

Chapter 2

Commonwealth Policy on Indigenous Affairs

2.1 There have been a number of significant policy announcements related to regional and remote Indigenous communities during 2008 and 2009. This chapter provides a summary of these policy announcements and developments that are most relevant to the committee's inquiry, as well as describing the overarching policy frameworks that the committee considers are impacting on the management of Indigenous Affairs at the Commonwealth level. It also sets out Indigenous specific funding that was announced by the Commonwealth government in the 2009-10 Budget.

2.2 One of the issues that has frustrated the committee, and which has been raised a number of times in meetings and in evidence¹, is the seeming lack of a clear and transparent policy framework governing the operation of Indigenous Affairs in Australia. In this chapter the committee has attempted to bring together available policy statements and structures to describe the current state of Indigenous Affairs.

Closing the Gap policy

2.3 The 'Closing the Gap' policy was developed out of a three year campaign that commenced in 2005 with a coalition of non government organisations calling for strategies to 'close the gap' between the life expectancy rates for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

2.4 Following this campaign, in March 2008, the National Indigenous Health Equality Summit was held in Canberra. During this summit the Commonwealth government and Indigenous and non-Indigenous health organisations signed the *Close the Gap Indigenous Health Equality Summit Statement of Intent* (Statement of Intent). The committee notes that the Statement of Intent committed the Commonwealth government to working with health organisations to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by the year 2030.

2.5 The main signatories to the Statement of Intent were the:

- Prime Minister;
- Leader of the Opposition;
- Minister for Health and Ageing;
- Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs;

1 National Rural Health Alliance Inc, *Submission 8*; Reconciliation Australia, *Submission 29*, attachment 3; Central Land Council, *Submission 92*; Professor Jon Altman, *Committee Hansard*, 17 November 2008.

- Presidents and Chairs of the four main Indigenous health peak bodies;
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation;
- Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association;
- Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses;
- Indigenous Dentists' Association of Australia;
- Presidents and Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of the four main mainstream health peak bodies;
- Australian Medical Association;
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners;
- Royal College of Australasian Physicians;
- Australian General Practice Network; and
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner of the Australian Human Rights Commission (then the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission).

2.6 The committee also notes that during the National Apology to the Stolen Generations on 13 February 2008, the Prime Minister pledged a new national effort aimed at closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

This new partnership on closing the gap will set concrete targets for the future: within a decade to halve the widening gap in literacy, numeracy and employment outcomes and opportunities for Indigenous children, within a decade to halve the appalling gap in infant mortality rates between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children and, within a generation, to close the equally appalling 17-year life gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous when it comes to overall life expectancy.²

2.7 This was followed by the Commonwealth's announcement of six targets intended to 'Close the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage'. These were:

- To halve the mortality gap between Indigenous children and other children under five within a decade;
- To provide access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four-year-olds in remote communities within five years;
- To halve the gap in literacy and numeracy achievement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and other students within a decade;
- To halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students in rates of year 12 attainment or an equivalent attainment by 2020;

2 The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP, Prime Minister, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 13 February 2008, p. 3.

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- To halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade; and
 - To finally close the shameful gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.³

2.8 These targets were adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) at their meeting of 2 October 2008.⁴

2.9 The committee notes that the Commonwealth government has outlined four pillars in its strategy to address Indigenous disadvantage. These are:

- all efforts in Indigenous policy must be governed by the sincere objective of closing the gap;
- resetting the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians;
- rebuilding the everyday social norms that underpin strong families and healthy communities; and
- building of partnerships across all sectors of the Australian community to help to close the gap, where the wider community—including business, the education sector, sporting groups and the community sector at large—become partners in bringing about measurable change in Indigenous communities and Indigenous lives.⁵

Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Fiscal Relations

2.10 COAG is the intergovernmental forum in Australia, comprising the Prime Minister, State Premiers, Territory Chief Ministers and the President of the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA). On 29 November 2008 COAG agreed to the *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Fiscal Relations* (Intergovernmental Agreement). This agreement is intended to provide an overarching framework for the Commonwealth's financial relations with the states and territories.⁶

2.11 The Intergovernmental Agreement commenced on 1 January 2009. Each Special Purpose Payment (SPP) made to the states and territories to carry out certain functions and services is associated with a National Agreement that contains

3 The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP, Prime Minister, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 26 February 2009, p. 3.

