



NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation
Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands

www.naccho.org.au

Measuring What Matters

Submission to Dept
of Treasury

January 2023

ABOUT NACCHO

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). We also assist a number of other community-controlled organisations.

The first Aboriginal medical service was established at Redfern in 1971 as a response to the urgent need to provide decent, accessible health services for the largely medically uninsured Aboriginal population of Redfern. The mainstream was not working. So it was, that over fifty years ago, Aboriginal people took control and designed and delivered their own model of health care. Similar Aboriginal medical services quickly sprung up around the country. In 1974, a national representative body was formed to represent these Aboriginal medical services at the national level. This has grown into what NACCHO is today. All this predated Medibank in 1975.

NACCHO liaises with its membership, and the eight state/territory affiliates, governments, and other organisations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing policy and planning issues and advocacy relating to health service delivery, health information, research, public health, health financing and health programs.

ACCHOs range from large multi-functional services employing several medical practitioners and providing a wide range of services, to small services which rely on Aboriginal health practitioners and/or nurses to provide the bulk of primary health care services. Our 144 members provide services from about 550 clinics. Our sector provides over 3.1 million episodes of care per year for over 410,000 people across Australia, which includes about one million episodes of care in very remote regions.

ACCHOs contribute to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing through the provision of comprehensive primary health care, and by integrating and coordinating care and services. Many provide home and site visits; medical, public health and health promotion services; allied health; nursing services; assistance with making appointments and transport; help accessing childcare or dealing with the justice system; drug and alcohol services; and help with income support. Our services build ongoing relationships to give continuity of care so that chronic conditions are managed, and preventative health care is targeted. Through local engagement and a proven service delivery model, our clients 'stick'. Clearly, the cultural safety in which we provide our services is a key factor of our success.

ACCHOs are also closing the employment gap. Collectively, we employ about 7,000 staff – 54 per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders – which makes us the third largest employer of Aboriginal or Torres Strait people in the country.

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Recommendations

NACCHO recommends that:

1. the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023* be drafted in accord with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement;
2. the *Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report* be incorporated into the *Measuring What Matters 2023* framework;
3. the *Measuring What Matter Statement 2023* affirm international and Australian Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles for data collection and use;
4. the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023* include the agreed measures for the Four Priority Reforms and 17 Socio-Economic Targets, and anticipate including the results of new measures as they emerge;
5. the *National Agreement Data Development Plan* and Data and Reporting Working Group inform the drafting of the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023*;

Introduction

NACCHO welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to Dept Treasury consultation around developing a *Measuring What Matters Statement*.

NACCHO acknowledges the need for an overarching Australian national progress and well-being framework comprising a centralised set of indicators, and welcomes the opportunity to inform its development.

The OECD Framework serves as a useful model, and starting point. However, particular attention needs to be paid to aspects unique to the Australian context, and in particular, the variation in wellbeing and progress experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A history of dispossession, marginalisation, ongoing racism and the impact of Government policy since colonisation has resulted in profound inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This has resulted disproportionately high rates of poverty compounded by structural barriers to full participation in the Australian economy evidenced across multiple drivers and measures of socio-economic inequality.

In 2023, NACCHO will make a submission to the Senate Inquiry into the Nature and Extent of Poverty in Australia. Our submission will discuss outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the key drivers of employment, education, income, government supplements, housing, health and justice. We urge the Department to consider NACCHO's submission in the drafting of *Measuring What Matters 2023*.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

In July 2020, the Australian Government, all state and territory governments, the Australian Local Government Association, and the Coalition of Peaks signed the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* (National Agreement). The National Agreement is a commitment from all Australian governments to set out a future where policy making that impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is developed in genuine partnership. It comprises two elements.

