

MEDIA RELEASE

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NATSILS WELCOMES INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP AND PARTNERSHIP FOR CLOSING THE GAP REFRESH

The National Peak Body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) joining with other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies across Australia, welcomes today's announcement that COAG has agreed to a formal partnership approach to the Closing the Gap Refresh.

The details of formal partnership between COAG and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will be settled in February 2019. The partnership will include a Ministerial Council on Closing the Gap with expanded membership to include representation from COAG and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through their peak bodies.

Before the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies intervened, COAG was due to settle a new Closing the Gap framework and targets without the full involvement and agreement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through their representatives.

"The Government has recognised that Closing the Gap will not succeed unless there is clear direction and partnership from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and our representative bodies," said Cheryl Axleby, co-chair of NATSILS.

"We welcome this new era of partnership in the design, implementation, monitoring and review of the Closing the Gap strategy. Our voices have been locked out of this process for too long."

Last week the Prime Minister agreed that Closing the Gap needed to be more than a strategy for governments, but a strategy that is owned by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as well. The refreshed framework, targets and action plans will be finalised through the new joint Committee by mid-2019.

"The Commonwealth Government has never had a deadline for ending the over-incarceration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, nor our over-representation as victims of violence. This is why we need national justice target to make progress to end these human rights injustices," said Cheryl.

"Solutions to end over-imprisonment must look holistically alongside other areas of disadvantage in the Closing the Gap strategy - health, education, employment - in order to create real change for future generations. In addition, family violence, child protection, disability and housing targets must be added."

"The Federal Government must lead this critical national work to address the ongoing legacy of colonisation, to heal our nation."

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