



natsiwa

NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN'S ALLIANCE

28 January 2025

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) is the peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women in Australia. The leadership team of Directors are Indigenous women each representing States and Territory across Australia. NATSIWA is funded by the Australian Government to bring together the issues and voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's organisations and individuals across Australia.

Submission to the Select Committee on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations

Communities

Introduction

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Select Committee on Measuring Outcomes for First Nations Communities. As a national organisation representing the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, NATSIWA advocates for policy approaches that address systemic inequities and promote holistic well-being in First Nations communities.

The current regression of the Closing the Gap targets, particularly regarding suicide rates, the number of children in out-of-home care, adult incarceration, and children's developmental readiness for school, signals an urgent need for reimagined frameworks and methodologies that centre First Nations perspectives, strengths, and priorities.

Our Position

1. Suicide Rates The alarming suicide rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people demand a paradigm shift toward culturally informed mental health strategies. Holistic, community-led programs incorporating traditional healing, connection to Country, and trauma-informed care must replace one-size-fits-all approaches. Adequate funding for suicide prevention initiatives should prioritise culturally safe environments and the training of First Nations mental health practitioners.

www.natsiwa.org.au

2. Children in Out-of-Home Care The overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care reflects the systemic inadequacy of current family support frameworks. Solutions must focus on early intervention, family reunification, and reducing unnecessary child removals. Cultural safety must underpin child welfare, with a preference for kinship care and robust cultural support plans ensuring children remain connected to their heritage and identity.

3. Adult Incarceration The disproportionately high incarceration rates of First Nations adults are a result of systemic bias and over-policing. NATSIWA calls for justice reinvestment strategies that prioritise diversion, rehabilitation, and community-led programs. On-Country programs and initiatives addressing the underlying social determinants of crime are essential for long-term change.

4. Developmental Readiness for School Children's readiness for school is deeply tied to equitable access to culturally appropriate early education. NATSIWA supports investment in programs that incorporate Indigenous languages, cultural practices, and community involvement. Addressing systemic barriers, such as affordable childcare and health inequities, is critical to ensuring that First Nations children begin school developmentally on track.

Core Principles

a. First Nations Leadership:

All reforms and initiatives must be co-designed and led by First Nations peoples to ensure cultural integrity and relevance.

b. Strength-Based Frameworks:

Reframe measures to focus on cultural resilience, strengths, and achievements rather than deficits, shifting narratives to one of empowerment.

c. Interconnected Wellness:

Expand the scope of targets to include holistic measures of wellness that encompass mental, physical, spiritual, and social health.

d. Data Sovereignty and Governance:

Data collection and reporting frameworks must respect Indigenous data sovereignty, enabling communities to own and govern their data.

Key Recommendations

1. Funding Approaches

a. Review and reform funding models:

Funding for Closing the Gap targets must be allocated through a co-designed process that empowers First Nations communities. Funding should be flexible, sustained, and outcomes-driven, prioritising initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

b. Address funding inequities:

Current funding allocations should be re-evaluated to ensure adequate resources are directed towards preventative and community-driven solutions rather than reactive, deficit-focused interventions.

2. Measurement and Evaluation Frameworks

a. Adopt culturally appropriate methodologies:

Measurement frameworks should incorporate culturally safe and strengths-based metrics that reflect the lived realities and aspirations of First Nations communities.

b. Engage Indigenous expertise:

Evaluation processes must embed First Nations knowledge systems, ensuring Indigenous-led data collection, analysis, and reporting.

3. Priority of Targets and National Partnership Agreement Reforms

a. Align targets with the National Priority Reforms:

The targets must align with the four Priority Reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, ensuring shared decision-making, strengthening community-controlled organisations, systemic transformation, and improved data sovereignty.

b. Address structural barriers:

Incorporate mechanisms that identify and dismantle structural barriers impeding progress on Closing the Gap targets.

4. Reflecting Strengths of First Nations Cultures

a. Shift the narrative from deficit to strength:

Reframe targets and reporting to celebrate cultural resilience, community strengths, and traditional knowledge systems.

b. Embed cultural indicators:

Develop indicators that measure cultural safety, connection to Country, language revitalisation, and community cohesion.

5. Broadening Definitions of Wellness

a. Incorporate holistic health indicators:

Expand measurements to include mental, physical, and spiritual health as interconnected components of wellness.

b. Promote healing-informed practices:

Embed principles of intergenerational healing and trauma recovery in program design and evaluation.

6. Alternative Measurements

a. Develop complementary metrics:

Introduce alternative measurements such as community-defined success indicators, wellbeing indices, and ecological health metrics.

b. Pilot new approaches:

Trial alternative measurement frameworks in partnership with local communities to refine and scale effective models.

7. Expanding the Closing the Gap Framework

a. Foster intersectoral collaboration:

Encourage partnerships across sectors, including education, health, justice, and housing, to achieve integrated and sustainable outcomes.

b. Strengthen data sovereignty and governance:

Ensure all data collected under the Closing the Gap framework is owned and governed by First Nations communities.

NATSIWA advocates for immediate action to address the systemic causes underlying the regression of Closing the Gap targets. This includes prioritising culturally informed, community-driven solutions and embedding respect for Indigenous knowledge systems across all sectors.

By adopting a strengths-based, First Nations-led approach, we can achieve meaningful and lasting outcomes for our communities. NATSIWA is committed to supporting the Select Committee's efforts to deliver measurable improvements that reflect the aspirations and needs of First Nations peoples.

We thank the Committee for the opportunity to contribute to this inquiry and are available to provide further evidence or clarification on the matters raised in this submission.

Yours sincerely

Wendy Anders

Chief Executive Officer

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATSIWA)