

MEDIA RELEASE

On the 13 February 2008, the then Prime Minister, the Honourable Kevin Rudd, acknowledged the harmful impacts of past policies and practices on the lives and livelihoods of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and especially on those who were forcibly removed from their families, communities, cultures and Countries.

Fifteen years later, outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the entire range of key socio-economic indicators are still relentlessly lagging well behind those of the rest of the population and the Australian Government is again conceding there has been an *'enormous failure'* in attempts to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rest of the Australian population. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people the restoration of equity, dignity and justice that should have naturally followed on from the Apology has failed to materialise.

While there is no denying the reasons for this ongoing disparity are complex, the persistent poor outcomes work to quite simply demonstrate that the policies, programs and services designed to enable and safeguard the health and wellbeing of all Australian citizens, are failing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In moving forward, the burden does not lie with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we have been working to achieve equity, dignity and justice since colonisation. The responsibility for policies, programs and services that neglect to adequately engage and respond to the needs of **all** its citizens clearly rests with governments. So, while today's release of the Closing the Gap Implementation Plan, and announcement of \$424 million in new money to address injustice and inequity in areas such as housing, food, education and water infrastructure is welcome and a much-needed investment, the risk of further failure is high.

To capitalise on this investment all Governments must action the commitments made through the historic shared National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap. Consistent with the four priority reform areas agreed through this arrangement, improving and sustaining outcomes will demand Governments to prioritise a focus on:

- › how to do things differently
- › the processes and practices required to support greater autonomy and self-determination and
- › enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People the flexibility to guide the design, development, delivery and monitoring of their own solutions

Our people can't afford to bare the consequences of Government neglect and failure of any longer. For us achieving equity, dignity and justice has been an imperative much longer than the National Apology 15 years ago. We therefore call on all Governments to start actioning the commitments they made towards reform and in doing so ask them to remember that this shift is about:

- › our empowerment, autonomy and self-determination
- › a way of engaging, sharing decisions and enabling true partnerships
- › strategic long-term investment
- › equity, dignity and justice and moving away from a passive, deficit-based model—whereby solutions are imposed and delivered by governments or their providers—to a more sophisticated model of enablement, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are supported to achieve their aspirations and address their needs.