



everyone's family

Closing the Gap refresh

Submission to the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet

April 2018

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Overview of The Smith Family

The Smith Family is a national charity founded in 1922 to improve the lives of disadvantaged children in Australia. Almost a century on from its founding, it is now the nation's largest children's education charity.

Our vision is a better future for young Australians in need. Our mission is to create opportunities for young Australians in need by providing long-term support for their participation in education. This mission is founded on the belief that every child deserves a chance.

Our mission guides every element of our work, including program development and delivery, research, advocacy and fundraising. The Smith Family delivers programs in each state and territory in Australia, in over 90 communities, including many regional and rural communities.

In 2016-17, The Smith Family supported more than 151,000 children, young people, parents, carers and community professionals through its programs. Over 120,000 children and young people participated in programs run by The Smith Family. This includes almost 39,000 children and young people participating in our largest program, *Learning for Life*. There are approximately 17,178 participants in our programs who identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2016-17, The Smith Family's total income was approximately \$100 million. Around 70 percent of this funding comes from private donations from individual supporters, corporate partners, universities, trusts and foundations, and bequests. There are over 230 partnerships helping to sustain our programs. Only a quarter of The Smith Family's income is sourced from different levels of government.

As part of our leadership and collaborative work in the sector, The Smith Family is a member of a number of organisations and represented on a number of advisory groups and boards, including the Community Council of Australia. The Smith Family is also an active member of the Reconciliation community, and is currently in the process of implementing our third Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), which is also our second Stretch RAP. At the heart of our policy approach is the principle of working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to improve educational outcomes. We share a commitment to the achievement of the Closing the Gap targets in the areas of education and employment.

Introduction

This submission is made on behalf of The Smith Family's Advisory Group on Issues Concerning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Advisory Group) and reflects their collective view on key issues relating to refreshing the Closing the Gap targets (CTG). Our Advisory Group meets three times each year. It provides The Smith Family with invaluable support and advice on organisational culture and operations, including how to better deliver programs and services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The Advisory Group has guided us in developing three Reconciliation Action Plans (RAP), the current one for 2017-2020. A profile of individual Advisory Group members is at **Attachment A**.

The Smith Family is committed to working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families to help close the gap in educational outcomes. In 2016-17, almost 20% (7,609) of the children in our *Learning for Life* program were from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds. We also facilitate the *Indigenous Youth Leadership Program* (IYLP) funded under the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet's Indigenous Advancement Strategy. IYLP supports secondary students from rural and remote communities to attend high-performing academic schools. Our *Girls at the Centre* program works with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women as they move through high school by providing wraparound support, mentors and motivation to complete Year 12 and move on to post-school employment and education. We also facilitate nine *Communities for Children* (CfC) sites, including Mirrabooka in Western Australia and Katherine in the Northern Territory. At our CfC sites, we work with local organisations to deliver programs responding to community needs. We help improve outcomes for children aged from birth to 12, and work with their families as well.

We commend the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) for its intentions to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in refreshing the CTG targets. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples know best how to build a better life for themselves.¹ Governments remain responsible and accountable for assisting and investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order that they thrive. However governments, as well as civil society and business, must follow the lead of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and provide necessary support as they take ownership of their individual and collective futures. A genuine partnership supports the ambition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for self-determination as described in *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*, which amongst other things stated the following:

*'When we [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples] have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.'*²

The CTG targets help us to understand, in detail, the challenge for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons in achieving and sustaining a high quality of life across key economic and social indicators. By improving our understanding of the gaps, we can together develop better-tailored and resourced strategies to close the gaps. However only policy driven by the aspirations, needs, experience, talents and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can succeed in

¹ Sarra, Chris, 'Strong and Smart: investing in Indigenous children', Sambell Oration 2018, Melbourne, 11 April 2018; Sarra, Chris, 'Aboriginal people are exceptional. When we can all acknowledge that, the gap will close', *The Guardian*, 12 February 2015.

² Referendum Council, *Uluru Statement from the Heart*, 26 May 2017.

addressing these challenges. As the Public Discussion Paper succinctly demonstrates, there is a lot of work yet to be done and a long way to go to meet most of the CTG targets.

