CLOSING THE GAP: NATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGY FOR INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS

Council of Australian Governments

A Strategy agreed between:

- the **Commonwealth of Australia** and
- the **States and Territories**, being:
  - the State of New South Wales;
  - the State of Victoria;
  - the State of Queensland;
  - the State of Western Australia;
  - the State of South Australia;
  - the State of Tasmania;
  - the Australian Capital Territory; and
  - the Northern Territory of Australia.

This Strategy will contribute to the Council of Australian Governments' targets for Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage and is a schedule to the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*.

THE NATIONAL URBAN AND REGIONAL SERVICE DELIVERY STRATEGY TO CLOSE THE GAP IN INDIGENOUS DISADVANTAGE JULY 2009

Introduction

In 2008, COAG requested the development of an Urban and Regional Strategy to coordinate the delivery of services to Indigenous Australians. To achieve significant gains in urban and regional locations, COAG requires an active focus across health, housing, early childhood development, education and employment, as means of achieving progress towards COAG's Closing the Gap targets.

Addressing the disadvantage experienced by many Indigenous Australians living in urban and regional areas will require a multi-faceted approach. Work to achieve improvements will need to be undertaken over a considerable period of time. While this Strategy sets out what Governments plan to do, it also recognises that Indigenous individuals and families need to be the focus of this effort. Boosting Indigenous demand for and take-up of services, strengthening Indigenous leadership and family and community well-being, individual capacity and responsibility for decision-making about their own lives, together with changes to health, education, housing, early childhood development and employment will see immediate benefits and improved longer-term outcomes for Indigenous individuals and their families.

This Strategy builds on the experience of all jurisdictions in listening to Indigenous people in urban and regional areas, and recognises that approaches to implementation will reflect the different circumstances and needs of Indigenous individuals, families and communities in each State or Territory. It reflects COAG's commitment to working in partnership with Indigenous people to achieve the Closing the Gap reforms agreed by COAG across the health, housing, early childhood development, education and employment spheres and recognises this will require the development and maintenance of strengthened partnership arrangements.

The Strategy outlines:

- the underlying evidence for action;
- the contribution of Indigenous specific and mainstream National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) in Health, Housing and Homelessness, Early Childhood, Education and Economic Participation to addressing disadvantage in urban and regional locations; and
- actions that can be taken by all jurisdictions to give practical effect to these key NPAs, and other initiatives of the Commonwealth and the States and Territories to improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians in urban and regional communities in a coordinated and targeted way.

Using this Strategy, all jurisdictions will report to COAG late this year on their progress in utilising the Indigenous specific and mainstream NPAs in the areas of health, housing, early childhood, education and employment to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in urban and regional areas and the progressive roll-out of the Strategy. This report will underpin each jurisdiction's commitment to a concerted and ongoing effort, as outlined and monitored through an Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plan agreed between each jurisdiction and the Commonwealth [1].

[1] Bilateral Plans are yet to be developed with the ACT and Tasmania.

A review of the overall Strategy is planned for three years' time.

What the evidence tells us

In 2006, the estimated resident Indigenous population was 517,000, or 2.5 per cent of the total Australian population[2]. Three-quarters (75%) of the Indigenous population were living in major cities and regional areas, with the remaining 25 per cent in remote areas. [3] Whereas there are large Indigenous populations living in remote Queensland, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (NT), in most jurisdictions (other than the NT), urban and regional locations are the predominant locations in which Indigenous people live.

The proportion of the Indigenous population resident in urban and regional areas rose markedly from 44 per cent in 1971 to 74 per cent in 2001, with almost one-third now resident in major cities. While this remains considerably less than the total Australian population resident in major cities (63%), it represents a substantial increase over the past 30 years. The 2006 Socio-Economic Indexes for Area also shows that 45 per cent of Indigenous people aged 0-18 years live in highly disadvantaged areas.[4]

Census data also indicates a continuation of well above national average (11%) Indigenous population growth between 2001 and 2006 throughout most of Victoria, the eastern half of New South Wales, south east and coastal Queensland, the south east of South Australia and south west Western Australia. [5]

Data also shows continued net migration to particular regional centres in Australia, including Shepparton, Mildura, Dubbo, Broken Hill, Esperance, Charters Towers and Kalgoorlie. Generally there is also a corresponding net movement of non-Indigenous people out of these locations, contributing to a higher concentration of Indigenous people in particular locations.[6] In addition, the rate at which Indigenous people are away from their usual place of residence is 7 per cent; almost double that for the rest of the population. The effect is to create a catchment around service towns or centres which has very significant implications for service delivery.[7]

Recent analysis of the levels of socioeconomic disparity between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in a given location, based on 2001 and 2006 Census data, confirms that Indigenous disadvantage is not just because Indigenous Australians are more likely to live in remote towns or outstations.[8] Even within the same suburb or large regional town, Indigenous Australians for a range of reasons, fare relatively poorly in terms of employment, education, income and housing.

These disparities in outcomes have not been met with a concerted effort to address Indigenous health, housing, early childhood development, education and employment needs guided by a clear sense of the gaps in outcomes experienced by Indigenous Australians. Instead, there has been a

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[2] Noting the undercounting of Indigenous people in the Census count.

[3] Classification is based on ABS 2006, *Statistical Geography: Volume 1 Australian Standard Geographical Classification (ASGC)*, (cat. no. 1216.0).

[4] Unpublished 2006 Census data

[5] Noting that the increased disclosure of Indigenous status over this time is a factor

[6] Taylor, J. 2006, *Population and Diversity: Policy Implications of Emerging Indigenous Demographic Trends, CAEPR* Discussion Paper No. 283/2006

[7] Prout, S.2008, On *the move? Indigenous temporary mobility practices in Australia* – CAEPR Working Paper No. 2008/48

[8] Biddle, N. 'Same suburb, different worlds: Comparing Indigenous and non-Indigenous outcomes in city suburbs and large regional towns', *People and Place* (forthcoming).

mixed response at all levels of government, which has produced a number of factors which need to change in order for Indigenous people to take up services, and get better outcomes from them. These factors include:

- *structural factors* – such as poor planning and co-ordination across government resulting in gaps, overlapping services and lack of clear roles and responsibilities between mainstream providers and Indigenous community service organisations; Indigenous organisations and clients having to deal with multiple programs and agencies; up-front costs; lack of infrastructure and transport issues;
- *service provider staffing issues* – ranging from difficulties in recruiting and maintaining staff, the challenges in securing skills and competencies required to manage complex issues (including lack of culturally aware staff and Indigenous staff) and inappropriate staff attitudes;
- *Indigenous people's reticence to use government services;*
- *ineffective engagement* by service providers with Indigenous communities; and
- *levels of disadvantage* – disadvantage in and of itself does not solely relate to low income. Even when adjustments are made for low SES is adjusted, Indigenous Australians in urban and regional areas still experience higher levels of disadvantage relative to other Australians.

The contribution of key COAG National Partnership Agreements to addressing disadvantage in urban and regional locations

While this Strategy acknowledges that addressing disadvantage will require action across a number of areas, a very significant contribution to addressing the needs of Indigenous Australians living in urban and regional locations has been made through COAG's agreement to a range of Indigenous specific and mainstream NPAs that increase investment in health, social housing and homelessness services, early childhood development, education and economic participation.[9]

Health

The NPA on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience a burden of disease two and a half times that of non-Indigenous Australians[10], and that chronic diseases and associated risk factors are responsible for a majority of the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Almost half the life expectancy gap is caused by 11 risk factors including: smoking (50% of Indigenous Australians smoke and this has not changed since 1995); overweight and obesity (60% of Indigenous Australians); physical inactivity (47% of Indigenous Australians in 2004-05); alcohol; and low fruit and vegetable intake.[11]

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[9] Note that not all jurisdictions are signatories to all National Partnerships.

