

**SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
(SAAAC)**

Mr Troy Sloan
First Assistant Secretary
Policy, Analysis and Evaluation Division
Indigenous Affairs Group
Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet
PO Box 6500
CANBERRA ACT 2600



Dear Mr Sloan

Closing the Gap Refresh

I write on behalf of the South Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council (SAAAC) to provide input into the Refresh of the Closing the Gap strategy. The SAAAC is the South Australian Government's Ministerially-appointed peak Aboriginal policy advisory group and provides the Government with advice about policies and programs as they affect Aboriginal South Australians.

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to help shape the next phase of the Closing the Gap strategy. Whilst progress against the current Closing the Gap targets has been mixed, the strategy has been an important mechanism for focusing the attention of governments on Aboriginal disadvantage, and for that reason the SAAAC supports its retention. Having said that, changes are needed in relation to the current targets and the way the strategy is implemented.

Before outlining the SAAAC's views, I note for your information that two members of the SAAAC – myself as Chair and Mr Marcellus Enalanga, the SAAAC's Deputy Chair – attended the Special Gathering of Prominent Aboriginal Australian held in Canberra in February this year and had input into the Refresh through that forum. The SAAAC endorses the Special Gathering Statement.

In considering what a Refreshed framework should look like, the SAAAC has considered the following four questions:

1. What overarching goals should be achieved for the Aboriginal community through Closing the Gap?

2. Should the current Closing the Gap targets be retained?
3. Should there be new targets?
4. What principles should underpin implementation of the Refreshed Closing the Gap strategy?

Overarching goals of the Refreshed Closing the Gap strategy

The SAAAC believes that the Refreshed Closing the Gap strategy needs to increase Aboriginal self-determination. It is not enough for Aboriginal people to be consulted about the Refresh, Aboriginal people also need to be the key decision makers in the design and implementation of the Refreshed strategy. This is essential for the success of Closing the Gap and it has been a failing of the current strategy.

The Refresh also needs to have the goal of building the capacity of the Aboriginal community so that Aboriginal people feel empowered, strong, proud and cohesive. It should be a goal of the Refreshed strategy that programs and services for Aboriginal people are delivered by Aboriginal organisations. The delivery of services for Aboriginal people by Aboriginal people is a fundamental principle that should underpin all services provided to the Aboriginal community.

The Refreshed strategy needs to have improved data collection systems so that performance against targets can be assessed more informatively. For example, data should be available at the sub-state level to enable outcomes at the local level to be measured; these data could then be used to inform the implementation of place-based strategies. There also needs to be improved data sharing by governments with the Aboriginal community. This greater transparency would build trust and enable governments to work more collaboratively with the Aboriginal community. A greater emphasis on evaluation and identifying what works should also be a goal of the Refreshed strategy. This lack of program evaluation and the reliance on outcome measures has been a significant weakness of the current strategy.

Linked to this, Aboriginal researchers should be engaged to assess and monitor performance in relation to Closing the Gap – a goal of the Refresh should be Aboriginal people conducting research about Aboriginal people. This would ensure this work incorporated an Aboriginal cultural lens.

Current Closing the Gap targets

The current Closing the Gap target areas should be retained but the present outcomes need to be reviewed and more appropriate, evidence-based timelines adopted.

The current targets are too narrow and need to be broader than health, education and employment.

There needs to be a shift in focus from 'gap' targets that compare Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal performance to targets that measure change over time in the outcomes of Aboriginal people (i.e. comparing Aboriginal people with Aboriginal people). Whilst it is important to reduce difference and the level of disadvantage between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people it is more important see improved outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Similarly, there is too much emphasis in the current strategy on deficit-based targets, which paint a negative picture of the Aboriginal community. The Refreshed strategy needs to include a strengths-based approach that highlights the successes and achievements of Aboriginal Australians, which are many.

Lastly, it is the SAAAC's view that the current targets should not be changed without first consulting and obtaining endorsement from the Aboriginal community. This is essential for Aboriginal ownership of the Refreshed strategy and highlights that collaboration and genuine co-design are key to its success.

New targets

As noted, the SAAAC believes the current Closing the Gap targets are too narrow and endorses the recommendation from the Special Gathering to the Council of Australian Governments that the Refreshed strategy should include a broader range of targets in the following priority areas:

- families, children and youth
- housing
- justice, including youth justice
- health
- economic development
- culture and language
- education
- healing
- eliminating racism and systemic discrimination.

The SAAAC also believes targets should be included in the following areas:

- cultural wellbeing, including connection to culture, country and community, and access to Aboriginal language teaching
- child protection, particularly in relation to the high number of Aboriginal children in out of home care and implementation of the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle

- the overrepresentation of Aboriginal people in the adult and juvenile justice systems and access to early intervention, diversionary and rehabilitation programs
- Aboriginal employment levels in the public and private sectors
- the number of Aboriginal owned businesses and procurement from Aboriginal businesses.

In the development of new targets, consideration needs to be given to having metropolitan and regional targets that recognise the differences in outcomes and opportunities between large urban centres and regional and remote areas.

Targets must be linked to program funding that supports the achievement of the targets. If this does not occur the strategy will fail. In turn, program funding must include funding for evaluation so that information is obtained about what works and why. This will ensure funding is directed to those areas where it is most effective.

Implementation principles

It is the SAAAC's view that the way Closing the Gap is implemented is as important as the targets in the Refreshed strategy.

The SAAAC endorses the guiding principles that the Special Gathering agreed should guide the next phase of the Closing the Gap agenda, namely:

- empowerment and self determination
- Aboriginal people leading the design and implementation of programs from the beginning
- Governments working in genuine partnership with the Aboriginal community on all aspects of Closing the Gap
- having clear roles, responsibilities and accountability
- having meaningful and accessible data
- ensuring Aboriginal people have a meaningful role in monitoring progress.

Thank you for the opportunity to have input into the redesign of the Closing the Gap strategy. If you have any questions about the feedback provided, I can be contacted at the above address or by telephoning 8205 1523.

Yours sincerely,



Ms Sharron Williams

CHAIRPERSON

SOUTH AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

27 April 2018