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MEDIA RELEASE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagements send a clear message to governments on Closing the Gap

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia have had their say on a new national agreement on Closing the Gap, which is currently in development through a partnership between the Coalition of Peaks and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Coalition of Peaks, in partnership with governments, led a comprehensive engagement process in 2019, achieving a high level of community participation. There were nearly 1700 respondents to an online survey and more than 2300 individuals attended almost 70 face-to-face meetings that were held in cities, regional towns and remote communities in every state and territory.

The Coalition of Peaks has today released a snapshot summary of what was heard through the engagement process. Face-to-face meetings revealed overwhelming support for the reform priorities developed by the Coalition of Peaks, validated by the online survey findings of more than 90 per cent support for all three:

1. Developing formal partnerships between government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on Closing the Gap
2. Growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services
3. Improving mainstream service delivery

One theme that regularly emerged was that shared decision-making depends on all parties having access to the same information, leading the Coalition of Peaks to now propose the development of local data projects as the fourth reform priority.

In 2018, Australian governments agreed to new Closing the Gap targets in draft form, and while there was broad community support for the general areas chosen, there was also feedback on some of the wording, outcomes, measures and focus.

Convenor of the Coalition of Peaks and CEO of NACCHO Pat Turner said that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been clear: reforming the way governments work to close the gap is critical to accelerating progress.

“Participants and survey respondents were united on their support for the priority reforms, speaking with one clear voice.” Turner said. “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities know what works for them and have charted a clear way forward for the new national agreement on Closing the Gap.”
“It was essential to the Coalition of Peaks that our communities were engaged in the development of the next Closing the Gap agreement from the beginning. The Coalition of Peaks has listened and is now working so that governments also hear your voice and put the priority reforms at the heart of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap,” Turner said.

The engagement process was independently reviewed by Indigenous-owned consultancy Two Point Co., which specialises in capturing a genuine Indigenous voice to inform policy design. The review concludes that the “campaign to mobilise the community to participate was effective and that the “engagements were open, fair and transparent.”

The Coalition of Peaks formally acknowledge the support of COAG for the engagements and their commitments under the historic Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap to fully engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, communities and organisations in the design, implementation and monitoring of the new Closing the Gap arrangements.

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About the Coalition of Peaks
The Coalition of Peaks is a representative body comprised of nearly fifty Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations that have come together to have their collective voice heard. The Coalition of Peaks is working with the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to develop a new National Agreement on Closing the Gap to replace the National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

For more information on The Coalition of Peaks, The Joint Council, The Partnership Agreement and to sign up for our mailing list, go to: https://www.naccho.org.au/programmes/coalition-of-peaks/