

Investment needed to avoid Closing the Gap failures

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Education is at the centre of three of the 16 new targets for the National Agreement for Closing the Gap, announced by the Morrison Government.

These are:

- students reach further education pathways
- early childhood education is high quality and culturally appropriate
- youth are engaged in education or employment.

Federation Deputy President Henry Rajendra said the Government now had to stack its words against the appropriate action required to close the gap between First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

“Until there is the provision and adequate funding of a high-quality public education that exemplifies high academic standards and achievement for young Aboriginal people, I fear this next move is doomed for failure, yet again,” Mr Rajendra said.



Federation Aboriginal Education Coordinator Charline Emzin-Boyd questioned the commitment of governments, considering little had been achieved in most of the targets over the past 12 years of the program.

“While this might be a great step forward, as this is the first time the government has included Aboriginal voices in the mix, there is the feeling that we’ve been here before. Government must show genuine preparedness by investing appropriate funding and human resources to implement and achieve these set targets in this new National Agreement on Closing the Gap,” Ms Emzin-Boyd said.

“But it is important to note that this is the first time a National Agreement designed to improve the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has been negotiated directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives, as it should.”

Federation’s commitment to Aboriginal education is embodied by its 2019 Annual Conference decision that “meaningful socio-economic, educational and health outcomes for all Aboriginal young people, their families and communities” should be a national priority.

“Achieving constitutional recognition and establishing National Voice enshrined in the Constitution, a ‘Makarrata Commission’ to facilitate ‘agreement-making’ and ‘truth-telling’ are fundamental to reconciliation and closing the gap in education, health, infant mortality, life expectancy and employment between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations,” the decision states, as per the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap was signed by the First Ministers of all Australian Governments, the lead convenor of the Coalition of Peaks, and President of the Australian Local Government Association.

Lead convenor of the Coalition of Peaks Pat Turner AM was hopeful the reframed agreement would finally achieve its targets.

“For the first time, First Nations people will share decision-making with governments on Closing the Gap,” Ms Turner said.

“The National Agreement makes this a reality, not just for the Coalition of Peaks, but for all First Nations people that want to have a say on how things should be working in their communities.

“If the priority reforms are implemented in full by governments and through shared decision making with First Nations people, we should see changes over time to the lives and experiences of our people.”