for Aboriginal children with parents in prison.

"It's clear that these are frontline services running essential programs to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage." Mr Meehan said.

"Government needs to demonstrate that it is sticking to its assurances that it won't cut frontline services." He said.

There was also concern about proposed changes to early childhood services through the Budget Based Funded program which could affect an array of other services including nutrition, transport, family support, health and early intervention programs.

"These are direct services for Aboriginal children that should be supported." He said

There was further concern that the process of rationalising 150 programs to five in Indigenous Affairs will mean this uncertainty will continue for sometime as government assesses where the cuts will come from.

"There is great uncertainty among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations about the future of the frontline services they're delivering." Mr Meehan said.

"There doesn't seem to be a systemic, coherent approach to this process and there's been very little real engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure these vital services aren't affected." Mr Meehan said.

Mr Meehan said that without genuine engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around the budget measures, any goodwill generated from the commitment to be the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs could evaporate.

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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