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National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholic Council



We need to work together to close the Gap.

On 14 February Prime Minister Morrison outlined the failure of the Closing the Gap Strategy to attain the goals for which it set itself in 2007. Admirably, the Prime Minister has acknowledged and taken responsibility on behalf of the Government for letting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to linger behind non Indigenous Australians in health, life expectancy and education. Our people are suffering in every area and quite simply, it is not good enough.

NATSICC wholeheartedly welcomes the renewed focus of engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations in amending the framework. Importantly the inclusion of our people in the planning and delivery of related programs will also place responsibility upon us to work on reaching the targets.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities possess a strength of faith and culture that has not diminished since colonisation.” said NATSICC Chairperson John Lochowiak. “We continue to draw upon these pillars of our culture in the face of adversity and will continue to do so to reach parity with non-Indigenous Australians on life expectancy, education and the other measures contained within the Closing the Gap targets.”

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addressed – the Gap between words and actions.

Closing the Gap has also resulted in an unnecessary layering of bureaucracy which has served to move Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people further away from decision making processes. As Catholics we believe that the Principle of Subsidiarity should form a core pillar in the design and implementation of programs in partnership with - and for - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Subsidiarity empowers and acknowledges the genius and dignity of the individual by recognising that those closest to the problem or issue are best placed to provide a solution. We must encourage and use these intrinsic attributes to forge a path forward for our people and not bury them under protectionism or paternalistic measures.

NATSICC also conditionally welcomes the announcement that HECS debt will be waived for teachers that work in a remote community for four years. The issue with the announcement lies in the fact that it does not consider the geographic dispersion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Centre for Pastoral Research has found that, according to the latest census data, **63% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Catholics live in Major cities or inner regional areas, while a further 19% live in outer regional areas. Just under 18% live in remote or very remote areas.** It would be more prudent to allocate the waiver of HECS debt based on areas of underlying need and disadvantage and to consider extending it to other occupations including nurses, doctors and other key areas of employment.

The combination of targeted HEC's incentives across a range of occupations, meaningful engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, embracing subsidiarity in program design and delivery and the provision of stable and long term funding will result in positive outcomes for our people.

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