

REFORM THE INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT STRATEGY

Australia has committed to close the gap in health and wellbeing between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the non-Indigenous population within a generation. This requires a nation-wide effort in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations across election cycles, funding agreements and governments.

It also requires the Australian Government to commit to long-term funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services — and their respective peak bodies — so that communities can access quality, culturally strong services across all sectors. A community-driven, needs-based approach to funding is essential if we are going to close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

WHAT THE AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENT SHOULD DO

REFORM THE INDIGENOUS ADVANCEMENT STRATEGY.

Reform the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) and align the IAS with other funding programs to ensure the key determinants of funding are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community agency and need.

WHY

The *Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS)*, introduced on 1 July 2014, is the primary way in which the Australian Government funds and delivers a range of programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It consolidates about 150 individual programs and activities in the areas of jobs, land and economy, children and schooling, safety and wellbeing, culture and capability, and remote Australia strategies into the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. It does not include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health programs. Regrettably, this strategy was developed with little or no input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their representative organisations.

Oxfam, along with a range of other Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations, has numerous concerns with the IAS process, particularly relating to consultation, design, assessment, selection and implementation. We believe failings in these areas may negatively impact efforts to close the gap and enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to effectively tackle the issues affecting their communities.

The IAS program needs to be reformed to ensure the key determinants of funding are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community agency and need. A community-driven, needs-based approach — rather than competitive tendering — will build the capacity of local and regional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and services so that they can effectively address the issues facing

the communities they serve. These organisations often have a clearer understanding of the needs of their communities, yet many have been unable to complete the tender application process due to limited capacity and resources, creating widespread uncertainty and distress. The tender guidelines and selection criteria have also not adequately considered specific community need or explicitly required cultural competence.

We believe government departments and peak Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations should work together to develop a trauma-informed, culturally based *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outcomes Framework* to build communities' knowledge and skills so they can effectively address local and regional issues. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities need to be the co-drivers of change, not just recipients of funds.

To successfully address Indigenous disadvantage, the Australian Government must consider all areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life in an interdependent and holistic way. This means working closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations and experts to see the interconnections between social determinants such as health and wellbeing, employment and education, community safety and incarceration rates. The government needs to then adequately fund and implement policies that are evidence-based, and analyse these policies to ensure they are continuously improved. Finally it must ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations at the local, regional and federal level are at the heart of this work, for they are essential to its success.

ABOUT OXFAM

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people influence the local and global decisions that affect them. In all we do, Oxfam works with partner organisations and alongside vulnerable women and men to end the injustices that cause poverty.

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