10 Vos T, Barker B, Stanley L, Lopez AD (2007). The burden of disease and injury in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples 2003. Brisbane: School of Population Health, The University of Queensland.

11 Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report 2008, AHMAC, Canberra.

Leading causes of mortality of Indigenous Australians include: circulatory disease (26%) injury and poisoning (16%), diabetes (8%), chronic respiratory disease (9%) and cancer (15%).[12]

The Commonwealth and the States and Territories are together contributing $1.58 billion to the NPA, focused on five priority areas:

- *tackling smoking* – the Commonwealth and States and Territories will together work to reduce the smoking rate and reduce the burden of tobacco-related disease for Indigenous communities, as smoking is the single biggest killer of Indigenous people and the number one risk factor for chronic disease:
  - Smoking is responsible for 12 per cent of the burden of disease for Indigenous Australians and 20 per cent of deaths; [13]

- *healthy transition to adulthood* – the States and Territories will fund services to support positive life choices by young Indigenous people, reduce risk taking behaviours and increase resilience, with this expected to lead to, among other benefits, an increased sense of social and emotional well-being, reduced uptake of alcohol, tobacco and illicit drugs, and reduced hospitalisations for violence and injury:
  - Excess mortality among Indigenous Australian teenagers and young adults is mainly due to violence, accidents, substance abuse and self-harm, including suicide;[14]

- *making Indigenous health everyone's business* – the States and Territories will fund services to improve coordination and responsiveness to Indigenous health outcomes from non-health services such as child protection, juvenile justice, corrections, housing , especially those that target socially isolated and high risk populations.

- *primary health care services that can deliver* – the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will work together to improve access to culturally secure primary health care for all Indigenous Australians, with improved access to quality primary health care through better coordination across the care continuum, particularly for people with chronic diseases and /or complex needs; increased uptake of MBS-funded primary health care services by Indigenous people; and increased cultural competence of the primary health care workforce:
  - While Indigenous Australians have morbidity and mortality levels 200-300 per cent higher, their access to health care services overall is only 10 per cent higher;[15] and

- *fixing the gaps and improving the patient journey* – the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will work together to better manage the care transitions for Indigenous Australians across different parts of the health sector, especially for those at risk of, or with, a chronic disease, leading to improved levels of engagement between Indigenous patients, referred care providers and primary health providers (public or private) to deliver better follow up and referral processes and reduce admissions and incomplete treatments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients:
  - Indigenous Australians are hospitalised for conditions that should be treated in primary health care at 6 times the rate of other Australians, and this is rising for chronic conditions (161% increase since 2000-01);[16]

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12 AIHW analysis of National Mortality Database as seen in the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework Report (2008), AHMAC, Canberra.

13 Ibid., Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008).

14 Ibid., Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008).

15 Ibid., Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008).

The specific commitments to address inequalities in health outcomes and the burden of chronic disease in urban and regional Indigenous populations are complemented by a commitment to national system-level changes which will focus on: setting national minimum service standards for all organisations providing primary health care services to Indigenous individuals and families; improved quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification in health data sets; establishing electronic records sharing; increasing the number of Indigenous people in the health workforce; and promoting respect and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the delivery of quality health care.

The NPA on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes will be monitored by 31 performance indicators that align with the COAG Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous Health. Jurisdictions will report annually against the performance benchmarks and output indicators included in their Implementation Plans through the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council.

Housing and Homelessness

The NPA on Social Housing and the NPA on Homelessness recognise that Indigenous people in urban and regional Australia are over-represented amongst people who are homeless[17], or at risk of homelessness[18], in public housing and on the waiting lists for public and social housing. The proportion of Indigenous households in social housing is around 7 per cent of public and community housing households and 10 per cent of total social housing households (which also includes state owned and managed Indigenous housing households). In June 2008, 7.2 per cent of households in public housing were Indigenous (23,953 out of a total of 331,136 households); 6.4 per cent of households in community housing were Indigenous (2,298 out of a total of 35,667 households) and 100 per cent of households in state owned and managed Indigenous housing were Indigenous (12,375).

The NPA on Social Housing will provide $400 million over two years for a Social Housing Growth Fund; and will fund State and Territory Governments to increase the supply of social housing, through the construction of approximately 2,000 new dwellings nationally by 2010-11. In particular, the Agreement will support projects that enhance the ability of persons who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, including Indigenous people.

Through the Social Housing Initiative in the NPA on the Nation Building and Jobs Plan, the Commonwealth and State and Territory Governments will significantly increase the supply of social housing throughout Australia and provide much needed accommodation to many disadvantaged Australians, particularly those who are homeless or at risk of becoming homeless. Through this initiative the Commonwealth will commit funding of $6.4 billion over

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16 Ibid., Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (2008).

17 At the 2006 Census, 9 % of the homeless (9,531 people of the total 104,676) were Indigenous. Indigenous people made up 3.8% of people staying with other households, 6 per cent of those in boarding houses, 16 per cent of people in improvised dwellings and 20 per cent of people in specialist homelessness services. Overall, 2.4 % of people were identified as Indigenous in the 2006 Census.

18 ‚at risk of homelessness‚ relates to secondary and tertiary levels of homelessness:

- Secondary homelessness - people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation and people residing temporarily with other households because they have no accommodation of their own. It also includes people staying in emergency or transitional accommodation provided by governments and non-government organisations and people residing temporarily in boarding houses for 12 weeks or less.
- Tertiary homelessness - people living in boarding houses on a medium to long term basis for over 12 weeks.

the years 2008-09 to 2011-12. Over this period, around 20,000 additional social housing dwellings will be built, adding to the social housing stock, together with around 47,000 existing public housing dwellings being refurbished. Funding will be allocated to states generally on a per capita basis, subject to jurisdictions submitting suitable proposals that meet the requirements of the initiative.

The NPA on Homelessness will also benefit Indigenous Australians who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. Through this NPA the Commonwealth and States and Territories will commit $1.1 billion over five years from 2008-09. The 'Place to Call Home' initiative will provide additional new dwellings, with tenants receiving targeted support services for the first year of their tenancy. This is expected to particularly benefit Indigenous people in urban and regional locations. Homeless Indigenous young people, including those exiting the care of child protection services, could also benefit from the introduction of service models such as the 'Foyer' model, that provide supported accommodation combined with employment pathway skills in urban and regional locations. Indigenous people who are 'rough sleepers' will be assisted by outreach programs and programs to implement long-term stable accommodation.

All States and Territories will assist Indigenous people to access housing e.g. public, private and community, under the Homelessness NPA by addressing the following three areas:

- street to home initiatives for chronic homeless people (rough sleepers);
- support for private and public tenants to help sustain their tenancies, including through tenancy support, advocacy, case management, financial counselling and referral services; and
- assistance for people leaving child protection services, correctional and health facilities, to access and maintain stable affordable housing.

The particular measures being put in place by States and Territories, including those targeting Indigenous Australians, in relation to these outputs will be agreed in Implementation Plans. This will ensure services are responsive to client needs and enable integration of specialist and mainstream agency support.

Indigenous women and children experiencing domestic and family violence will be assisted to stay in their housing through a number of measures located in metropolitan and regional locations (also to be agreed in Implementation Plans). The Homelessness NPA also provides support for children who are homeless or at risk of homelessness to maintain contact with the education system.

Education

Arrangements agreed by COAG in 2008 create a framework which provides schools and school systems with greater resources and flexibility to allocate resources to areas that will produce the best outcomes for students to achieve the closing the gap targets. This includes flexibility to develop strategies to respond to individual needs of Indigenous students and to suit the circumstances of each school community. Similarly, specific targets, strategies and measures to achieve outcomes under the Education Agreements will vary across jurisdictions and will be negotiated bilaterally.

The bulk of funding that supports the education of Indigenous students is delivered through schools funding which has been significantly increased in 2009-2012 through the National Education

Agreement and the *Schools Assistance Act 2008*. In addition, NPAs covering Early Childhood Education, Indigenous Early Childhood Development, Low Socio-Economic Status Schools, Literacy and Numeracy, Teacher Quality, Digital Education Revolution, Trade Training Centres and Building an Education Revolution, have been established between the Commonwealth and States and Territories to drive reforms in key areas of national significance. These reforms, which address the relevant COAG targets, will focus on:

- strengthening the access and quality of early childhood education - as part of the bilateral agreements under the National Partnership on Early Childhood Education, each state and territory is identifying their baseline position and the strategies that will be implemented, given the circumstances operating in that jurisdiction. In addition, the Australian Government will lead the development of an Indigenous (including remote) Universal Access Strategy. This strategy will focus on practical, effective approaches to increasing access to quality preschool education for Indigenous children in all geographic locations. The strategy will identify what works, current and planned activities and gaps and opportunities;
- supporting high quality teaching with a clear focus on the fundamentals of English literacy and numeracy;
- improving educational outcomes in schools with a high proportion of students from disadvantaged backgrounds;
- strong school leadership that can respond innovatively to improve student outcomes and engage local communities; and
- investments in infrastructure that builds a 21st century learning environment in schools.

In particular, the Smarter Schools-Low Socio-Economic Status (SES) School Communities NPA will fund a range of within school and out-of-school reforms to support the educational needs and wellbeing of students in schools in low SES communities. The Commonwealth will invest $1.5 billion over seven years, to be matched by investment from the States and Territories which will include redirection and reprioritisation of existing school funding sources and new funding commitments. The National Partnership is aimed at improving student engagement and educational achievement and addressing entrenched disadvantage.

A new NPA on Youth Attainment and Transitions was agreed by COAG in July 2009. It includes targets to increase participation in education and training by 2010 and increase Year 12 or equivalent attainment rates by 2012 – in support of COAG's 2015 target of 90 per cent overall Year 12 or equivalent attainment. $100 million in reward funding is available under the NPA for achievement of these targets. In addition, the NPA will include an agreement to a national trajectory for halving the gap in Indigenous Year 12 or equivalent attainment by 2020, and a commitment to monitor and report annually on leading indicators of Indigenous participation and attainment. This trajectory requires Indigenous 20-24 year old Year 12 or equivalent attainment to increase from 41.4 per cent in 2006, to 66.1 per cent by 2020. The Australian Government will work closely with the states and territories to deliver a total of $723 million of measures under the NPA, to pursue reforms to improve young people's educational attainment and transitions from school, and contribute towards achieving the COAG targets.

Performance indicators and national targets have been broadly agreed to galvanise effort towards unprecedented improvements in education outcomes of Indigenous Australians. The 2008 National Action Plan Assessment Program, Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data shows that the gaps between the results for Indigenous students and all students in urban and regional areas were of similar magnitude. The largest gaps in writing achievement for urban and regional areas were for Year 9 students, with a gap of 21 percentage points in urban areas and 22.1

percentage points in regional areas. The largest gaps in reading achievement for urban and regional areas were for Year 5 students, with a gap of 18 percentage points in urban areas and 19 percentage points in regional areas. For achievement in numeracy the largest gaps in urban and regional areas were for Year 9 students, with a gap of 15.5 percentage points in urban areas and 16.7 percentage points in regional areas. The smallest gaps (around 9 percentage points) between Indigenous students and all students in urban and regional areas were for Year 3 students in writing and numeracy. Through the Literacy and Numeracy NPA, targets based on NAPLAN data are also to be agreed with government and non-government systems for accelerated improvement for participating Indigenous students. Achievement of these targets will be key precursors to $350 million of reward payments.