4 Council of Australian Governments, *Communiqué – 2 October 2008*, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-10-02/index.cfm (accessed 4 June 2009).

5 The Hon Kevin Rudd, MP, Prime Minister, *House of Representatives Hansard*, 26 February 2009, pp. 3-4.

6 Council of Australian Governments, *Intergovernmental Agreement on Federal Financial Relations*, December 2008, p. 5, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm (accessed 27 May 2009).

objectives, outcomes, outputs and performance indicators, and clarifies the roles and responsibilities intended to guide the Commonwealth and states and territories in the delivery of services across the relevant sectors. Under this Intergovernmental Agreement COAG has agreed to six new National Agreements—National Healthcare Agreement, National Education Agreement, National Agreement for Skills and Workforce Development, National Disability Agreement, National Affordable Housing Agreement, and the National Indigenous Reform Agreement.

National Indigenous Reform Agreement

2.12 The National Indigenous Reform Agreement is intended to drive the policies to 'close the gap' in Indigenous disadvantage. The Committee notes that COAG will next meet in Darwin on 2 July 2009, with this meeting stated as having a special focus on addressing Indigenous disadvantage. At this meeting COAG is due to consider an Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap to be incorporated into the National Indigenous Reform Agreement.⁷

2.13 The National Indigenous Reform Agreement sets out six 'building blocks' or platforms upon which COAG intends the reform agenda to be based. These are proposed to be:

- Early Childhood;
- Schooling;
- Health;
- Economic Participation;
- Healthy Homes;
- Safe Communities; and
- Governance and Leadership.⁸

2.14 The committee notes that the Commonwealth government has committed \$3.6 billion overall to the COAG National Indigenous Reform Agenda.⁹

7 Council of Australian Governments, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, November 2008, p. 3, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm (accessed 29 May 2009).

8 Council of Australian Governments, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, November 2008, p. 4, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm (accessed 29 May 2009).

9 John Gardiner-Garden, Coral Dow and Michael Klapdor, *Budget 2009-10: Indigenous Affairs*, research paper, Australian Parliamentary Library, May 2009, p. 168, <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/RP/2008-09/09rp33.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2009).

National Partnership Agreements

2.15 COAG has also agreed to a number of National Partnership Agreements which are new forms of payments to fund specific projects and to facilitate and reward states and territories that deliver on agreed reforms. The committee notes that the financial arrangements will include incentive payments to reward performance.¹⁰ The committee will attempt to monitor the amount and timing of these incentive payments as well as gauge the impact this approach is having on improving the effectiveness of state and territory government policies.

2.16 The National Partnership Agreements related to Indigenous service delivery include:

- Remote Indigenous Service Delivery;
- Indigenous Economic Participation;
- Indigenous Early Childhood Development;
- Indigenous Health; and
- Remote Indigenous Housing.

Remote Indigenous Service Delivery

2.17 Through this Agreement, the Commonwealth, the states and Northern Territory governments have agreed to improve access to government services including early childhood, health, housing and welfare services all through a single government interface.¹¹ This Agreement intends to provide \$291.2 million over six years with the Commonwealth government agreeing to provide \$187.7 million with the aim of improving access to services for Indigenous people living in 26 remote communities. The Commonwealth government has stated that it intends to create a new service delivery model in these communities to clearly identify service standards, roles and responsibilities that people living in these communities will be able to rely upon.¹²

10 Council of Australian Governments, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, November 2008, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/index.cfm (accessed 29 May 2009).

11 Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery*, November 2008, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership/national_partnership_on_remote_service_delivery_with_a_mended_schedule.pdf (accessed 14 May 2009).

12 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Budget Statement – Appendix B*, 12 May 2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publicationsarticles/corp/budgetpaes/budget09_10/indigenous/documents/closingthegap/appendix_b.htm (accessed 2 June 2009).

2.18 The 26 communities chosen are:

Northern Territory

- (Ntaria) Hermannsburg
- Yirrkala
- Yuendumu
- Gapuwiyak
- Numbulwar
- Angurugu
- Umbakumba
- Milingimbi
- Gunbalanya
- Nguiu
- Ngukurr
- Galiwinku
- Maningrida
- Wadeye
- Lajamanu

Queensland

- Mornington Island
- Doomadgee
- Hope Vale
- Aurukun¹³

South Australia

- Amata
- Mimili

New South Wales

- Walgett
- Wilcannia

Western Australia

- Fitzroy Crossing and surrounding communities
- Halls Creek and surrounding communities
- The Dampier Peninsula, focused on Ardyaloon and Beagle Bay.¹⁴

2.19 While the committee is pleased to note the intention of this Agreement, it is concerned about the policy decision making process. As discussed in Chapter 4 there is a high degree of confusion and uncertainty about how these 26 communities were

13 The committee has been advised by FaHCSIA that Coen and Mossman Gorge will also be included in the priority locations.

