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CLOSING THE GAP – STRENGTHENING INDIGENOUS COMMUNITIES

The Rudd Government is building on its commitment to close the gap in life expectancy and life opportunities for Indigenous Australians through targeted investment to strengthen Indigenous communities.

Since 2008 all Australian governments have committed over \$4.6 billion to close the gap under a new partnership approach agreed through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

Through the implementation of the COAG agreements and unprecedented effort and support across the Australian community, we are seeing the start of real and sustainable progress.

The Government has also committed \$1.2 billion since 2007 to continue the Northern Territory Emergency Response and a further \$1.5 billion since 2007 to other Indigenous specific measures.

This year's Budget focuses on making sure that programs are implemented and services are delivering in a way which is effective and targeted to meet the specific needs of Indigenous communities.

To achieve this, governments are working in partnership with Indigenous Australians because Indigenous Australians are the ones who are best placed to lead change in

their own lives, in their families and in their communities. Governments can help, but closing the gap will not happen without the commitment of Indigenous people.

Community Safety

The Australian Government is working with the States and Territories to strengthen policing and improve the safety of Indigenous communities and maximise the impact of other investment in education and housing.

The Government will invest in the following three measures:

- Support for the Australian Federal Police to continue their work as a part of Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory, at a cost of \$9.2 million over two years, while new Northern Territory Police complete their training and become fully operational.
- Funding of \$6.6 million over two years for the National Indigenous Child Abuse and Violence Intelligence Task Force to continue to investigate patterns of violence, serious crime and abuse of power and trust in remote Indigenous communities.
- Expanding the rollout of Opal fuel to reduce petrol sniffing in Indigenous communities at a cost of \$38.5 million over four years. This will increase the number of participating sites to 145, benefiting a further eleven communities.

In addition, in recognition of the importance of progressively meeting the need for a strengthened police presence in remote Northern Territory communities, the Australian Government and Northern Territory Government are releasing the recently completed Independent Review of Policing in Remote Indigenous Communities in the Northern Territory and it is now available at www.fahcsia.gov.au

The Review Report assesses outstanding needs and makes a number of recommendations about improved support infrastructure and management support. As an immediate response, both Governments have agreed to establish a joint working party to address the Review's recommendations including development of an implementation plan to progress agreed recommendations over the next five years.

Employment

Having a job not only gives people financial independence, it also brings the social and economic benefits that are essential for the development of strong, independent communities. To increase and improve employment opportunities for Indigenous Australians, the Government is:

- extending the reforms of the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program to the Torres Strait at a cost of \$44.3 million over four years. These reforms will provide CDEP participants in the Torres Strait with the same incentives and participation requirements as others in the CDEP program and will provide funding for 237 jobs delivering services funded by the Australian Government;
- continuing the Business Skills for Visual Artists initiative, at a cost of \$4.0 million over four years, which supports ethical commerce in the Indigenous visual arts sector by assisting Indigenous artists with professional

development, business skills training and access to the commercial marketplace;

- improving Indigenous employment, recruitment and retention practices in Commonwealth public sector organisations employing workers outside the *Australian Public Service Act 1999*, at a cost of \$1.6 million.

Education and Early Childhood

In this year's Budget, the Australian Government will invest \$15.4 million over four years into a flexible funding pool to support projects that improve education outcomes for children and young people under the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014*.

The Plan identifies how governments, education providers and communities will work together to achieve the Government's targets in educational outcomes. It helps to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people will benefit from the additional \$2.6 billion being invested in the Smarter Schools National Partnerships with the States and Territories.

Funding of \$59.4 million will be provided to improve the quality of budget based funded early childhood services to meet key aspects of the new National Quality System for early childhood education and child care by 2014. Children attending around 140 centre based early childhood services, including around 100 Indigenous services, will benefit from improvements to the physical environment of the service, level of qualifications of staff at the service, and governance and administrative capacity. The remote service delivery communities with budget based funded early childhood services will be in the first phase of implementation.

These services are directly funded by the Australian Government to provide childcare and early learning opportunities to vulnerable and disadvantaged children in areas where the market would otherwise fail to deliver child care.

Housing

Housing is crucial to close the gap. Children cannot grow up healthy and get a good education if their home environment is unsafe and overcrowded.

The Government is continuing its support for Indigenous Australians to have access to affordable housing and accommodation, including home ownership, through two important measures:

- A temporary transfer of \$56.0 million in unutilised capital from the Home Ownership on Indigenous Land program (HOIL) into the Home Ownership Program while further land tenure reform takes place on Indigenous land in remote communities. This will enable more people to access the oversubscribed Home Ownership Program, boosting the numbers of Indigenous people able to buy their own homes in regional and urban areas. This capital will be made available to HOIL customers as demand for that program accelerates.
- A \$6.9 million capital investment for Aboriginal Hostels Limited to make necessary repairs to a number of its hostels.

Flexible Remote Service Delivery

Under the Remote Service Delivery Strategy, all Australian governments have signed up to a concentrated and accelerated approach to tackle deep-seated disadvantage.

After decades of uncoordinated, ad hoc actions from governments at all levels, a comprehensive and sustained approach is vital to provide residents of remote Indigenous communities with the facilities and services that could be expected in any Australian town of a similar size, location and need.

As the Prime Minister announced in his second annual address to the Parliament on progress towards closing the gap in February 2010, the Australian Government is investing \$46.0 million into a Remote Service Delivery Flexible Funding Pool in response to the advice of the Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services to ensure flexibility in delivering programs to benefit Indigenous Australians. The fund will allow the Government to respond flexibly and quickly to the projects that are identified as high priority by community members, reducing red tape and bureaucratic delays.

Indigenous Broadcasting

The Rudd Government is committed to supporting the Indigenous broadcasting sector. This year's Budget includes funding of \$15.2 million in 2010-11 for National Indigenous Television, complementing the substantial existing investment in Imparja television, Indigenous Community Television, community radio stations, remote Indigenous media organisations and remote Indigenous broadcasting services. In 2010, the Australian Government is reviewing its investment in the Indigenous broadcasting and media sector, to ensure that resources allocated to Indigenous broadcasting are delivering the best results for Indigenous people.

Indigenous Legal Assistance Services

The Government will provide an additional \$34.9 million over four years for the Indigenous legal aid services program as part of its broader access to justice package to provide additional funding for legal assistance services to improve access to justice in the community.

These services are delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services across Australia. The additional funding will assist in meeting increasing demand for these services and improve access to justice for Indigenous Australians across Australia, supporting key Government priorities, including social inclusion and closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

For all media inquiries, please call Jessica Walker on 0430166633