Early Childhood Development

Indigenous children are the most vulnerable group of children in Australia and disparities with non-Indigenous children in some outcomes have widened in recent years. The NPA on Indigenous Early Childhood Development commits $564 million of joint Commonwealth, State and Territory funding to improve access to antenatal care, teenage sexual and reproductive health services, child and maternal health services and integrated early childhood development and family support services.

Commonwealth funding of $292.6 million over six years from 1 January 2009 will be provided to States and Territories to establish 35 Children and Family Centres in targeted urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations and disadvantage and high population of Indigenous children between birth and four years of age. Of the 35 centres, 15 are to be established in urban areas and the remaining 20 will be established in regional and remote locations. This place based approach ensures that each Centre can be tailored to the needs of its community and recognises that, particularly in urban areas, there are more opportunities to link with existing infrastructure and services.

Commonwealth investment of $107 million over five years from 1 July 2009 will be provided to the States and Territories to: improve access to, and use of, antenatal care by young Indigenous mothers and provide support to reduce risk factors such as smoking; support young Indigenous people, including those who are disengaged from school, to make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health; and drive improved data collection and reporting. States and Territories will focus their efforts in areas with significant numbers of young Indigenous women and high numbers of births to teenagers.

This NPA also seeks to increase access to, and use of, maternal and child health services by Indigenous families by building on the existing Commonwealth election commitment of $90.3 million for *New Directions: An Equal Start in Life for Indigenous Children* (new mothers' and babies' services) and includes complementary State/Territory investment of $75 million. Services will be established in regions identified as high need and will be culturally inclusive and responsive to local needs to better engage Indigenous children and families.

The mainstream Early Childhood Education NP will deliver universal access to early childhood education in the year before formal schooling. A key performance indicator in the Early Childhood Education NP is the proportion of Indigenous children (by geographic location as identified by the Australian Standard Geographic Classification), who are enrolled in (and attending, where possible to measure) a preschool program in the year before formal schooling.[19]

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[19] Preschool program as defined in the National Partnership Agreement on Early Childhood Education is: structured, play-based early childhood education.

Economic Participation

The gap in the Indigenous workforce-aged employment to population ratio (also known as the employment rate) at the 2006 Census was around 24 percentage points. To reduce this gap to 12 percentage points by 2018, Indigenous employment growth of around 100,000 over ten years would be needed. This represents a 63 per cent total increase on the number of Indigenous people employed at mid 2006.

Analysis of changes in labour force status between 2001 and 2006 shows the gap narrowed as a ratio from 0.71 to 0.75, with improvement most evident in urban and regional areas. Particular attention will need to be given to job creation in urban and regional areas and especially regional labour markets in New South Wales and Queensland if overall targets are to be met.[20]

In 2006 the employment-to-population ratio (employment rate) for those aged 15 and above was considerably lower for both Indigenous males 51.2per cent and females 41.2 per cent than for non-Indigenous Australians (71.9% and 58.4% respectively). The proportion of Indigenous people employed in Major Cities in 2006 was 50 per cent compared to 44 per cent Inner Regional, 44 per cent in Outer Regional areas, 44 per cent in Remote and 45 per cent in Very Remote areas. While the gaps in remote areas are large[21], much of the overall gap is concentrated in urban areas given the relative population shares. As an example, only 16.9 per cent of unemployed Indigenous Australians were located in remote or very remote areas in 2006. Unemployment rates were highest in Inner Regional (males 18.6% and females 18.1%) and Outer Regional areas (males 18.1% and females 17.0%), and unemployment rates were at intermediate levels in Major Cities (males 15.3% and females 14.5%) and Remote areas (males 15.3% and females 13.5%).