14 Commonwealth government, *Budget 2009 – 10*, May 2009, http://www.aph.gov.au/Budget/2009-10/content/ministerial_statements/indigenous/html/ms_indigenous-03.htm (accessed 5 June 2009).

chosen out the estimated 1 187 discrete Indigenous communities in Australia.¹⁵ This is discussed further in Chapter 4.

National Partnership on Indigenous Early Childhood Development

2.20 At its July 2008 meeting the committee notes that COAG agreed to a National Partnership to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. The National Partnership commenced on 1 January 2009 with joint funding of \$564 million over six years to 2014, of which the Commonwealth government has committed to contributing \$489.6 million.

2.21 This Partnership is stated to be based on evidence that improvements in Indigenous child mortality require better access to antenatal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, child and maternal health services and integrated child and family services.¹⁶

2.22 The Partnership documents state that the Partnership will consist of three elements:

- Establishing a minimum of 35 Children and Family Centres across Australia in areas of high Indigenous population and disadvantage;
- Increasing access to antenatal care, pre-pregnancy and teenage sexual and reproductive health programs by Indigenous young people; and
- Increasing access to, and use of, maternal and child health services by Indigenous families.

2.23 The committee notes that the Children and Family Centres are due to commence operation from June 2010.¹⁷

National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children

2.24 At a meeting on 30 April 2009 COAG agreed to the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children. The Framework seeks to deliver a substantial reduction in child abuse and neglect in Australia and outlines priority actions for the Commonwealth and state and territory governments. These include a National Standard for Out-of-Home Care; improved support for young people leaving care; working closely together on enhanced service integration in key disadvantaged communities; and improved access to early intervention and prevention services,

15 Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Housing and Infrastructure in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities, Australia*, 2006 (cat. 4710.0).

16 Council of Australian Governments, *Communiqué – 3 July 2008*, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-07-03/index.cfm (accessed 26 May 2009).

17 Council of Australian Governments, *National Partnership Agreement on Indigenous Early Childhood Development*, November 2008, p. 7, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/20081002/docs/indigenous_early_childhood_NPA.pdf (accessed 2 June 2009).

including quality child care for children at risk. It is intended that COAG will receive an annual report on the progress of the first three-year action plan.¹⁸

2.25 The committee notes that governments are set to develop an implementation plan to be considered in August 2009. This plan is intended to:

...be a key tool in measuring progress of the National Framework. All jurisdictions and stakeholders will be able to monitor progress against activities and milestones outlined in the Implementation Plan. A set of performance indicators will be developed as part of the Implementation Plan, providing another opportunity to monitor progress and outcomes. Reporting processes for the National Framework will provide an opportunity to streamline existing reporting processes to ensure greater levels of transparency.¹⁹

2.26 The committee looks forward to the development of performance indicators to measure progress in these areas and hopes they will go some way to assist in improving data collection and reporting on child protection issues.

Health National Partnership

2.27 The Health National Partnership was agreed on 29 November 2008 which commits to funding of \$1.6 billion over four years, with the Commonwealth committed to contributing \$806 million and the states and territories \$772 million. This is intended to assist in achieving the 'closing the gap' targets, to close the life expectancy gap within a generation and halve the mortality gap for children under five within a decade.

2.28 The Health National Partnership is described by COAG as 'a down payment on the significant investment needed by both levels of government to close the unacceptable gap in health and other outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians'²⁰ and is, according to COAG, focused on:

- reduced smoking rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples;
- reduced burden of diseases for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities;

18 Council of Australian Governments, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, April 2009, p. 5, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-0430/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf (accessed 9 June 2009).

19 Council of Australian Governments, *Protecting Children is Everyone's Business: National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children 2009-2020*, April 2009, p. 36, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2009-0430/docs/child_protection_framework.pdf (accessed 9 June 2009).

20 Council of Australian Governments, Attachment A to meeting of 28 November 2008, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-11-29/attachments.cfm (accessed 2 June 2009).

