



The
Coalition
of Peaks



Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks Bodies

The Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap

An historic Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap has been agreed between the Commonwealth Government, State and Territory Governments and a Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies.

The Partnership Agreement means that for the first time Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through their peak body representatives, will share decision making with governments on Closing the Gap.

The Partnership Agreement sets out how governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks bodies will work together to agree a new national agreement on Closing the Gap, including any new Closing the Gap targets and implementation and monitoring arrangements.

The Partnership Agreement will be in place for ten years. It includes a commitment to three yearly

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led-reviews on Closing the Gap.

Under the Partnership Agreement, for the first time, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will have an equal voice and full ownership of the Closing the Gap framework.

The Coalition of Peaks believe that shared decision making between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled representative organisations in the design, implementation principles and monitoring of Closing the Gap is essential to closing the gap in life outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

The Partnership Agreement can be read in full here: <https://www.naccho.org.au/programmes/coalition-of-peaks/>

The Closing the Gap Refresh: Why the Partnership Agreement was needed

At its meeting on 12 December 2018, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed “that the finalisation of targets and implementation of the (refreshed) Closing the Gap framework occurs through a genuine, formal partnership between the Commonwealth, state and territory governments and Indigenous Australians through their representatives”. This was a historic announcement, but it didn’t come easily.

The original Closing the Gap policy was agreed in 2008 by COAG. Some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were able to have a say on what the policy was and its related programs, but there was never full ownership from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their representatives and it was always considered to be an initiative of Governments.

Even still, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies supported Closing the Gap to improve health services, housing and early childhood development, and welcomed the new funding committed by governments to those areas in the initial years.

As some of the initial targets were due to expire and progress was not what was hoped, in December 2016, COAG announced a “Refresh” of Closing the Gap and said they wanted to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in determining a new framework and targets.

However, it quickly became clear that governments were not listening properly or engaging in a genuine way. Many Peak bodies wanted more time to consider the options, and more information on what was and wasn’t working. Most importantly, Peak bodies needed to see that their voices were truly being heard. There was a real concern that governments had already decided what they wanted to do and were now negotiating behind closed doors to decide on a new set of targets without the input of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A lot of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies told Government that they thought the “Refresh” was not being done as promised. In early October 2018, a group of fourteen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies came together to write to the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to insist that the Council of Australian Governments not agree any changes to Closing the Gap without formal input and support from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Peak bodies also asked for those representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to be able to negotiate and reach agreement on a new Closing the Gap framework and to have an ongoing role in its implementation.

At first, we didn’t get a response. We wrote a second letter and in frustration, went to the media. A breakthrough came when the Prime Minister met with us and agreed that we should have ownership and share in the decision making on Closing the Gap. The Prime Minister then took this back to COAG and got its agreement.



Who are the Coalition of Peaks?

The Coalition of Peaks are made up of nearly 40 members of national and state / territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies. We are directly involved in the delivery and monitoring of services to our members and communities across a broad range of sectors.

We all have our own unique histories, needs and priorities, but share a commitment to legitimate community-controlled representation of our communities on matters that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to working in partnership on Closing the Gap.

We:

- 1) Are national and state and territory non-government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies and certain independent statutory authorities which have responsibility for policies, programs and services related to Closing the Gap;
- 2) Have our governing boards elected by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and / or organisations which are accountable to that membership; and
- 3) Support the vision for a genuine partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the Council of Australian Governments in developing and implementing the next phase of Closing the Gap.

A dedicated policy team is being established to support the Coalition of Peaks and this will be based in the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (NACCHO).

If you think your Peak body meets the membership criteria and you want to join the Coalition of Peaks, please email coalitionofpeaks@naccho.org.au.

Never has a group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak bodies come together in this way to agree and negotiate together with governments. So much has been achieved up to this point, but the hard work on the new Closing the Gap policy is just beginning.

Joint Council on Closing the Gap and Partnership Working Groups

The Partnership Agreement establishes a Joint Council on Closing the Gap as one of the ways to do the work under the Partnership Agreement.

The Joint Council will be co-chaired by a Minister and a representative of the Coalition of Peaks and will publish an annual workplan and release a communique following each meeting.