It is recognised that employment leads not only to improved incomes for families and communities, but also enhanced self-esteem, increased opportunities for self development and reduced social isolation. The National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Economic Participation seeks to narrow the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by building the capacity of Indigenous people to participate in the economy as well as generating opportunities for their participation. Current projections indicate that this National Partnership will assist up to 13,000 Indigenous people into employment over a five year period contributing to the COAG target to halve the gap in employment outcomes.

The Agreement involves complementary investment of $228.8 million over five years to significantly improve opportunities for Indigenous people to engage in private and public sector jobs through:

- creating real sustainable employment for up to 2,000 CDEP participants in areas of government service delivery that have previously relied on subsidisation through the Community Development Employment Projects program;
- strengthening current government procurement policies and creating up to 3.000 jobs to maximise Indigenous employment;

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20 Biddle,N, Taylor, J and Yap, M, *Indigenous Participation in Regional Labour Markets 2001-06*, CAEPR Discussion Paper, 288/2008

21 Lower measured unemployment rates in remote areas are a function of participation in Community Development Employment Program (the ABS classifies CDEP participation as a form of employment).

- incorporating Indigenous workforce strategies into all new major COAG reforms thereby contributing to the Closing the Gap targets; and
- reviewing all Public Sector Indigenous employment and career development strategies and employing up to 8,000 Indigenous people to reflect national Indigenous working age population share by 2015, currently projected to be at least 2.6 per cent.

A key joint commitment under this NPA is agreement to incorporate Indigenous workforce strategies into all new major COAG reforms contributing to the Closing the Gap targets. Workforce strategies will have as core components the acquisition of recognised and accredited mainstream qualifications and articulated training pathways for Indigenous Australians. In particular, those reforms targeted specifically at the Closing the Gap targets should also support achievement of the target to halve the gap in employment outcomes.

From 1 July 2009, Indigenous jobseekers in regional areas with established economies will be serviced through the reformed employment services instead of CDEP. The existence of CDEP in regions with established economies has often reinforced the isolation of Indigenous people from labour market, programs and opportunities. The new employment services focus particularly on the disadvantaged and long-term unemployed. There will be more tailored and individualised assistance and providers will be required to have a comprehensive Indigenous employment strategy.

The Government has also committed an additional $190.6 million over five years to a reformed and expanded Indigenous Employment Program which will make services more responsive to the specific needs of Indigenous job seekers, Indigenous businesses and employers. The Indigenous Employment Program operates across Australia, targeting regional areas and specific industries experiencing labour shortages, as well as providing assistance to develop plans to recruit and retain Indigenous employees.

What else needs to be done?

While each of these NPAs will on their own make a significant contribution to addressing the needs of Indigenous people living in urban and regional locations, the evidence shows that changes are required across a number of priority areas so that positive outcomes for Indigenous people can be achieved across all the areas of health, housing, early childhood, education and employment.

These investments need to be brought together as parts of a bigger effort to address all aspects of Indigenous disadvantage in urban and regional locations. This will also include a focus on respect for Indigenous people and their cultures, through promoting and supporting a strong and positive view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture. This will be particularly important for reducing the social exclusion of Indigenous Australians and for increasing the positive outcomes from specific initiatives to improve their health, housing, early childhood, education and employment prospects.

This more comprehensive approach provides a way for governments, service providers and the wider community to harness new investment for better outcomes and is set out below. A number of action areas provide the basis for developing jurisdiction-specific implementation plans for the urban and regional service delivery strategy. These action areas allow for differences between the States and Territories in population characteristics, mobility patterns and existing social and physical infrastructure and services.

Integration and Governance

Governments propose to take a much more transparent and systematic approach to coordinating services to address Indigenous disadvantage to overcome a legacy of piecemeal and *post-hoc* adjustments, to address the needs of Indigenous individuals and families. At the highest level, all Governments will be guided by the *Service Delivery Principles for Services for Indigenous Australians* agreed by COAG in 2008.