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- increased uptake of Medicare Benefits Schedule-funded primary care services to Indigenous people with half of the adult population (15-65 years) receiving two adult health checks over the next four years;
 - significantly improved coordination of care across the care continuum; and
 - over time, a reduction in average length of hospital stay and reduction in readmissions.²¹

2.29 The Agreement states that these targets are to include delivering health checks to 55 per cent of the adult Indigenous population (around 155 000 people) over 5 years with about 600 000 chronic disease services delivered in the same period. The Agreement also commits to provide more than 90 000 Indigenous people with a chronic disease with a self-management program and around 74 500 Indigenous people with financial assistance to improve access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines.²² The committee will follow the progress of this initiative and will attempt to gather further details on such issues as the number of Indigenous adults now receiving health checks, what chronic diseases are being targeted and the impact this is having.

National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing

2.30 The committee notes that all state governments and the Northern Territory government have agreed to a 10 year National Partnership on remote Indigenous housing, in which the Commonwealth government has committed to providing \$1.94 billion over 10 years (\$834.6 million over five years) in an attempt to address overcrowding, homelessness, poor housing conditions and the severe housing shortage in remote Indigenous communities.

2.31 The intended results of the housing package over 10 years are:

- construction of up to 4 200 houses and major upgrades and repairs to around 4 800 houses in the 26 communities referred to above at paragraph 2.18.
- improved tenancy management services to ensure rental houses are well maintained, rent is collected and support services are in place;
- economic development opportunities through increased local training and employment opportunities in construction and housing management;
- an ongoing maintenance and repairs program;
- upgrades to housing related infrastructure in remote communities, including town camps; and

21 Council of Australian Governments, Attachment A to meeting of 28 November 2008, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-11-29/attachments.cfm (accessed 2 June 2009).

22 Council of Australian Governments, *Communiqué – 29 November 2008*, p. 33, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-11-29/docs/communique_20081129.pdf (accessed 2 June 2009).

- access to affordable accommodation options in regional centres to support employment, education and training opportunities in regional areas.²³

2.32 The committee notes that the National Partnership also attempts to clarify the responsibilities of the Commonwealth, the states and the Northern Territory governments, asserting that the states and the Northern Territory are to be the main deliverer of housing in remote Indigenous communities, through a standardised tenancy management and support framework.

2.33 The National Partnership commenced on 1 January 2009. The state, territory and Commonwealth governments have stated that they will work towards clearer roles and responsibilities and funding for municipal services and maintenance of infrastructure and essential services in remote areas.

2.34 The committee considers that clarity in funding and responsibility across states and territories is an area that has caused a great deal of confusion and significant inefficiencies and will monitor the progress made through this Agreement during the life of this inquiry.

Indigenous Economic Development National Partnership

2.35 Under the Indigenous Economic Development National Partnership the Commonwealth and state and territory governments have committed to investing \$228.8 million (\$172.7 million Commonwealth funding and \$56.2 million state and territory funding over five years) to assist up to 13 000 Indigenous people into employment.

2.36 The initiative is intended to create jobs in areas of government service delivery that have previously relied on subsidies through the Community Development Employment Projects (CDEP) program. The Partnership also commits to a review of career development strategies for public sector Indigenous employment with the stated aim of increasing Indigenous public sector employment to reflect the Indigenous working age population share by 2015. All governments have also committed to strengthening current procurement policies with the aim of maximising Indigenous employment, skills development and business creation.

2.37 The National Partnership states that both Commonwealth and state and territory governments are investing significantly in capital development, procurement and service delivery through other COAG reforms, and that Indigenous workforce

23 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Remote Indigenous housing investment*, Press release, 23 March 2009, http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/remote_indigenous_housing_23mar2009.htm (accessed 2 June 2009).

strategies are to be built into implementation plans for all reforms to contribute to the closing the gap targets.²⁴

2.38 The committee urges COAG to accurately record and report on the creation of these jobs and employee retention and will report on progress made through the Indigenous Economic Development National Partnership.

Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services

2.39 The committee notes that on 27 May 2009 the Commonwealth government introduced legislation to create a statutory office for the Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, as agreed by COAG. The Commonwealth government has committed \$9 million over four years to the creation of this office in its 2009-10 Budget.²⁵

2.40 The Commonwealth government has outlined the role of the Coordinator-General as being responsible for the implementation of reforms in housing, infrastructure and employment in remote Indigenous communities, and is to report to the Commonwealth Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs. The Coordinator-General will formally report publicly twice a year on the development and delivery of remote services and on the progress that has been made in achieving the closing the gap targets.²⁶ The Minister has stated that '...the position will be given the authority to coordinate across agencies, to cut through bureaucratic blockages and red tape, and to make sure services are delivered effectively'.²⁷

2.41 The committee notes that the Commonwealth government announced the appointment of Mr Brian Gleeson as the Coordinator-General on 18 June 2009. The Minister stated:

Mr Gleeson's broad experience will be invaluable in his role as Coordinator-General, with responsibility to drive the implementation of the Council of Australian Governments' reforms in housing, infrastructure and employment in remote Indigenous communities. I will be asking Mr

24 Council of Australian Governments, *Communiqué – 29 November 2008*, p. 32, http://www.coag.gov.au/coag_meeting_outcomes/2008-1129/docs/communique_2008_1129.pdf (accessed 2 June 2009).

25 Commonwealth government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, p. 254.

26 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Office of Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services*, Press release, 27 May 2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/jr_m_indigenous_coord_gen_27may09.htm (accessed 2 June 2009).

27 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Office of Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services*, Press release, 27 May 2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/jr_m_indigenous_coord_gen_27may09.htm (accessed 2 June 2009).

Gleeson to include a special focus on implementing the Government's \$125 million Transformation Plan in the Alice Springs town camps.²⁸

2.42 The committee will monitor the newly created role of the Commonwealth Coordinator-General in the implementation of the Alice Springs Transformation Plan. The committee asked the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) for information about the Transformation Plan at its Canberra hearing on 9 June 2009.²⁹ FaHCSIA have advised the committee that the Transformation Plan is intended to support the Commonwealth's 'closing the gap' targets in Alice Springs and involves \$125 million in expenditure. \$100 million of this is already announced expenditure from the National Partnership on Remote Indigenous Housing for housing and infrastructure upgrades and reforms in the Alice Springs town camps. An additional \$25 million will be allocated to service delivery and housing assistance in the greater Alice Springs area to address homelessness. This includes temporary accommodation facilities.³⁰

2.43 The committee is pleased that the Plan also intends to address coordination and service delivery issues and notes that:

The ongoing improved coordination of Government services and facilities in Alice Springs will also be part of the Plan...

...next steps include completing implementation of a governance framework, establishing implementation teams and plans, completing a service delivery analysis of relevant services in Alice Springs, identifying available funding further to the initial Government investment and compiling a communications and community engagement plan.³¹

2.44 The committee also notes that the Northern Territory government has announced a Northern Territory Coordinator-General position as part of its new *A Working Future* policy, further outlined in Chapter 5.

The Northern Territory cabinet has attributed some funding to us to set up a service delivery coordination unit, so we will be providing resources out of that service delivery coordination unit into the operations centre to jointly coordinate...The Coordinator-General has been appointed for the Northern Territory, Bob Beadman, so he will work with the Australian government's Coordinator-General, once that person is announced.³²

28 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Appointment of Coordinator-General for Remote Indigenous Services*, Media Release, 18 June 2009. Available at: http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/coord_general_18june2009.htm (accessed 19 June 2009).

29 Senator Judith Adams, *Committee Hansard*, 9 June 2009, p. 57.

30 FaHCSIA, answer to question on notice, 9 June 2009 (received 22 June 2009).

31 FaHCSIA, answer to question on notice, 9 June 2009 (received 22 June 2009).

32 Mr Kenneth Davies, Department of the Chief Minister, Northern Territory Government, *Committee Hansard*, 22 May 2009, p. 65.

2.45 The committee intends to monitor the overall effectiveness of the Coordinator-General positions and report on any significant changes to the coordination of remote service delivery that may result.

Measuring and reporting under COAG

2.46 The committee notes that the COAG framework places strong emphasis on reporting requirements and includes the disaggregation of indicators by Indigenous and non-Indigenous status. This is intended to provide a clear picture of progress towards meeting the published targets.³³ In an attempt to provide consistency across the delivery of the National Partnership Agreements, the committee notes that COAG has agreed to service delivery and investment principles for remote areas which are intended to apply to all states and territories.

