We have the solutions.

REDFERN
STATEMENT
THE REDFERN STATEMENT

An urgent call for a more just approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs.

“Social justice is what faces you in the morning. It is awakening in a house with adequate water supply, cooking facilities and sanitation. It is the ability to nourish your children and send them to school where their education not only equips them for employment but reinforces their knowledge and understanding of their cultural inheritance. It is the prospect of genuine employment and good health: a life of choices and opportunity, free from discrimination.”


On the 9th of June 2016, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations gathered in Redfern where in 1992 Prime Minister Paul Keating spoke truth about this nation - that the disadvantage faced by First Peoples affects and is the responsibility of all Australians.
The Redfern Statement
leaders made the following declaration:

We stand here as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak representative organisations with a deep concern:

• That First Peoples continue to experience unacceptable disadvantage;

• That the challenges confronting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be isolated to the margins of the national debate;

• That Federal Government policies continue to be made for and to, rather than with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; and

• That the transformative opportunities for Government action are yet to be grasped.

Stand with us to let this statement and call for Government action be heard and acted upon by our nation’s leaders.
This Redfern Statement and call for Government action is led by:

- National Congress of Australia's First Peoples
- First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS)
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (NACCHO)
- National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) Forum
- Secretariat for National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care (SNAICC)
- Australian Indigenous Doctors’ Association (AIDA)
- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM)
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers Association (NATSIHWA)
- National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Physiotherapists
- NGAOARA – Child and Adolescent Wellbeing
- The Healing Foundation
- The Lowitja Institute
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak

With overarching support from:

- Close the Gap Steering Committee
- Family Matters Campaign
- National Health Leadership Forum
- The Change the Record Coalition
And broad support from:

- Amnesty International Australia
- ANTaR
- Australian College of Midwives
- Australian College of Nursing
- Australian Council of Social Service
- Australian Healthcare & Hospitals Association
- Australian Medical Association
- Australian Physiotherapy Association
- Berry Street
- Centre for Excellence in Child and Family Welfare
- Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People (VIC) – Andrew Jackomos
- Domestic Violence NSW
- Families Australia
- Federation of Community Legal Centres (VIC)
- Human Rights Law Centre
- Indigenous Eye Health, University of Melbourne
- Law Council of Australia
- Menzies School of Health Research
- National Association of Community Legal Centres
- Oxfam Australia
- PeakCare Queensland Inc.
- Public Health Association of Australia
- Queensland Family and Child Commission
- Reconciliation Australia
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners
- Save the Children
- Sisters Inside
- Tasmanian Children’s Commissioner – Mark Morrissey
- The Fred Hollows Foundation
- The Heart Foundation
- Uniting Communities
- UnitingCare NSW & ACT
A call for urgent Government action

In the past 25 years – a generation in fact – we have had the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, the Bringing Them Home Report and Reconciliation: Australia’s Challenge: the final report of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation. These reports, and numerous other Coroner and Social Justice Reports, have made over 400 recommendations, most of which have either been only partially implemented for short-term periods or ignored altogether.

In the last 25 years we have seen eight Federal election cycles come and go, with seven Prime Ministers, seven Ministers for Indigenous Affairs, countless policies, policy changes, funding promises and funding cuts – all for the most marginalised people in Australia.

For the last quarter century, we have seen seminal reports which have repeatedly emphasised that our people need to have a genuine say in our own lives and decisions that affect our peoples and communities. This, known as self-determination, is the key to closing the gap in outcomes for the First Peoples of these lands and waters.

All of these reports call for better resourcing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

All of these reports call for real reconciliation based on facing the truths of the past and creating a just and mature relationship between the non-Indigenous Australian community and the First Peoples. Yet, our First Peoples face the same struggles as they did in 1992.

The Federal Government and each of the State and Territory governments share responsibility to right this nation’s past injustices. The current Government has an unprecedented nation-building opportunity to meaningfully address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. They have the mandate to act.
We therefore call on the Federal Government to:

Commit to resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led-solutions, by:

- Restoring, over the forward estimates, the $534 million cut from the Indigenous Affairs portfolio in the 2014 Budget to invest in priority areas outlined in this statement; and
- Reforming the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and other Federal funding programs with greater emphasis on service/need mapping (through better engagement) and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as preferred providers.