Other Working Groups will be established under the Partnership Agreement to share the detailed policy work, implementation and monitoring needed to make the new Closing the Gap work.

The Joint Council will meet at least twice a year and is made up of a Minister from the Commonwealth Government and each State and Territory Government and twelve representatives of the Coalition of Peaks chosen by the Coalition of Peaks.

This is the first time a Council of the Council of the Australian Governments has formally included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives.

The issue of the Coalition of Peaks being able to choose their own representatives is an important one - and one that was hard-fought to get the governments to agree on.

The Coalition of Peaks strongly believe in the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their organisations should be able to choose who they want to represent them including in government forums for Closing the Gap. We do not support governments setting up structures like Advisory Councils made up of members Governments appoint to represent us in decision making. That is not self-determination.

What will happen next on Closing the Gap

The Council of Australian Governments have committed to finalising the refreshed Closing the Gap agreement.

Under the Partnership Agreement, the Coalition of Peaks will sit down with governments to review the current National Indigenous Reform Agreement which is the current agreement on Closing the Gap between governments. This will help the Coalition of Peaks and COAG to jointly determine what has been working and what areas need to be strengthened or changed.

Informed by the review of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, the Coalition of Peaks and COAG will then work towards a new national agreement on Closing the Gap with accountability and oversight measures, principles for how the new agreement will be implemented and new targets for action.

The Coalition of Peaks is committed to consult their membership at each stage to develop their policy positions in these discussions.



How can Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations get involved?

Now that we have a seat at the table, we want to use our collective voice to represent the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities around the nation.

The Coalition of Peaks is developing a process to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Australia and each of the Peaks' membership so that we can talk to you directly about what is working on Closing the Gap and what needs to change.

We encourage you to connect with us by joining our mailing list, following our social media pages, share and like our messages about this historic partnership and exciting path forward. You can sign up to our mailing list at: <https://www.naccho.org.au/programmes/coalition-of-peaks/>

We also want the State and Territory Governments to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations in their jurisdictions and make sure that their

voices are heard on Closing the Gap. Some states already have partnership arrangements in place, but not all, and all can do better.

The Coalition of Peaks have asked each State and Territory Government to form a working group with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to help implement Closing the Gap policies and programs and monitor and report back on how Closing the Gap is working for you. State and Territory peak bodies that are part of the Coalition of Peaks will keep talking to governments to make sure this happens and that community-controlled organisations can choose their own representatives on these Working Groups.

This Partnership Agreement marks an important turning point in our nation – and we look forward to working with all our members in getting our voices heard on Closing the Gap and creating positive and lasting outcomes for our communities.

Current Coalition of Peak Members

National Members

- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives
- First Nations Media Australia
- First Peoples Disability Network
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia
- Lowitja Institute
- National Congress of Australia's First Peoples
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- National Family Violence Prevention Legal Services Forum
- National Native Title Council
- SNAICC – National Voice for Our Children
- The Healing Foundation
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association

State / Territory Members

Western Australia

- Aboriginal Health Council of Western Australia

Tasmania

- Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre

Northern Territory

Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory:

- Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance NT
- Central Land Council
- Northern Land Council
- Australian Capital Territory
- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

Queensland

Queensland Coalition of Peaks being established including:

- Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Legal Service (Qld) Ltd
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak Limited

South Australia

- Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Incorporated, consulting with a policy group of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations in South Australia

Victoria

Victorian Aboriginal Executive Council:

- Victorian Aborigines Advancement League

- Koori Youth Council
- Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
- Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
- Djirra
- Federation of Victorian Traditional Owner Corporations (FVTOC)
- Victorian Aboriginal Housing Board
- Victorian Aboriginal Health Service
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Services Association Ltd

New South Wales

NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peaks (CAPO):

- NSW Aboriginal Land Council
- NSW/ACT Aboriginal Legal Services
- Link Up NSW
- NSW Aboriginal Education Consultative Group¹
- NSW Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council
- NSW Aboriginal Child, Family and Community Care State Secretariat
- First Peoples Disability Network

Australian Capital Territory

- ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elected Body

¹ Also provides a national perspective pending the formation of a national peak for Indigenous education.