



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

September 2022

(Updated)



Contents

Opening Statement.....	1
Working in Partnership	2
Purpose of this Implementation Plan	2
Partnership on this Implementation Plan	3
Working with state and territory governments	3
Accountability, monitoring and reporting on progress	3
Priority Reforms.....	4
Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making	4
Priority Reform Two: Building the community-controlled sector.....	6
Priority Reform Three: Transforming government organisations.....	7
Priority Reform Four: Shared access to data and information at a regional level.....	8

Opening Statement

In 2019, the Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) was proud to be a co-signatory in a landmark agreement that marks a new chapter in the national effort to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

At the heart of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Partnership, there are four agreed priority reform targets and 17 socio-economic targets in areas including education, employment, health and wellbeing, justice, safety, housing, land and waters, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages.

I am pleased to introduce this Revised Implementation Plan which has been informed by the work of ALGA and state and territory local government associations and the findings contained in our Closing the Gap Annual Report 2022 on our original Plan.

ALGA has long worked to support local government councils in their work to provide First Nations People with a greater say on, and input, into matters that directly affect their lives. Whether it be through Reconciliation Plans, Agreement making such as Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUA) or special service agreements to provide specific services and or access to council facilities. This Plan continues that job.

Our inability to reduce disadvantage among First Nations people over many decades is a stain on our national reputation as an egalitarian society that values a fair go for all.

I am confident, however, that this Implementation Plan will play an important role in supporting all jurisdictions and their local governments to work more effectively to reduce Indigenous disadvantage in all its forms.



Cr Linda Scott

President

Australian Local Government Association

Working in Partnership

Purpose of this Implementation Plan

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (July 2020) requires that all Parties to the Agreement develop their own Implementation Plan to support the achievement of the Agreement's objectives and outcomes.

The Commonwealth, states and territories, because of their significant roles and responsibilities in achieving the outcomes and targets under the Agreement, are required to prepare an Implementation Plan using an agreed format.

The state and territory governments' Implementation Plans are to be whole-of-government plans, covering government agencies and statutory bodies including local governments. Further, the state and territory government Implementation Plans are to include information on how they will work with their local governments to implement the Agreement.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) and the Coalition of Peaks, because of their different roles, structure, responsibilities and circumstances, are not required to adopt an agreed format but must still develop and provide an Implementation Plan to the Joint Council within twelve months of the Agreement.

Clause 109 of the Agreement outlines ALGA's commitment and objectives to be progressed in this Implementation Plan. They are to:

- a. ensure local governments understand the Agreement and its commitments and encourage its adoption by local governments
- b. assist the state and territory governments to work with local governments in the implementation of this Agreement
- c. support strengthened shared decision-making at the local level, supporting local governments to be part of partnerships with the Commonwealth, states, and territory governments and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.

Given that the efforts of individual local governments should be captured in the state and territory Implementation Plan this Plan focuses on the actions ALGA and member state and territory associations have taken to support jurisdictions' work with their councils and First Nations Peoples to achieve the objectives of the Agreement.

Partnership on this Implementation Plan

This revised plan however draws upon the views of the Coalition of Peaks as espoused by a representative at the National General Assembly of Local Governments on 21 June 2022, feedback from member state and territory local government associations and the internal network of officers with responsibility for the provision of policy advice and support on matters related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities, including in some jurisdictions supporting Aboriginal Shire Councils.

Working with state and territory governments

The Australian Local Government Association as a member of both the Joint Council and the Partnership Working Group has consistently reinforced the need for state and territory governments and the relevant state/territory-based Coalition of Peaks (or their equivalent) to work closely with individual local governments in their jurisdiction and the relevant local government association.

Local Governments across the country are committed to reconciliation and Closing the Gap and share the priorities of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Local Governments can be an important partner in helping to implement Closing the Gap initiatives, particularly in rural and remote areas of the country where local governments are often the principal service provider in a location. However, these councils are often financially constrained due to their low-rate base, limited capacity to raise revenue through additional fees and charges and access to appropriate grants and assistance from the other levels of government may be required.

