



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **Some good news but the main challenge is closing the funding gap**

The Commonwealth Budget contains some very welcome measures in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. But structural reform is what is really required and a longer-term commitment to close the funding gap is necessary if we want the health gap to improve.

In Cairns this morning, Donnella Mills, the Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) said, 'The prelude to this Budget has been dominated by the mainstream and economic concerns. We understand that the Government is concerned with cost-of-living pressures, affordable housing, and domestic violence. We support all efforts in this regard. But we also acknowledge that it contains some important measures that will assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people and bring valuable relief to our sector.'

NACCHO welcomes the \$12.8m in suicide prevention, \$10m for mental health support, \$11.1m to expand coverage of the Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme, \$94.9m to combat communicable diseases in our communities, and \$12.5m to facilitate community-led distribution of menstrual products in regional and remote First Nations communities. These are all important announcements.

Donnella Mills said, 'These provide a critical first step after the failed Referendum last year. The Government needs to get a positive dialogue happening in the wake of all the misinformation and hostility that we lived through. The best way of doing that is to invest in our communities and fund the responsibly costed package of proposals that NACCHO puts forward each year.'

'Why should Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people expect to live lives 8-9 years less than other Australians?' asked the acting CEO of NACCHO, Dr Dawn Casey.

In Canberra this morning, she said, 'Despite all the myths you heard in the Referendum about wasted expenditure, the cold hard fact of the matter is that there is a [health funding gap](#) of \$4.4 billion each year for our people. That equates to about \$5,000 per Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person. The Commonwealth's share of that gap is \$2.6 billion. So, we have a simple challenge to work through with the Government: let's agree on a plan to close the funding gap, if we are ever to close the health gap.'

NACCHO is also looking forward to bunkering down behind the seminal National Agreement on Closing the Gap. The Productivity Commission's report showed that most government agencies are fumbling in their efforts to implement it and seem not to understand the necessary structural reform that the Prime Minister and eight premiers and chief ministers signed up to in 2020. We see the Agreement as an important mechanism to help close the gap.

Donnella Mills said, 'As we have been denied a Voice, it is up to NACCHO and our counterparts to advocate for our sectors. The main message we have for governments, at the moment, is to work with us in closing the funding gap and let's continue to work together to get the National Agreement firing.'

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[NACCHO](#) is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across the country on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO is the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, with over 3,500 out of the 6,000 staff working in ACCHOs being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.



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