

MEDIA RELEASE



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Push for Budget surplus must not impede increasing investment in Closing the Gap

ANTaR has called on the federal Treasurer to make sure that necessary funding increases to address the unmet needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are not sacrificed in the push to quickly return the Budget to surplus.

“ANTaR has provided a pre-Budget submission to Treasury detailing a range of areas where further funding is needed to address the Government’s stated goals and reduce Indigenous disadvantage,” Ms Phillips said.

“Investment in community education on Constitutional recognition, an innovative new approach to reduce Indigenous incarceration and support to create a level native title playing field are among our key priorities for the 2011-12 Federal Budget,” said Jacqueline Phillips, ANTaR National Director.

“To take full advantage of the historic opportunity offered by the upcoming referendum on Indigenous recognition, resources are needed to educate the community about the importance of recognition and the history of our Constitution, its omissions and prejudices.”

ANTaR has also called for funding for Justice Reinvestment pilot programs to reduce the over-imprisonment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Justice Reinvestment involves redirecting a proportion of funds spent on prisons to services which will keep people out of prison: education, health, employment, housing and rehabilitation.

“With Indigenous juveniles 28 times more likely to be imprisoned than non-Indigenous juveniles, the need for a radically different approach is clear,” said Ms Phillips.

The Government has recently outlined an agenda to support the development of more sustainable native title agreements. Increased funding to native title bodies has been a recommendation in a series of government and parliamentary reports.

“Sustainable native title agreements depend on a level playing field. We urge the Government to consider adequate funding for native title bodies as an integral part of its native title reform and economic development agenda.”

In addition to the priorities above, ANTaR’s submission urged extra investment in:

- community alcohol management programs in the Northern Territory;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services;
- Aboriginal community controlled health services;
- increasing the number of fully-funded services positions to replace CDEP positions;

- funding the Indigenous Economic Development Strategy;
- addressing service and infrastructure priorities, including building the capacity of the Indigenous housing sector nationally, and
- reparations for the Stolen Generations

“We must not let the short-term nature of the political cycle impede the need to invest in long-term strategies that will benefit all Australians,” Ms Phillips concluded.

A full copy of ANTaR’s pre-Budget submission can be downloaded from <http://www.antar.org.au/sites/default/files/Submission%20to%20Federal%20Budget%202011-12%20FINAL.pdf>.

ANTaR is a national advocacy organisation dedicated specifically to the rights - and overcoming the disadvantage - of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

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ANTaR relies on the support of generous donations to continue its work supporting the rights and empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.