



AUSTRALIAN
LOCAL GOVERNMENT
ASSOCIATION

Closing the Gap Implementation Plan

2023

(Updated)



Image courtesy of LGA SA.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the first storytellers of this land and traditional owners of country on which we now live and work. We recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters, communities, and cultures. We pay our respects to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to elders past and present. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this report may contain the names of people who have since passed away. ALGA thanks our members and councils who have provided data and other information to be included in this document. We would like to thank the Coalition of Peaks and government agencies that have assisted ALGA and reached out to help councils to progress the objects of the agreement at a state, regional and local level.

The front cover image was taken at the launch of an Indigenous education and social skills project at the Kalaya Children's Centre, which was a joint initiative between City of Port Adelaide Enfield and City of Onkaparinga.



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Opening Statement

On behalf of Australian local governments, our Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) is proud to be a co-signatory to Australia's National Agreement on Closing the Gap, a landmark agreement that marked 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.

As both our ALGA Closing the Gap 2023 Annual Report and the Productivity Commission's second Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation report in July 2022 show, as a nation we are not on track for too many of our Closing the Gap targets. In some areas, the gap is actually widening.

We must all – every level of government – do better.

This Revised Implementation Plan takes into account what we have learnt from our efforts so far and is informed by the work of ALGA state and territory local government associations and our member councils.

Our 2023 Annual Report highlights, among other things, the critical importance and need for greater effort to be placed on developing the key relationships between levels of government, in particular state and territory governments and our local governments and First Nations peoples' partners.

It is my hope that what we have learnt from the first two full years of operation of the Agreement, and this Implementation Plan, will play an important role in supporting local governments, alongside other levels of government and our Australian indigenous people 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 is informed by the experiences and learnings outline in ALGA's 2023 Closing the Gap Annual Report. The Plan builds on ALGA's previous Implementation Plan and the views of the Coalition of Peaks, in particular those 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 as well as 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

Under the National Agreement, all state and territory governments' Implementation Plans are to be whole-of-government plans, covering government agencies and statutory bodies (local governments are statutory bodies under the relevant Local Government Act in their jurisdiction). In addition, state and territory government Implementation Plans are to include information on how they will work with their local councils.

The Australian Local Government Association (ALGA) as a member of both the Joint Council and the Partnership Working Group has consistently reinforced this requirement, as well as the need to engage with relevant state/territory-based Coalition of Peaks (or their equivalent), individual local governments in their jurisdiction and the relevant local government association. Further the need to recognise the resource constraints that often limit the effective engagement of some local governments, their association, and the relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sectors representatives' bodies.

However, the Productivity Commission's Closing the Gap Draft Review Report (2023) notes that while there are pockets of good practice, overall progress on priority reform has been slow. Further that currently, plans do not highlight how they will work with local governments. The Draft Report also notes that ALGA members rely on support and authority from, and are limited by progress made by, state and territory governments.

ALGA and state and territory associations acknowledge the challenges, complexity, and ambition of this Partnership Agreement. However, this highlights the need for focus and prioritisation. In reviewing the 2021 Plan and the maturity of the current relationships and jurisdictional plans we believe that the strategies outlined in the original Implementation Plan remain relevant for the following 12 months. This Plan should be considered as a living document and will be adapted from time to time based on progress and feedback from the other parties of the Agreement.

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 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 responsible for ‘place.’ Local governments create and enforce local regulations, and deliver local infrastructure, services and activities which are adapted to and reflective of the needs of the community we serve.

Given that local councils are wholly focused on specific places we are 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 foster joint decision-making.

To achieve success, it will be important to engage local governments early in the process of identifying opportunities for place-based partnerships. 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 and Indigenous Australians to identify and resolve any legislative and financial impediments to joint decision-making on Closing the Gap.



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| 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. |

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.*

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.

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.

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.

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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.*

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.

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 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.
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