Commit to better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their representative national peaks, by:

- Funding the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (Congress) and all relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations and forums; and
- Convening regular high level ministerial and departmental meetings and forums with the Congress and the relevant peak organisations and forums.

Recommit to Closing the Gap in this generation, by and in partnership with COAG and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

- Setting targets and developing evidence-based, prevention and early intervention oriented national strategies which will drive activity and outcomes addressing:
  - family violence (with a focus on women and children);
  - incarceration and access to justice;
  - child safety and wellbeing, and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care; and
  - increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to disability services;

Secure national funding agreements between the Commonwealth, States and Territories (like the former National Partnership Agreements), which emphasise accountability to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and drive the implementation of national strategies.
Commit to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to establish a Department of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs in the future, that:

- Is managed and run by senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public servants;
- Brings together the policy and service delivery components of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs and ensures a central department of expertise.
- Strengthens the engagement for governments and the broader public service with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the management of their own services.

Commit to addressing the unfinished business of reconciliation, by:

- Addressing and implementing the recommendations of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, which includes an agreement making framework (treaty) and constitutional reform in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities.

The health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples cannot be considered at the margins.

It is time that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard and respected, and that the following plans for action in relation to meaningful engagement, health, justice, preventing violence, early childhood and disability, are acted upon as a matter of national priority and urgency.
Meaningful Engagement

*National Representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples*

It is critical that Australia’s First Peoples are properly represented at the national level to ensure meaningful engagement with Government, industry and the non-government sectors to advance the priorities of our people.

Since 2010, the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (Congress) has gone some way to fill the gap in national representation since the demise of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in 2005.

However, there remain too many gaps in adequate national level representation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – particularly for employment and education. Without Congress or equivalent national bodies where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders are supported to engage with Government it will be difficult for the next Federal Parliament to meet the multi-partisan priority and commitment to work ‘with’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

National representation is critical for coordinating engagement with State and Territory governments and stakeholders, particularly in the areas of education, employment and housing where there is no current national equivalent. The National Congress is best placed to provide coordination in the interim.
We call on the Federal Government to commit to:

1. **Restoration of funding to the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples**

   The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples (Congress) was established in 2010 to be the representative voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to advocate for positive change. The decision to defund Congress, just as it is beginning to emerge as a unifying element among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups, is a mistake.

   Without support, Congress’ ability to do its job of representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests is severely compromised. Congress must be supported to provide a mechanism to engage with our people, develop policy, and advocate to Government.

   Congress should be supported to reach sustainability and independence as soon as possible.

2. **A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative body for Education:**

   Although there are many good quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and strong leaders working at the State and local level in the education sector, there is currently no national body to promote and engage in education policy for Australia’s First Peoples.

   The education sector is fragmented across early childhood, primary and secondary education, vocational education and training, and higher education, with each of state and territory having public, Catholic and private school systems. In the absence of a single national education voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Congress has been active in coordinating and promoting unity across these sectors. Congress has consulted widely with its members, educators and organisations, many of which have a long history of working in this area.

   We call on the Federal Government to establish a national body that can call for policies to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities across all of these educational systems.
3. A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative body for Employment

The highly disadvantaged employment and income status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is well documented. While we appreciate attempts at advancing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the many issues around employment require a unified and expert voice.

Beyond skills training, mentoring and targeted employment services to enhance the job readiness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, concerted effort needs to be directed to creating jobs that are suitable and meaningful for our people. This is of particular concern in remote areas, where mainstream commercial and labour market opportunities are limited. In both urban and rural areas, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are faced with issues of racism and discrimination in the workplace.

The Federal Government should establish and fund a national representative body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to drive employment and economic solutions for our people, in order to:

- Work with our communities to develop their own strategies for economic development, and promote community participation and management;
- Promote strategies to create Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander-friendly workplaces; and
- Work with Government to design welfare policy that encourages, rather than coerces, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into employment.

4. A national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative body for Housing

Federal and State Government policies concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing is currently disjointed, wasteful and failing. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban and regional markets face many barriers in accessing and securing safe and affordable housing, including discrimination and poverty.