2.47 Performance indicators and benchmarks under each COAG target are yet to be developed. The committee notes that individual target trajectories are still being developed and are expected to be ready in time for the July 2009 COAG meeting.³⁴

2.48 As the Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs noted in her 2009-10 Budget Statement on 'Closing the Gap':

Improvements in data collection and analysis will be necessary at both a Commonwealth and State level to enable meaningful reporting against Closing the Gap targets. The Government is currently negotiating improved Indigenous data collection and collation at a Commonwealth and State level to support the implementation of a national performance reporting framework. This will enhance public accountability for funding under the new framework for federal financial arrangements agreed through COAG.³⁵

2.49 The committee notes the allocation of \$1.5 million over three years for a clearinghouse which is intended to gather and disseminate evidence on effective policy interventions to address Indigenous disadvantage in the 2009-10 Budget. The state and territory governments have also committed to matching this funding.³⁶

2.50 The committee agrees that more meaningful use of data is required however it is concerned that policy affecting Indigenous people is developed and then

33 Council of Australian Governments, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, p. 4, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement.rtf (accessed 12 June 2009).

34 Council of Australian Governments, *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, p. 12, http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/IGA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement.rtf (accessed 12 June 2009).

35 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*, Budget statement, 12 May 2009, pp 7-8, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publicationsarticles/corp/BudgetPAES/budget09_10/indigenous/Documents/ClosingTheGap/closingthegap.pdf (accessed 2 June 2009).

36 Commonwealth government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, p. 210.

implemented without having adequate regard to the evidence presented in the data. The committee's views on improvements to the collection and use of data are detailed further in Chapter 3.

Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Key Indicators Report

2.51 The committee notes that in April 2002, COAG commissioned a regular report against key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage from the Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision which is supported by the Productivity Commission. Reports on Indigenous disadvantage were released in 2003, 2005 and 2007, and are intended to inform governments about whether policy, programs and interventions are achieving positive outcomes for Indigenous people.

2.52 The fourth edition of the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report is due to be released in mid-2009.³⁷ The Productivity Commission also produces a compendium on services relevant to Indigenous people as part of the annual Report on Government Services. The most recent compendium was released in April 2009.

2.53 The Report on Government Services is intended to focus on the efficiency and effectiveness of specific services while the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage* report focuses on outcomes for Indigenous people and does not report on individual government services. The reporting framework has been developed with two tiers: 'headline' indicators for the longer term outcomes sought; and a second tier of 'strategic change indicators' that are intended to be able to be responsive to government policies and programs over the short term.

2.54 The Indigenous Disadvantage Report describes the overall 'state-of-the-nation' outcomes for Indigenous people, with a view to all government departments and agencies together being responsible and therefore there is no reporting on an individual government agency basis. The committee notes that the Indigenous Disadvantage Report does not necessarily feature state and territory comparisons and nor does it focus on government service provision.³⁸

Commonwealth government Budget 2009-10

2.55 The committee notes that the Commonwealth government—in the 2009-10 budget measures relevant to regional and remote Indigenous communities—has primarily focused on 'closing the gap' policies through committing \$1.3 billion over four years. A significant proportion of this—\$807.4 million—is intended to be directed to initiatives under the Northern Territory Emergency Response (NTER),

37 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2009*, January 2009, p. 5.

38 Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, Productivity Commission, *Report on Government Services 2009*, January 2009, p. 3.

which the committee now notes is referred to in the Budget Papers as 'Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory'.³⁹

2.56 The 2009-10 budget measures cover four broad categories:

- economic participation;
- a focus on remote Australia;
- Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory; and
- resetting the relationship with Indigenous Australians.⁴⁰

Economic participation

2.57 In the 2009-10 Budget, the Commonwealth government committed \$202.4 million in net expenditure over five years to Community Development Employment Projects Program (CDEP) and the Indigenous Employment Program (IEP) Reform.⁴¹

2.58 The committee notes that the intended changes to CDEP include the abolition of CDEP in non-remote areas within established economies from July 1 2009. The 2009-10 Budget Papers state that in communities with limited and emerging economies, the CDEP program will be restructured into two streams. This includes:

a Work Readiness Service stream that will provide a personal development pathway for job seekers from foundation skills to work readiness, including through the provision of up to 3,000 paid on-the-job work experience placements, with wage subsidies provided to work experience employers as an incentive to create these opportunities; and

a Community Development stream, which will fund community projects and build the capacity of local communities, service providers and enterprises.⁴²

2.59 The committee notes the Commonwealth government's intent to invest additional resources in Indigenous economic participation and will be monitoring its success in creating jobs and supporting Indigenous people into employment. The committee also notes that savings of \$326.7 million over five years from the CDEP

39 John Gardiner-Garden, Coral Dow and Michael Klapdor, *Budget 2009-10: Indigenous Affairs*, Research paper, Australian Parliamentary Library, May 2009, p.162
<http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/RP/2008-09/09rp33.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2009).

