

APPENDIX 3

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ECONOMIC INCLUSION ROUNDTABLE LETTER





ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ECONOMIC INCLUSION ROUNDTABLE

Dear Treasurer and Minister

We are writing to share the outcomes and key discussion points from a roundtable held on 1 December 2025 on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander economic inclusion (the Roundtable), convened by the Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee (the Committee).

The Roundtable brought together representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations across the country, including members of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community-Controlled Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks).

The Roundtable was a highly productive discussion, grounded in the expertise and lived experience of the community-controlled sector. We thank you, Minister, for attending the closing session, and we also acknowledge the Department of Social Services for its support in convening and facilitating the Roundtable.

The purpose of the Roundtable was to ensure that the Committee's work is informed by the perspectives of those with deep on-the-ground knowledge of what drives economic inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As you are aware, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience some of the highest levels of economic exclusion in Australia. Identifying effective policy levers to address this remains a core focus of the Committee's work and is central to governments' shared commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Summary of outcomes

The Roundtable emphasised that economic inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is underpinned by four key interrelated enablers:

- **Adequate and accessible social services and income support**, so people can meet immediate material needs, address poverty, and safely access the right income support payments when they need.
- **Stable, secure, appropriate and affordable housing**, as a foundational requirement for participation in employment, education and community life.

- **Affordable, accessible, high-quality and culturally safe early childhood education and care**, to support children’s development and enable parents and carers to participate in work and study.
- **Education, training and employment opportunities** that empower people, support flexible employment participation and offer meaningful career pathways, including within the community-controlled sector.

Attendees also highlighted the need for broader Australian Government reforms and investments – including in the care economy, childcare, the clean energy transition and major infrastructure projects – to be designed and implemented in ways that enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to participate in and share in the economic benefits.

Across each of these domains, the Roundtable identified practical and actionable measures the Australian Government could take to strengthen outcomes and reduce entrenched economic exclusion. These are set out in more detail at **Attachment A**.

Next steps

The Committee will consider the outcomes of the Roundtable as it prepares its 2026 Report to Government, to be delivered ahead of the next Federal Budget.

We also encourage you and your Ministerial colleagues to consider the Roundtable’s findings as work progresses on the Commonwealth’s Closing the Gap Implementation Plan in 2026, and in the development of priorities for the 2026–27 Budget.

The Committee would also like to see the issues raised in the Roundtable embedded across relevant whole-of-government reform agendas through existing mechanisms and the development of new initiatives.

Consistent with Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Coalition of Peaks has reaffirmed its commitment to work in genuine partnership with agencies to co-design policy proposals that advance the economic inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for government consideration.

Yours sincerely



The Hon Jenny Macklin AC
Chair
Economic Inclusion Advisory Committee



Pat Turner AM
Lead Convenor
Coalition of Peaks

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Economic Inclusion Roundtable - Outcomes

The Roundtable was convened on 1 December 2025 to identify practical actions to improve economic participation and development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Roundtable discussed four key enablers of economic inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with practical actions identified in each domain for Australian Government action.

Domain one: Social services and income support

Proposed actions for the Australian Government:

- From a whole-of-government perspective, the Australian Government should embed stronger accountability arrangements for funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is directed to:
 - (a) the States and Territories under the Federal Financial Relations system
 - (b) non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Accountability should be built into funding agreements, and there should be genuine consequences for not delivering.

- The Australian Government should ensure there is an ongoing physical presence of Services Australia in remote areas that is culturally safe and appropriate.
- Services Australia, or another appropriate Australian Government agency, should provide formal system navigation support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as part of their regular offering. Government services have an obligation to help people navigate and access available supports.
- The Australian Government should immediately increase and index the Remote Area Allowance and continue to review the adequacy of payments to ensure they meet cost of living pressures in remote areas.
- The Australian Government should consider changes to income support payments to allow people to take up seasonal or irregular work opportunities when they arise without having their income support payments tapered or impacted.
- The Australian Government should carefully update the remoteness measure to ensure it reflects contemporary circumstances and supports equitable outcomes.

- The Australian Government should provide longer-term funding arrangements to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled peak organisations (ACCOs) and improve program and policy design to facilitate more secure and stable funding and reflect the holistic, community-led nature of the services delivered by ACCOs. For example, the rollout of the Remote Australia Employment Service has left some providers and families with funding shortfalls and uncertainty over the 2025 Christmas period.

Domain two: Housing

Roundtable attendees welcomed the recent announcement by the Hon Clare O’Neil MP, Minister for Housing that the Housing Australia Future Fund Round 3 will include a dedicated First Nations funding stream. There was also overarching support for the work of the Housing Policy Partnership. The focus of this part of the Roundtable was more on what could be done to guide these initiatives so that they have the best impact.

Proposed actions for the Australian Government:

- In any funding allocation the Australian Government makes to states and territories or within its own housing and homelessness programs, there should be a specific, ring-fenced allocation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is based on need.
- The Australian Government should work through the Housing Policy Partnership to improve access to housing data. While we know there is significant unmet housing need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, there is insufficient data available on the exact housing need in each community, the current state of existing housing stock and the genuine investment required in housing stock including repair and maintenance.
- Tripartite funding agreements between the Australian Government, states and territories and local communities could improve accountability for outcomes. In addition to housing, these agreements could include essential services.
- On repairs and maintenance, there were calls for the Australian Government to take steps to:
 - (a) ensure that social housing dwellings are well maintained, safe and high quality, and build the capacity and capability Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities to do this work on an ongoing basis.

(b) urgently respond to high levels of asbestos in social housing. Poor quality social housing was noted as a key factor in the continued burden of disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

(c) plan to improve the condition of properties so that they can be transferred to ACCOs in accordance with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap – the poor condition of many properties is impacting transfer.

- The Australian Government should better coordinate supports to reduce the risk that people become homeless when their income support payments change.
- The Australian Government should do more to ensure social housing program settings are culturally responsive and inclusive. For example, recognising intergenerational ownership and tenure.
- The Australian Government should do more to support greater home ownership and private rental arrangements, in addition to greater social housing and homelessness supports. There should be a structured pathway from social housing to home ownership, and innovative policy approaches considered such as taxation incentives for first homeowners.
- The Australian Government should fund the Housing Sector Strengthening Plan, and work to fulfill its commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including clauses 55a and 55b.

Domain Three: Early childhood education and care

Proposed actions for the Australian Government:

- The Australian Government should take steps to implement a more strategic and coordinated approach to growing a highly skilled early learning workforce in the ACCO sector. Culturally safe face-to-face training should be more accessible, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- Upcoming infrastructure and capital investments in early learning centres should also consider housing needs for workers, and families of children attending, particularly in regional and remote areas.
- The Australian Government should work with the ACCO sector to develop a National Early Intervention Data Set for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, along with a strategy to fill the data gaps. This would support forecasting and tracking of early intervention investment to grow the evidence base of what works. There would also be enormous benefit in a National Early Intervention Investment Framework to direct investment to the front end of the system.

- The ACCO sector is under significant pressure from short-term and inflexible funding arrangements. ACCOs providing early childhood education and care and child and family services need 10-year funding contracts centred on the holistic service delivery model used by ACCO early childhood education and care services that are able to be used flexibly for what is most needed by the community – for further context, see SNAICC’s 2024 *Funding Model Options for ACCO Integrated Early Years Services report*.
- The Australian Government should have a coordinated and strategic plan in place to bring to scale learnings from major reform initiatives in the early childhood space, including Thriving Kids, the Investment Dialogue for Australia’s Children, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- Children need to be developmentally ready to go to school. A more integrated and multidisciplinary approach is needed to shift Closing the Gap Target 4. This includes identifying needs early, and ensuring children have the supports they need as soon as possible. One tangible way for this to occur is by expanding the childhood health check to include assessments of developmental delay and strengthening the workforce by building the screening elements for this check in the training of health workers.

Domain Four: Education, training and employment

Proposed actions for the Australian Government:

- The Roundtable discussed that mainstream employment services are not working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Communities want greater control over the levers for economic inclusion and economic development – to train more people, employ more people, and grow communities instead of continuing to rely on external contractors.
- The Australian Government should fund the development and delivery of a new program to support long term unemployed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job seekers – including to gain recognisable and transferable skills, and the wraparound supports needed to sustain employment.
- The Australian Government should take steps to improve the availability and quality of vocational education and training programs in communities, including expanding the number of ACCO Registered Training Organisations and making sure they have adequate funding to support the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students including through wrap-around supports. ACCO Registered Training Organisations should receive equal funding to TAFEs as training organisations.

- The Australian Government should work with the community-controlled sector to build on existing government funding arrangements with ACCOs to ensure stable and appropriate funding that provides for long-term employment contracts, competitive wages, the ability to offer trainee positions, and professional development and career progression of staff.
- The Australian Government should consider developing place-based workforce plans, with input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ACCOs and non-Indigenous community members. These plans could identify skills in demand by employers over the shorter and longer term, as well as opportunities for people to develop the skills needed to obtain meaningful employment on Country.
- The Australian Government should take steps to create more employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through major infrastructure and community-based projects sponsored by the Australian Government, and maximise the potential for flexible job creation, especially in regional and remote communities.
- The Australian Government needs to take action to improve procurement processes to address Black cladding.
- The Australian Government should support clearer pathways for young people between school, training and employment by funding dedicated career planning and mentoring for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that young people are supported to think about job readiness before they leave school.
- The Australian Government should do more to recognise skills and qualifications for non-mainstream roles. Ranger programs get great outcomes and empower people to use their knowledge and skills. Aboriginal-led models of maternity care are another strong example.
- It is important to confront racism in employment, including implementing the National Anti-Racism Framework.