This submission makes the following key points:

- We should not lose focus on the current CTG targets in any rethink or expansion of the number or nature of targets,
- We should consider reframing the targets to be more positive and aspirational, better reflecting the strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, this includes better measurement of progress against overall outcomes,
- We need to have a more sophisticated understanding of the nature of the gaps within individual targets,
- We should integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Knowledge into the CTG targets, and
- We should consider introducing an additional target on post-school pathways into education, training or employment for secondary students.

The remainder of the submission discusses these points in more detail.

Maintaining focus on the current CTG targets

We support COAG reconsidering the breadth and depth of CTG targets as long as we do not lose focus on the current CTG targets as a result, including the education-related targets. We believe education is a crucial changer of life circumstances and is the best way to break through personal barriers perpetuating intergenerational cycles of disadvantage amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We also believe there is still a lot of important work that needs to be done in the education space to close the associated gaps.

Except for the CTG target regarding Year 12 or equivalent attainment, the education-specific CTG targets are not on track. With regards to the Year 12 attainment target, whilst it is very encouraging that major inroads have been made to closing the gap, there is still a huge gap that negatively impacts enormously over the lifetime of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons. Given the reality of how we are tracking against each CTG target for educational outcomes, there should be no reduction of focus on the current targets, even if new ones are added.

Reframing the CTG targets

We recommend COAG consider reframing the targets to be less deficit-based and more aspirational. This language change is fundamental for discussing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy.³ Our policy frameworks must reflect higher expectations of what Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can achieve in life, and better embody the strengths-based approach outlined in the Discussion Paper. This approach acknowledges, and indeed celebrates, the exceptionalism of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in creating better lives

³ Pearson, Luke, 'The Language of Blame, Responsibility and Accountability', *Indigenous X*, 1 April 2018.

for themselves.⁴ A positive reframing of the CTG targets can still identify and measure respective gaps, but it can also offer an aspiration for government, business and civil society, in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to strive for more ambitious progress in closing the gaps.

Part of reframing the CTG targets to be more positive includes adding components including prosperity and wellbeing, as flagged in the Discussion Paper. Australians share a desire for prosperity and wellbeing, as part a decent quality of life in the 21st century. Incorporating these components explicitly into the CTG targets better reflects the common humanity and aspirations between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, something that is presently lacking from the CTG framework.⁵ This will also have positive benefits for the education-related CTG targets. For instance, the current targets identify early childhood enrolment, school attendance, literacy and numeracy and Year 12 attainment as priority indicators. Whilst these are fundamental, we should also be considering non-cognitive outcomes for children and young people, such as social wellbeing, development and social mobility. These indices are important and need to be explored further in the next iteration of the CTG targets, with commensurate quantitative and qualitative research being conducted to build a credible evidence base.

Building on the CTG targets

The CTG targets need to create a more sophisticated understanding of the social, economic and cultural disadvantage, and discrimination, experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities are heterogeneous and experience social, economic and cultural challenges differently. Yet the current CTG targets imply a common deficit for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons regardless of their geography or background. In reality, the size of the gaps differ when looking at the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in rural or remote areas versus those living in metropolitan areas, as they do when looking across demographic variances such as age and gender. We must build a more nuanced understanding of the nature of gaps *within* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cohorts and *within* individual targets. To do this requires rethinking how best to capture, collate and analyse relevant data on the impact of program and service delivery. Successfully adding depth and detail to the CTG targets will help produce better-tailored services supported by a more sophisticated evidence base. It also requires better measurement of progress.

To improve measurement, we recommend that COAG also introduce short and medium term performance indicators for each CTG target. These indicators should identify short-term goals required in order to meet the overall outcome, as well as the impact that programs and services are having at the individual, family and community level, having regard to differences within cohorts as outlined above. Developing and using such indicators will help Australian governments measure whether outcomes are being met over time, and improve the understanding of what policy and service interventions work and why.

⁴ Sarra, Chris, 'Aboriginal people are exceptional. When we can all acknowledge that, the gap will close', *The Guardian*, 12 February 2015.

⁵ Sarra, Chris, 'Effective Indigenous policy reform: closing the right gap', *The Conversation*, 15 August 2011.

The Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework, developed in 2002 by the University of New South Wales Social Policy Research Centre for the New South Wales Cabinet Office, is an excellent example of a sophisticated outcomes measurement framework.⁶ For each outcome seeking to be achieved, the framework identified a particular subset of key indicators, including short-term goals, relevant data sets to be analysed and specific subgroups to be further researched. For instance, under the outcome for 'child educational development', there were four indicators of success: (1) Under school age participation, (2) Preparation for school, (3) Educational achievement and (4) Participation in education.⁷ The performance of services and policies were then measured against these indicators. Given the ambition, scope and timeframe of the CTG targets, a similar framework to this one would work well in monitoring interim progress and ensuring services are having the necessary impact.