Firstly, **Four Priority Reform Areas** aim to bring about the structural change needed to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians. The Four Priority Reform Areas seek to affect ways in which governments work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities and individuals. These are:

- Priority Reform Area 1 – Formal partnerships and shared decision-making
- Priority Reform Area 2 – Building the community-controlled sector
- Priority Reform Area 3 – Transformation of mainstream institutions
- Priority Reform Area 4 – Sharing data and information to support decision making

Secondly, **17 Socio Economic Outcomes** focus on the areas of disparity regarded as most important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Both elements have corresponding targets and measurements:

- **Priority Reform targets** focus on measuring the change governments are making in the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Socio-economic targets** focus on measuring the outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There is significant work underway around the generation and sharing of data across Governments to measure these targets, and key data custodians nationally and jurisdictionally have established data collections core to Closing the Gap reporting. The first Commonwealth *Closing the Gap Annual Report*¹ was released in November 2022. Along with the Productivity Commission data dashboard and annual *Productivity Commission Data Compilation Report*² the *Closing the Gap Annual Report* is designed to measure whether the Commonwealth and all parties are meeting the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Productivity Commission's first three-yearly review of the National Agreement will be released later in 2023.

Through targets and indicators for its Four Priority Reform Areas and 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes, the National Agreement seeks to 'measure what matters' to the wellbeing and progress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Self-determination

Importantly, through the Coalition of Peaks, the Priority Reforms, targets and indicators outlined in the National Agreement have been developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a decisive act of self-determination. In partnership with government representatives, senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives of all member organisations of the Coalition of Peaks make decisions as equals in relation to policy, strategy and governance. Never has a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies come together in this way to agree and negotiate with governments.³ It is critical therefore, that the integrity of this decision-making framework be maintained in the development of the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023*.

NACCHO recommends that a *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023* be drafted in accord with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement.

NACCHO recommends the *Commonwealth Closing the Gap Annual Report* be incorporated into the *Measuring What Matters 2023* framework.

Priority Reform Four - Data Sovereignty and Principles of Community Data

Priority Reform Four is of particular importance to a *Measuring What Matters Statement* that incorporates Closing the Gap reporting. Priority Reform Four makes it necessary for governments to collect and retain data about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people — in development, stewardship, analysis and dissemination of data.

In line with Priority Reform Four, governments should consider the incorporation of international and Australian Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles for data collection and use, and the practical intersection with public sector-held data.

In addition, the integrity and control of Community Data⁴, collected and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and groups for their benefit, must be protected.

¹ NIAA (2022) *Closing the Gap Annual Report*, viewable online at <https://www.niaa.gov.au/news-centre/indigenous-affairs/commonwealth-closing-gap-annual-report-2022>

² Productivity Commission (2022) *Productivity Commission Data Compilation Report*, viewable online at: pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report

³ Coalition of Peaks Community Engagement Report, <https://coalitionofpeaks.org.au/download/2019-community-engagements/>

⁴ Ibid

A commitment to Community Data under Priority Reform Four comes with the establishment of six Community Data Projects. These projects are currently being developed in conjunction with communities and all parties to the National Agreement.

The Community Data projects will provide functional examples of how community data sharing and capacity building can work within a range of communities, servicing their interests. Parties to the National Agreement should look to the progress and learning of these projects while considering the use of community data in setting data development agendas.

NACCHO recommends the *Measuring What Matter Statement 2023* affirm international and Australian Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles for data collection and use.

NACCHO recommends the significance and potential role of the six Community Data Projects be highlighted by future *Measuring What Matter Statements*.

Data Indicators for the Four Priority Reform Areas

No data are currently available to measure and monitor progress in relation to the Four Priority Reforms. Work is currently underway through a dedicated Policy Partnership between Parties to the National Agreement to develop such indicators. To date, some progress has been made on developing a mechanism to measure achievement of Priority Reform Three and outcomes for:

1. systems and structural level transformation;
2. racism and unconscious bias;
3. cultural safety.
4. effective engagement with First Nations peoples;
5. intersectionality under Priority Reform Three (including disability and gender); and
6. funding transparency and reprioritisation.