The Federal Parliament should support the development of a national representative body of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders who can focus on housing security for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and:

- Advocate for the ongoing support for remote communities to prevent community closures;
- Work with communities to develop a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing strategy, with the aim of improving the housing outcomes for our people across all forms of housing tenure; and
- Provide culturally appropriate rental, mortgage and financial literacy advice.
HEALTH
First Peoples Health Priorities

Closing the Gap in health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians is an agreed national priority. The recognised necessity and urgency to close the gap must be backed by meaningful action.

Despite the regular upheaval of major policy changes, significant budget cuts and changes to Government in the short election cycles at all levels, we have still managed to see some encouraging improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes. But much remains to be achieved and as we move into the next phase of Closing the Gap, enhanced program and funding support will be required.

We appeal to all political parties, and governments to recommit to Closing the Gap and to concentrate efforts in the priority areas in order to meet our goal of achieving health equality in this generation.

JUSTICE
Access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The state of access to justice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their over-representation in the criminal justice system is a national crisis. Since 2004 there has been a 95 per cent increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in custody.

In addition to the estimated $3.4 billion that governments spend annually in keeping people in jail, there are also well-established downstream consequences of imprisonment, which affects future employment prospects, families and communities. These have inestimable social and economic costs for the broader community and act only to increase the risk of recidivism.

A number of reports have identified that the provision of adequate and accessible legal services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the areas of civil and family law will assist in reducing the level of over-representation in the justice system. Despite this, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and the Aboriginal Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS), have faced repeated cuts to their funding which only hampers their ability to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

If the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their fellow Australians accessing justice is ever to be properly addressed, the starting point has to be a genuine engagement by all levels of Government with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their organisations and representative bodies.
PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Preventing violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children

Violence against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children devastates communities and destroys families. In comparison with other women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are 34 times more likely to be hospitalised from family violence and 10 times more likely to be killed as a result of violent assault.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live with inter-generational experiences of dispossession and trauma, and continue to experience overt and institutional racism every day. It is important to recognise the complex and often interrelated causes of violence in communities and to support community solutions to reduce the instances and impacts of violence where it arises.

Through casework with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander victims/survivors, Family Violence Prevention Legal Services (FVPLS) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) see the multi-generational impacts of family violence on a daily basis.

Reducing and eliminating family violence can only be achieved with a commitment to an evidence-based and integrated government approach, undertaken in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, their organisations and representative bodies.

CHILD DEVELOPMENT, SAFETY & WELLBEING

Progressing early childhood outcomes through access to quality early childhood education and care

Access to quality early learning services for children experiencing vulnerability is a critical predictor of a child’s successful transition to school, and lifelong education and employment outcomes. Yet, while twice as likely to experience developmental vulnerability, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are half as likely to access early learning as non-Indigenous children. This needs to change urgently. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations overcome many of the barriers to service access and offer unique, culturally-centred services that respond to the needs of their communities. International and Australian evidence also shows us that genuine participation and ownership are central for positive outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families.

Research also demonstrates that early childhood services have the greatest impacts for vulnerable families, providing long-term wellbeing, productivity and cost benefits for society. They provide gateways for families to a range of integrated support services and act
as the best preventative measure to strengthen families and prevent child abuse and neglect. Increasing both service access and wider supports for children at risk would reduce child removal, particularly given that 44.4 per cent of children in out-of-home care are removed from their families by age four or under.

**DISABILITY**

*Addressing disability for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability are amongst the most marginalised in Australian society.

It is estimated that approximately 45 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people identify as having some form of disability, with 9.1 per cent having severe and profound disability. Despite the high prevalence of disability, policy attention which is sensitive to the unique circumstances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability has been negligible. Further, there is currently little investment in research and data to address the gaps in understanding, which presents a significant risk to the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The First Peoples Disability Network (Australia) is a national organisation established by, for and on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities with lived experience of disability. The Board of Directors is entirely comprised of First Peoples with disability. We are guided by the lived experience of disability in determining the policy priorities which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability attaining their full potential.
We have the solutions.

National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples


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