Integrating culture into the CTG targets

We recommend that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures be incorporated into the CTG framework, as part of an ongoing commitment to the strengths-based approach outlined in the Discussion Paper. Incorporating cultures also means explicit recognition of, and respect for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Knowledge. This Knowledge is broadly defined as accumulated knowledge encompassing spiritual relationships, relationships with the natural environment and the sustainable use of natural resources, and relationships between people reflected in language, narratives, social organisation, values, beliefs, and cultural laws and customs.⁸ The CTG targets would better reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities if they incorporated these cultures and Knowledge. It would also help ensure that the work undertaken to achieve the targets is led and owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

COAG should consider working with relevant portfolios to develop cultural respect and cultural safety frameworks across all CTG targets. Such frameworks help embed principles of cultural respect into relevant economic and social systems. Whilst frameworks are overarching principle-based documents, they also link to detailed policy, workforce and operational plans. The development of such frameworks should encompass state and territory governments, and be validated by local and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

A leading example is the Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, which was developed for the Australian Health Minister's Advisory Council (AHMAC) by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Standing Committee (NATSIHSC) in 2004.⁹ The current framework is for 2016 to 2026, and defines cultural respect as '[r]ecognition, protection and continued advancement of the inherent rights, cultures and traditions of

⁶ University of New South Wales Research Consortium, *Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework: For the Cabinet Office of New South Wales*, March 2002.

⁷ University of New South Wales Research Consortium, *Families First Outcomes Evaluation Framework: For the Cabinet Office of New South Wales*, March 2002.

⁸ Andrews Gavin, Daylight Cliff, Hunt Jeff et al, *Aboriginal cultural heritage landscape mapping of coastal NSW*, prepared for the Comprehensive Coastal Assessment by the NSW Department of Natural Resources, Sydney, NSW, 2006.

⁹ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, *Cultural Respect Framework 2016 – 2026*, 2016.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.¹⁰ This framework commits the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to embedding cultural respect principles into their health systems - from developing policy and legislation, to how organisations are run, through to the planning and delivery of services.¹¹ The Framework also guides policies and services in the delivery of quality, culturally safe, responsive health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹² It helps ensure that mainstream services are better aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures.

Cultural respect and cultural safety frameworks offer significant potential benefit for achieving progress against the CTG targets on education. The importance of culture to the development of children and young people, and to community cohesion, is well researched and documented. For example, the integration in 2015 of Aboriginal languages into the schools curriculum via the Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages, developed by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, was a crucial recognition of the importance of cultural identity to the education and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. However, we are only at the start of fully embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures into our education system. In 2015, the Western Australian Department of Education introduced its own Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework, the first Australian government to do so.¹³ The Framework is to help coordinate efforts to make schools more culturally responsive, as part of the effort to close the gap on educational outcomes and maximise the learning outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.

Complementing the introduction of cultural respect and safety frameworks, culturally appropriate and culturally competent evaluation methodologies should be integrated into CTG targets, and any performance indicators. The methods of assessing progress against the targets should reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities as equally as the program frameworks themselves do. COAG, through this refresh process, could begin to lead efforts to introduce and implement frameworks and evaluative methodologies across the Federation, in order to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and Knowledge in a respectful, beneficial way, and in order to better tackle the individual CTG targets.

Expanding the CTG targets

COAG should give consideration to adding a new target regarding the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged between 16 - 24 years old engaged in study or work after secondary school. The issue of post-school transitions is incredibly important, and coordinated pathways are vital for all young people to enter the workforce or tertiary education sector with motivation and confidence in their future. The Smith Family's own research, using our unique longitudinal data set collected from the *Learning for Life*, shows that attendance and achievement during high school predicts Year 12 completion and also predicts post-school outcomes. It also shows that attendance and achievement in the initial years of secondary school

¹⁰ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, *Cultural Respect Framework 2016 – 2026*, 2016.

¹¹ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, *Cultural Respect Framework 2016 – 2026*, 2016.