In partnership with the Coalition of Peaks, the Commonwealth has established a methodology for self-assessment. It is important that the independent mechanism be designed to deliver on intended outcomes but also to complement existing monitoring and reporting arrangements.⁵

Once this and other work has been completed, findings on progress against the Priority Reforms will be included in future *Closing the Gap Annual Reports* by the Productivity Commission.

NACCHO recommends the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023* include the agreed measures for the Four Priority Reforms, and anticipate including the results of new measures as they emerge.

Socio-Economic Outcomes

The National Agreement's 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes respond to areas in which there are very significant disparities between outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians. They have been selected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in accord with their life experiences, cultural identity and the need for intergenerational healing. The 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes cover the following areas:

- health;
- child and maternal health;
- removal of children from their families;
- social and emotional wellbeing;
- education;
- employment;

⁵ Op. cit. NIAA (2022).

- justice;
- community safety;
- housing;
- connection with land and water;
- language maintenance; and
- digital inclusion.

Data indicators for the 17 Socio-Economic Outcomes

Each of the National Agreement's 17 Socio-Economic Targets incorporates data indicators designed to measure whether efforts are working towards their achievement. Indicators and data are acknowledged by all Parties to be critical to the successful implementation of the National Agreement. Accurate measurement is important to the accountability of the process and to properly inform the evidence-based decision-making and policy development that is required to address inequity.

Baseline data is available against most Closing the Gap socio-economic targets. However, the quality and quantity of this data varies, as has historical levels of engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in the production and interpretation of data.

This data deficit is acknowledged by the National Agreement, and it nominates over 150 options for developing new data sources. While there is currently updated data available on nine of the Socio-Economic Targets, results should currently be used with caution, noting the small number of data points available. Over time, however, monitoring and reporting will provide greater insight into what progress is being made under the National Agreement.

NACCHO recommends the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023* include the agreed measures for the 17 Socio-Economic Targets, and anticipate including the results of new measures as they emerge.

Data Development Plan

To explore, prioritise, and delegate responsibilities around data options, the National Agreement required development of a Data Development Plan (DDP). The first DDP was approved by Joint Council in August 2022. The DDP was drafted by a Data and Reporting Working Group (DRWG) co-chaired by the Coalition of Peaks and the National Indigenous Australians Agency, and included Community Data custodians and Commonwealth and State and Territory agencies.

All Parties to the National Agreement are responsible for incorporating DDP actions as part of the governance of their ongoing Closing the Gap Implementation Plans. The conceptual and analytical work required to action the DDP's data-development priorities will be a significant body of work.

The DDP provides guiding principles for data development prioritisation over the life of the National Agreement. These must be considered by the Parties to the National Agreement in the setting of data-development agendas. These principles are:

1. ethical use of data, in particular acknowledging work led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Indigenous Data Sovereignty, and Indigenous Data Governance;
2. partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
3. prioritising data development which will promote Closing the Gap objectives;
4. leveraging broader data development agendas; and
5. commitment to data sharing and collaboration.

NACCHO recommends the DDP's Data and Reporting Working Group be consulted during drafting of the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023*.

NACCHO recommends the DDP's guiding principles be adhered to in the writing of the *Measuring What Matters Statement 2023*.

Other Measures and Indicators

The National Agreement focuses on the importance of disaggregated data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people relevant to a wide range of policy priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In accord with the National Agreement, significant processes are in place to devise complete, consistent, objective, accurate and unambiguous measurements that are not subject to different interpretations. The National Agreement recognises that quality data is an imperative – it will be an essential element in the success of an evidence-based, policy-reform agenda. National Agreement data collection is designed in broad alignment with OECD principles for quality indicators.⁶

Consistency between National Agreement measures and measures devised in other colonial-settler states, such as New Zealand, Canada and the USA, may be advantageous in terms of comparing national progress. The targets and measures for monitoring progress on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, however, are particular to the unique experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The targets and measures are being established primarily for local need, rather than with an eye for international comparison, and cannot be altered to accord with measures elsewhere.

⁶ Quality Framework for OECD Statistical Activities,
<https://www.oecd.org/sdd/qualityframeworkforoeecdstatisticalactivities.htm>