40 John Gardiner-Garden, Coral Dow and Michael Klapdor, *Budget 2009-10: Indigenous Affairs*, Research paper, Australian Parliamentary Library, May 2009, p.162.
<http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/RP/2008-09/09rp33.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2009).

41 Commonwealth government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, p. 211.

42 Commonwealth government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, pp. 211-212.

reforms will be 'redirected to fund the creation of more employment and training opportunities for Indigenous people.'⁴³

A focus on remote Australia

2.60 The committee notes that these budget measures have committed a total expenditure of \$89.1 million, mostly in health measures, with \$58.3 million over four years committed to improve eye and ear health services for Indigenous Australians. Some of this allocation is intended for rural and remote areas to help the 20 000 Indigenous children with severe middle-ear infections. The funding is expected to assist 1 000 extra operations to correct eye and ear problems, and establish more than 10 regional teams to help prevent cases of middle-ear infection in the Northern Territory. The committee notes this commitment and will monitor how many Indigenous children are assisted through this funding and how effective the regional teams are in addressing this serious issue affecting children in regional and remote Indigenous communities.

2.61 There is also a Commonwealth government commitment of \$11 million over four years to improve access to dental care services for Indigenous people in rural and remote areas. The committee notes that in order to achieve this improvement the Commonwealth government has announced a trial of mobile dental facilities.⁴⁴ The Commonwealth government has also committed to evaluating this trial and the committee will monitor any improvements in dental health.

2.62 The committee also notes that Dental Health Services Victoria stated in their submission that unless other determinants of oral health are addressed—such as nutrition, personal health practices and coping strategies, hygiene and socio-economic status—Indigenous people in regional and remote communities will continue to have some of the highest rates of oral disease.⁴⁵

2.63 Finally, a further \$3.8 million is committed over four years to extend the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services pathology program which the committee notes is due to end on 31 July 2009. This program aims to improve the management of diabetes by providing Indigenous communities with access to on-site blood testing at participating medical services sites.⁴⁶

43 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*, Budget statement, 12 May 2009, p. 12, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publicationsarticles/corp/BudgetPAES/budget09_10/indigenous/Documents/ClosingTheGap/closingthegap.pdf (accessed 24 June 2009).

44 Commonwealth Government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, p. 241.

45 Dental Health Services Victoria, *Submission 47*, p. 1.

46 Commonwealth government, *Budget Paper No. 2*, 12 May 2009, p. 251.

Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory (NTER)

2.64 The Commonwealth government has committed \$807.4 million over three years with the intention of continuing measures referred to as 'Closing the Gap' in the Northern Territory. As the committee noted earlier in this chapter this measure was previously referred to as the NTER. The committee notes that the Commonwealth government in the budget papers noted that the government is 'moving the NTER to a sustainable development phase to ensure measures will be effective in the long term'.⁴⁷

2.65 \$34.6 million of the \$807.4 million has been committed over three years to facilitate engagement with Indigenous leadership, increase communications with communities, and for specific consultations prior to the intended lifting of the suspension of the operation of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1976* (RDA).⁴⁸

2.66 The committee notes that other Commonwealth government commitments in the Closing the Gap in the Northern Territory budget measures include:

- \$156.6 million over three years intended to continue law and order activities, such as funding 60 Northern Territory police officers to replace Federal Police officers deployed under the initial NTER, five permanent and ten temporary police stations, as well as activities supporting alcohol and pornography restrictions;
- \$131 million over three years intended to improve primary care services in remote Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory with follow-up treatments of children for ear, nose and throat conditions and dental problems identified through NTER; the continuation of the Remote Area Health Corps which provides doctors, nurses and other health workers in remote areas; and an expansion of the existing outreach service that sends teams to treat children injured in abuse-related circumstances;
- \$105.9 million, primarily in 2009–10, intended to continue income management and financial advice to income support recipients;
- \$84.1 million intended to continue field operations, including the presence of Government Business Managers and interpreter services;
- \$80.2 million over three years intended to continue 81 night patrol services;
- \$45.7 million over three years intended to continue and expand education initiatives;

47 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Towards a sustainable development phase: Discussion paper on Future Directions for the NTER*, Press release, 21 May 2009, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/future_directions_nter_21may09.htm (accessed 25 June 2009).