¹² Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, *Cultural Respect Framework 2016 – 2026*, 2016.

¹³ Western Australian Department of Education, *Aboriginal Cultural Standards Framework*, 2015.

are early indicators of students who are likely to have poor longer-term outcomes, as they help predict school completion and engagement post-school in work or further study.¹⁴

Only 41.1% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are fully engaged in education, training or work at age 24, compared with 74.4% for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.¹⁵ The costs of not being in work or study are significant for young Australians and the nation as a whole. Average lifetime costs to the Australian community for each 24 year-old Australian who is not in full-time employment, education and/or training is conservatively estimated at more than \$1.1 million.¹⁶ The importance of improving post-school transitions will only increase as work continues to be impacted by the next wave of technological changes, and also becomes more casualised and insecure for young people.¹⁷

Currently there are CTG targets for Year 12 attainment and for employment outcomes. An additional target as outlined above would create a necessary link between the Year 12 attainment and employment outcomes targets.

Any expansion of targets needs to be met by increased investment of capability and resources by the Federal Government and respective states and territories, and an increased commitment to work with non-government organisations to deliver relevant services and programs. Otherwise there is a real risk that focus shifts away from the current CTG targets.

Conclusion

Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to create better lives for themselves, in which they have equitable access to economic, social and cultural opportunities, remains perhaps the most important nation-building task outstanding for Australia. The development of the CTG targets gave a framework for focusing policy development and service delivery in a way previously lacking. However, we need a more sophisticated and more positive approach to closing the gap, with a better way of measuring progress and examining other indicators and targets currently absent from the framework. It is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can infuse their aspirations for their future into a more sophisticated and mature policy response that they ultimately lead, in partnership with COAG as well as civil society and business. This refresh is therefore an important moment to recalibrate our approach in order to make the next decade's approach as valuable and impactful as possible.

¹⁴ The Smith Family, *Attendance Lifts Achievement: Building the evidence base to improve student outcomes*, March 2018.

¹⁵ Lamb, Stephen et al, *Educational opportunity in Australia in 2015: Who succeeds and who misses out*, Mitchell Institute, 26 October 2015.

¹⁶ Lamb, Stephen and Huo, Shuyan, *Counting the costs of lost opportunity in Australian education*, Mitchell Institute, June 2017.

¹⁷ See for instance, Committee for Economic Development of Australia, *Australia's Future Workforce?*, 16 June 2015; Foundations for Young Australians, *The New Work Order: Ensuring young Australians have skills and experience for the jobs of the future, not the past*, August 2015; O'Neill, Margot, 'Artificial intelligence and automation are coming, so what will we all do for work?', *ABC News*, 10 August 2017.

ATTACHMENT A

THE SMITH FAMILY'S ADVISORY GROUP ON ISSUES CONCERNING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

John Rawnsley – Chairperson

John is from the Larrakia and Anmatjerre groups in the Northern Territory. He was born and raised in Darwin attending Darwin High School and Charles Darwin University. Up until the age of nine he lived at Uluru and Kakadu and as an adult lived in Alice Springs for several years. John Rawnsley is the Manager of the Law and Justice section at the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency. Prior to this he worked in various legal roles and in leadership development.

Pauline Brown

Pauline Brown is a descendant of one of the clans of the Yuin Nation from the South Coast of NSW. Pauline has worked for over 35 years in the Government sector across national, state, regional and local areas of responsibility within Aboriginal Affairs, primarily in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, and most recently with the NSW Government across Ageing, Disability, Home Care, Child Protection and Health for the past 13 years. Pauline's Commonwealth public service experience ranges across National Office, the State Offices in South Australian and New South Wales, and regional offices at Darwin, Wagga, Dubbo and Lismore. Pauline's areas of employment have included Aboriginal social and economic programs and policy. Pauline is currently working in the Illawarra and Shoalhaven regions.

Peter Farmer

"My grandfather on my mum's side inspired me to focus on having an education. He told me the importance of education, that not many Indigenous people can effectively communicate themselves, often with English as a second language. For me, I grew up around my parents and grandparents learning Nyoongar language." An aspiring artist with a passion for football, Peter is currently studying at university to complete a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Aboriginal Arts and playing for the North Beach Football Club in the West Australian Amateur Football League. Peter has a particular focus on areas affecting and impacting Aboriginal young people and mentors young Aboriginal people through his studies and art practice.