A comprehensive approach by Governments, in partnership with Indigenous communities, will facilitate effective services on the ground for Indigenous people. The appropriate governance mechanisms to enable this to occur will need to be developed by each jurisdiction.

- Governments will establish, primarily through Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plans, appropriate mechanisms to coordinate policy and services in their jurisdiction which contribute to Closing the Gap targets.
- Governments will also use existing and future government commitments, including the Nation Building and stimulus packages, to improve outcomes for Indigenous people, as appropriate.

Effective Services

A range of strategies and approaches needs to be undertaken to support improvements to the way services are delivered to Indigenous people. Fundamental to success will be the engagement of Indigenous people and working in partnership to address barriers to their take-up of services.

To do this, Governments will reform service delivery systems to ensure government investments:

- deliver effective and accessible services that are taken up by Indigenous people in urban and regional locations;
- deliver culturally competent services that achieve good outcomes for Indigenous Australians;
- maximise linkages between Indigenous-specific and mainstream services; and
- deliver service models that respond to high levels of mobility amongst Indigenous Australians.

Focusing on Local Need/Place-Based Approaches

A place-based approach is a practical way to implement initiatives designed to combat disadvantage in urban and regional areas to achieve real and sustainable outcomes. This approach recognises the diversity of issues and allows local initiatives to be delivered in a manner that is appropriate, and therefore more likely to be effective, for each community. This approach permits the flexibility for jurisdictions to implement targeted initiatives to meet their priorities.

To do this, Governments will:

- prioritise investment in services and programs and, where appropriate, in specific locations that have the greatest impact on Closing the Gap and breaking the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage; and
- work together to identify any priority locations in a State or Territory in which to undertake focused place-based work.

Strengthening Indigenous Capacity, Engagement and Participation

Promoting and supporting a strong and positive view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture will be a particularly important method of reducing social exclusion for Indigenous Australians. Strengthening individual, family and community wellbeing and capacity is critical in urban and regional locations and provides an opportunity for developing responses to local needs which are driven by both the community and government.

To do this, Governments will:

- support community and individual leadership skills and governance training;
- recognise the importance of working in partnership with Indigenous organisations to strengthen and support families and children affected by past policies of forced removal;
- strengthen cultural awareness and create an environment of broader respect and recognition of Indigenous peoples and their culture; and
- promote Indigenous Australians being actively involved in all aspects of Australian society.

Building Effective Accountability and Sustainability

The commitment to monitoring and reporting requires that Governments improve statistical collection services that are currently insufficient to allow monitoring of key outcomes. Statistics are often skewed by the under-identification of Indigenous people in administrative data sets and limited sampling of Indigenous people in more general surveys.

These problems are compounded by such factors as uncertainties in the underlying Indigenous population statistics and inconsistencies in data across the jurisdictions. To give effect to the COAG commitment to accurate monitoring of outcomes for Indigenous Australians, Governments commit to taking specific action to support improvements to data quality consistent with Schedule F of the National Indigenous Reform Agreement

To do this, Governments will:

- ensure that programs and services have regular and transparent performance monitoring, review and evaluation; and
- build the evidence base and share good practice.

Next Steps

This Strategy outlines the ongoing commitment to achieve sustained improvements for Indigenous people living in urban and regional locations. As a first step, all jurisdictions will report to COAG late this year on progress in utilising the Indigenous specific and mainstream National Partnership Agreements in the areas of health, housing, early childhood, education and economic participation associated changes to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in urban and regional locations.

The Strategy will be progressed in each jurisdiction as part of the Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plan agreed between the Commonwealth and each State/Territory (either through a specific implementation schedule detailing actions to be taken for each key action area or through integrated efforts across all schedules under the Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plans, depending on the circumstances and preferences of each jurisdiction).

Building on review mechanisms under the Overarching Bilateral Indigenous Plans, the effectiveness of this Urban and Regional Strategy will be reviewed after three years.