

MEDIA RELEASE



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The only way to close the gap is to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Today, more than 150,000 Australians will gather in over 1500 community events to mark National Close the Gap Day and show their support for closing the appalling health equality gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights advocacy organisation ANTaR used the occasion to call for government to engage with First Peoples and work with them to close the gap.

ANTaR National Director Andrew Meehan said that the record number of events showed that Australians from across the country are demanding that government listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about what's needed to close the gap.

"It's been a particularly torrid few weeks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the back of a year of upheaval and disarray."

"There's been renewed confusion and uncertainty with the announcement of funding under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy, and despair at communities facing closure across Western Australia," Mr Meehan said.

He said that the planned community closures appear at odds with commitments to health equality as there was growing evidence that culture and living on country is linked to better health and wellbeing.

"It's time for government to rethink its approach to top down policy development, and learn from those who are best placed to come up with solutions - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Mr Meehan said.

"The constant call for decades has simply been to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a sustained and respectful way, not spring surprises and upheaval on them every time someone in government has an idea," Mr Meehan said.

"There is great anxiety and a growing distrust that government is prepared to engage constructively with the First Peoples. Government needs to address this as a matter of urgency," he said.

Mr Meehan said that there is now an opportunity to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and focus on increasing access to health services to identify and treat chronic disease to make real gains in health.

He said that the *Progress and Priorities Report* of the Close the Gap Campaign provided the blueprint for progress in health equality and government should work in partnership to act on it.

He said that National Close the Gap Day again demonstrates that Australians support the generational effort to close the gap, and want government to listen to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ANTaR is a foundational member of the Close the Gap Campaign and 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