Wendy Field

Wendy has more than 20 years' experience in management, administration and leadership across a range of environments, including the community sector, policy and advocacy organisations and public service sectors at State and Commonwealth Government levels. Wendy initially trained as a social worker and spent several years working with homeless people, primarily young people and chronically homeless women; later in her career she gained a second degree in Social Sciences. Prior to joining The Smith Family, she held a number of leadership roles across a wide variety of policy and program areas in the Australian Government Department of Family, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

Jayde Geia

Jayde Geia is a Gunggandji descendent from Yarrabah with family connections to Moa Island in the Torres Strait Islands. Jayde currently works as Senior Consultant at Ernst & Young and volunteers her time with a number of organisations including First Nations Foundation (Director) and Queensland Law Society Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group (Member).

Leonie Green

Leonie Green has a long history of leadership and management roles in both the corporate and not-for-profit sectors across a wide range of areas including children, young people and families; social enterprise development; employment and training; and homelessness and housing. Prior to commencing at The Smith Family, Leonie spent six years as the NSW/ACT State Director for Mission Australia. From 2012 to 2013 she was a member of the NSW Premier's Advisory Council for Homelessness. Leonie has also held leadership roles at Work Directions Australia and Work Ventures, and has, as a result, significant experience developing and managing complex and multi-year partnerships, including with government.

April Long

April is currently National Manager of Programs at Shine for Kids. She was General Manager Program and Partnerships at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) between 2015-2017, and prior to that was General Manager Enterprises and Programs at NCIE between 2014-2015, and Programs Manager 2012-2014. April also has professional experience in law and public policy. April has an extensive history of community leadership work, including being previously being a member of NSW Law Society's Indigenous Legal Issues Committee, and being a member of the NSW Kids and Families, Youth Health and Wellbeing Advisory Group. April was selected as a participant on the International Visitor Leadership Program by the Australian Government to tour the United States and learn about Indigenous economic development. She has a Bachelor of combined Arts/Law from the University of New South Wales.

Dr Jeff Harmer AO

Jeff retired in December 2011 as Secretary of the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs after six years in the role. During a 33-year career in the Australian Public Service including 13 years as a CEO, he occupied a range of executive positions across a number of Commonwealth Departments and was Managing Director of the Health Insurance Commission (now Medicare Australia) from 1998 to 2003. In 2003 and 2004 Jeff was Secretary of the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training. Jeff is currently the Director of the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute and a Member of the Board of the John James Foundation, a Canberra-based medical charity.

Dr Lisa O'Brien

Dr Lisa O'Brien has worked in leadership roles across the public, not-for-profit and commercial sectors over the last two decades. As CEO of Australia's largest children's education charity, Lisa has significantly increased the effectiveness and reach of the organisation's programs. Each year these programs support over 120,000 disadvantaged Australian children and young people. Under Lisa's leadership, The Smith Family has implemented a comprehensive whole-of-

organisation approach to measuring and improving the educational outcomes of the young people it supports and in 2016, it won the SIMNA Excellence in Social Impact Measurement award.

Lisa is a non-executive director of the Community Council for Australia and BUPA Australia & New Zealand, member of Chief Executive Women and former CEO of the Skin and Cancer Foundation Australia. Lisa was also a founding member of Sydney's Lou's Place, a drop-in centre providing respite and support for women in need. A Medical Practitioner registered in New South Wales and a Fellow of the Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators, Lisa also holds a Masters of Business Administration and a Masters of Human Resource Management and Coaching.

Jason Smith

Jason is a proud Yithi yithi/Nari Nari man from NSW and is known and accepted by his local Aboriginal community of Balranald NSW and Newcastle NSW. He recently worked as a Regional Manager for Uniting Care and prior to this, spent 5 years as a Senior Policy Officer in Aboriginal Strategy at the Department of Family and Community Services. Jason Smith is National Manager of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Policy and Programs at The Smith Family, and is a participant in the organisation's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of Practice Group.

Leanne Smith

Leanne Smith has been with The Smith Family since March 2010. Leanne has a passion for contributing to positive social change, particularly in working with young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are looking to make a difference in their own communities and more broadly. As the Project Manager for the *Indigenous Youth Leadership Project*, funded by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Leanne oversees its operations across four states and territories and with over 18 education partners. Over a three decade career Leanne has worked in not-for-profit organisations and has also held various positions with the University of South Australia.