Accountability, monitoring and reporting on progress

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap requires the Parties to the Agreement to make public information on their progress on the Agreement and their Implementation Plan through Annual Public Reports (cl. 118). Jurisdictions are required to table their Public Reports in their Parliaments (cl. 119).

In the absence of a Parliament, ALGA's Public Report has been received by the ALGA Board and where appropriate will be released at the subsequent National General Assembly (NGA) of Local Governments and made available on the ALGA website. The NGA is convened annually by ALGA and is the peak annual event for Local Government Mayors and Councillors across Australia.

This Implementation Plan will be reviewed annually following the publication of the Annual Report to capture areas where additional focus and collaboration between ALGA, state and territory local

government associations and governments and other partners is required to ensure that there is progress towards achieving the Priority Reforms and targets.

Priority Reforms

The focus of the ALGA Implementation Plan is on the four priority reform areas included in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Priority Reform One: Partnership and shared decision-making

Outcome: *People are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.*

Target: *There will be formal partnership arrangements to support Closing the Gap in place between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments in place in each state and territory enshrining agreed joint decision-making roles and responsibilities and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have chosen their own representatives.*

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap recognises the critical importance of every level of government working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and sharing decision-making to close the gap. Under the Agreement there are two forms of partnerships – the policy partnership and the place-based partnership.

There are five priority areas for the policy partnerships: justice (adult and youth incarceration), social and emotional well-being (mental health), housing, early childhood care and development, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. In some of these priority areas local governments have a very limited role (e.g., justice) and in others, some local governments may have a more direct role such as early childhood care and development. Local governments, via the state and territory local government associations need to be engaged in the relevant policy partnership at a jurisdictional level.

Place-based partnerships are particularly relevant to councils as the level of government is effectively responsible for 'place'. Local governments create and enforce local laws, and deliver local infrastructure, services and activities which are adapted to and reflective of the needs of the community they serve. Given that local councils are much more focused on specific places and communities than

state and federal governments, they are, in theory at least, well positioned to foster a collaborative approach to governing communities and ensuring that all members of the community can influence decision-making, and in some cases jointly make decisions.

The relevant local governments must be engaged early in the process of identifying the locations for the place-based partnerships and participate throughout the partnership. Given that in some locations a place-based partnership may cover many local government areas the relevant Councils, working with the other partners must identify the most effective way to engage and participate. These arrangements will often need to be supported by the state and territory governments.

- Key action PR1.1** ALGA and each state and territory local government association to continue to work with the state and territory governments to identify and resolve any legislative and financial impediments to joint decision-making on Closing the Gap.
- Key action PR1.2** The state and territory local government associations and individual councils (where relevant) to continue to be, or increasingly be involved in any stocktake and/or health check of partnerships being undertaken by state and territory governments and the relevant Aboriginal Partnership Organisation.
- Key action PR1.3** ALGA and state and territory local government associations to identify and promote case studies of effective partnerships involving local governments that build on successes seen through the stocktake and health check process.
- Key action PR1.4** To continue to advocate that state and territory local government associations should be engaged in the relevant policy partnerships at a jurisdictional level whilst ALGA should continue to be engaged at the national level.
- Key action PR1.5** The relevant local governments to actively participate in the place-based partnerships with support from the state and territory government and where necessary their local government association. This may include identifying and developing appropriate governance arrangements for the involvement of the relevant councils.
- Key action PR1.6** ALGA and the state and territory local government associations to promote local governments' participation in priority reform 1 partnerships and report annually. Best practice to be publicly recognised.



Priority Reform Two: Building the community-controlled sector

Outcome: *Building the community-controlled sector: There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high-quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.*

Target: *Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.*

The Parties to the National Agreement acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, achieving better results, often preferred over mainstream services, and employing more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. The Agreement also recognises the need for sustained capacity building and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations and workforce development.

