

CLOSING THE GAP: INDIGENOUS ENGAGEMENT IN LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Local government has a central role to play in closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians – with grassroots, practical solutions delivered locally.

To achieve national goals to turn around Indigenous disadvantage, we need to harness the capacity of all levels of government.

On the ground, we need to tap into the opportunities and services offered by local government.

The Australian Government has set six ambitious targets to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which comprises the Prime Minister, State Premiers and Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA), we are working together to:

- close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
- halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- ensure all Indigenous four year olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade;
- halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment, or equivalent attainment, rates by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

The Government understands that achieving these targets will take hard work, commitment and time, but we've made a strong start. Since we were elected, we have committed more than \$1.2 billion over five years in Indigenous funding.

Nurturing Indigenous leaders is essential to bringing about positive and lasting change. Many Indigenous people are already making a significant contribution to local government.

We want to build on this. Indigenous people need to develop and drive their own solutions.

To do this we must build new partnerships based on mutual respect and responsibility.

There's no underestimating the challenges ahead.

The Indigenous demographic profile is very young and while most of them live in urban and regional areas, at least a quarter lives in remote areas.

Indigenous unemployment is three times the rate for other Australians. Halving the gap within ten years means that an additional 100,000 Indigenous Australians will need to find and keep jobs.



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We are also reforming the Community Development Employment Projects and the Indigenous Employment Program to provide Indigenous Australians with a broader range of integrated employment services.

CDEP positions that have supported the delivery of government services are being converted to properly paid jobs. So far 2500 positions have been converted nationally, including 1914 in the Northern Territory. Many of these jobs are in local government.

Local government councils are finding creative and practical ways to close the gap in their communities – overcoming barriers through sporting and cultural events, creating local job strategies with business and embracing Reconciliation Action Plans.

In the private sector, the Government is supporting the Australian Employment Covenant's target of creating 50,000 jobs for Indigenous Australians with essential training and work-readiness programs.

What we need are new approaches to entrenched problems and innovative answers to questions like.

What can local government contribute to help achieve the COAG targets, including the target to halve the gap in Indigenous employment outcomes within a decade?

How can the Australian Government work better with local government to close the gap?

How can local government support Indigenous initiative to forge new relationships, including with the corporate sector and broader community?

How can local government foster the leadership of Indigenous elders, women, men and youth?

How can local government celebrate local achievements and share a positive vision with Indigenous people?

How can local government better target gaps in services and infrastructure, particularly in remote Indigenous communities?