48 The Commonwealth government's intention to reinstate the *Racial Discrimination Act 1976* is discussed further in chapter 4.

- \$37.5 million over three years towards the intended continuation of the School Nutrition Program;
- \$32.9 million over three years intended to continue family support services that include a mobile child protection team and the operation of safe houses;
- \$28.4 million over three years intended for youth diversionary services;
- \$18.3 million over three years intended to continue maintaining and improving community stores;
- \$11.2 million towards proposed additional houses for teachers in Indigenous communities;
- \$11 million over three years intended to continue whole-of-government co-ordination and program management and evaluation;
- \$10 million for a proposed Local Priorities fund in 2009-10 to address minor service and infrastructure gaps as part of planning and community engagement processes;⁴⁹ and
- \$9.1 million over three years intended to fund eight new crèches.⁵⁰

Resetting the relationship with Indigenous Australians

2.67 The Commonwealth government has also committed \$64.2 million in expenditure which is stated to be for the purpose of creating a new relationship with Indigenous people.⁵¹ This includes proposed funds of:

- \$26.6 million over four year for an Indigenous Healing Foundation which is proposed to help members of the Stolen Generation suffering trauma;
- \$13.8 million over four years which is intended to help members of the Stolen Generation find families and communities;
- \$13 million over four years for an Indigenous Electoral Education Program intended to improve Indigenous participation in the electoral system; and
- \$10.8 million to Reconciliation Australia for the stated purpose of education and awareness programs to foster better relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

49 The Hon Jenny Macklin MP, Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, *Closing the Gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians*, Budget statement, 12 May 2009, p. 32, http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/about/publications/articles/corp/BudgetPAES/budget09_10/indigeno/us/Documents/ClosingTheGap/closingthegap.pdf (accessed 7 June 2009).

50 John Gardiner-Garden, Coral Dow and Michael Klapdor, *Budget 2009-10: Indigenous Affairs*, Research paper, Australian Parliamentary Library, May 2009, pp. 164-165. <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/RP/2008-09/09rp33.pdf> (accessed 1 June 2009).

51 John Gardiner-Garden, Coral Dow and Michael Klapdor, *Budget 2009-10: Indigenous Affairs*, Research paper, Australian Parliamentary Library, May 2009, p. 165. <http://www.aph.gov.au/Library/pubs/RP/2008-09/09rp33.pdf> (accessed 7 June 2009).

Healing Foundation

2.68 As noted above, the 2009-10 Budget allocates \$26.6 million over four years for an Indigenous Healing Foundation.

2.69 The committee notes that FaHCSIA is currently undertaking consultations with organisations and individuals, and intends to conduct national community workshops for the purpose of gathering community input into the Foundation. The development team is comprised of nine individuals with expertise in Indigenous healing and issues related to the Stolen Generations.⁵² The committee also notes that a report is expected to be provided to the Commonwealth government by 30 September 2009 on the consultations.

National Indigenous Representative Body

2.70 As noted in Chapter 4 of the committee's first report in 2008, the Commonwealth government invited the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner to convene a steering committee tasked with developing a preferred model for a national Indigenous representative body.

2.71 The committee notes that a number of workshops and consultations have been held nationally with the steering committee due to present its preferred model by July 2009 and to recommend an interim body for establishment from August 2009.⁵³

Statement of support for the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

2.72 The committee notes that on 3 April 2009 the Commonwealth government signed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples with qualified support. The Declaration was originally endorsed on 17 September 2007, with 144 nations voting in support of the Declaration. At the time Australia was one of four countries that voted against the Declaration.⁵⁴

52 Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, <http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/progserv/engagement/HealingFoundationDevelopmentTeam/Pages/default.aspx> (accessed 4 June 2009).

53 Tom Calma, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, *Final stage in consultations for a new national Indigenous representative body*, Press release, 14 May 2009, http://www.hreoc.gov.au/about/media/media_releases/2009/36_09.html (accessed 10 June 2009).

54 The Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly on Thursday September 13 2007, by a majority of 144 states in favour, 4 votes against (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States). There were 11 abstentions, <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/declaration.html> (accessed 2 June 2009).