Government parties have committed to building strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors and organisations in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives. Whilst ALGA and the state and territory local government associations will have a limited direct role in building the community-controlled sectors, they can promote the achievement of this priority reform particularly in sectors where local governments are engaged in service delivery.

The Parties to the National Agreement have prioritised several sectors for joint national strengthening efforts through the development and implementation of Sector Strengthening Plans as outlined in the Agreement. The initial sectors are early education care and development, health and housing, and disability will be developed next.

The state and territory governments need to consider the roles and responsibilities of local government when developing these plans to ensure that opportunities can be appropriately captured. For example, councils are the provider of early childhood education and childcare services in some states and territories, councils provide housing in remote communities or provide community health services.

In some rural and remote areas (thin markets) the local government may be the “provider of last resort”. In these areas, it is important that the council and any proposed Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (ACCO) work together to ensure that new or expanded services are sustainable. Local governments in these areas also typically experience issues with skills shortages and accessing

training and development opportunities. There may be opportunities for the local government sector and the Aboriginal Community controlled sector to work together for mutual benefit.

Key action PR2.1 ALGA and state and territory local government associations to participate in the development and implementation of Sector Strengthening Plans as appropriate.

Key action PR2.2 State and territory local government associations to work with state and territory governments to review procurement policies and guidelines to facilitate greater ACCOs participation in council tenders for goods, services, and construction/maintenance contracts.

Key action PR2.3 As part of the 2021-2022 Local Government Skills and Capability Project being led by ALGA with the state and territory local government associations, consider issues associated with employment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and opportunities for joint training and development with ACCOs.

Priority Reform Three: Transforming government organisations

Outcome: *Improving mainstream institutions: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.*

Target: *Decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism.*

Addressing institutional racism and promoting cultural safety are essential elements for closing the gap. The Government parties to the National Agreement have committed to systemic and structural transformation to ensure government mainstream institutions and agencies are free of institutional racism and promote cultural safety. Further, they have committed to challenge unconscious biases that result in decisions based on stereotypes.

Many individual councils already have initiatives underway in relation to organisational transformation to eliminate racism and promote cultural safety. The initiatives are often as unique as the council and the community they serve. There may however be a benefit in ensuring that each local government has access to the same training and resources/toolkits which can then be tailored in partnership with members of the local Aboriginal community.



- Key Action PR 3.1** State and territory local government associations to work with their respective jurisdictional governments to facilitate council access to toolkits (or the equivalent) and cultural awareness training to support a culturally capable and confident workforce.

- Key Action PR 3.2** ALGA and state and territory local government associations to develop and implement Reconciliation Action Plans that align with Closing the Gap objectives and encourage all councils to do the same.

- Key Action PR 3.3** ALGA and state and territory local government associations to showcase Reconciliation Action Plans and/or other activities that improve the cultural appropriateness of council services.

Priority Reform Four: Shared access to data and information at a regional level

Outcome: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.*

Target: *Increase the number of regional data projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap and their development.*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations' access to location-specific data and information are crucial for achieving the first three priority reforms. It underpins the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to make informed decisions about the services and supports required at a local and regional level and to inform and influence policy and programs more broadly.

Local governments collect data for a multitude of purposes and use a multitude of data collection methodologies and processes. Given the scale of some local government areas, there may be challenges with council's ability to disaggregate data in a way that protects individuals' privacy. It is therefore important that the state and territory governments provide advice and assistance to their local governments about what and how data should be made available and data management approaches.



Key Action PR 4.1 ALGA and state and territory local government associations to encourage councils who are involved in the six Community Data Project Sites to work with their respective state / territory government to capture their learnings so that these can be collated and made available to all local governments to inform their deliberations on relevant data collection and sharing.

Key Action PR4.2 ALGA will alert state and territory local government associations to critical issues that would benefit from improved reporting that are raised at the Joint Council meetings, to assist them and state and territory jurisdictions to improve information to be collected and shared.