

Policy gap widening

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This year is the 10th since millions of Australians mourned, wept, celebrated and embraced loved ones on the day then-prime minister Kevin Rudd delivered the National Apology to the First Peoples and to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children forcibly removed from their family and community.

It is also 10 years since all Australian governments committed to the Closing the Gap strategy and targets. The targets were clear, purposeful, ambitious, timely and achievable. It was the most meaningful commitment to address factors that have affected this nation's First Peoples.

However, a decade on, Australian governments have failed to address the widening gaps in education, health, child mortality, life expectancy and employment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal populations.

Since the commencement of the Closing the Gap strategy, these key targets have been hindered by massive funding cuts, a lack of leadership by government and the failure of successive governments to understand and accept that engagement and consultation with Aboriginal communities and their elders is critical to the success and development of strategies to address parity across key targets.

Former prime minister Tony Abbott delivered the first funding blow. His 2014 Budget cut \$530 million from the Indigenous Affairs portfolio, and successive budgets, including under Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, have never restored this funding.

Funding cuts have also extended to the education portfolio with the Turnbull Government's failure to fund its full share of the National Education Reform Agreement with the NSW Government.

Over the next two years, the Turnbull Government will cut \$1.9 billion from public schools across the country, and NSW public schools are set to lose \$856 million.

This will have a destructive effect on Aboriginal education and the achievement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal students.

The over-representation of Aboriginal people in adult prisons and juvenile detention remains alarming and shameful.

Of particular concern is those with a disability; many undiagnosed and without adequate or timely treatment. For Aboriginal youths with complex support needs, timely treatment could prevent incarceration and provide the care and protection they need.



All Australian governments must act immediately if they are genuinely committed to protecting and realising the potential of young Aboriginal people with disability.

Governments must dramatically increase investment in early intervention strategies such as pre-schooling, transition programs, measures to address mental health issues, and therapy services such as speech pathology. This issue requires a whole-of-government and multi-departmental approach, including education and health, if there is any chance of success.

Federation reaffirms its resolve to continue to campaign to call on all Australian governments to prioritise this issue and provide the necessary funding and commitment to Close the Gap for our First Peoples.