



Closing the Gap 2020

The IEUA believes that it remains a national disgrace that infant mortality rates, life expectancy and key education outcomes for First Nations' people remain at unacceptable levels.

19th March 2020 is Closing the Gap Day. On this day, IEU members call for action on improving the health, education and employment outcomes for First Nations' People.

12th Report to Parliament

On 12th February 2020, Prime Minister Scott Morrison delivered the 12th Closing the Gap Report to Parliament.

Almost every year, a Prime Minister delivers a report and states that the country needs to move on from a deficit approach. Each year the failures and the inability to make a significant impact on the Gap is reported. This year was no different. The 12th Closing the Gap report exposed the wide gulf remaining between aspiration, and over a decade's worth of failures to bring health, living and education standards among First Nations' people more into line with those of the general population.

Close The Gap Campaign

In 2008, the campaign was deemed necessary as Australia has one of the world's worse life expectancy gaps between First Nations' and non-Indigenous Australians.

As a response, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) endorsed the National Indigenous Reform Agreement. The Reform Agreement outlined two health/medical goals and four educational/employment goals to be achieved in partnership with First Nations' community and health organisations. A further education target related to school attendance rates was added in May 2014.

These goals were to:

- Improve Indigenous life expectancy to the Australian average by 2031;
- Halve the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous mortality rates;
- Ensure that 95% of all Indigenous four year olds are enrolled in early childhood education by 2025 (revised goal);
- Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018;
- Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous students by 2018;
- Halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020; and
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and other Australians by 2018.

Five of Seven Closing the Gap Targets Remain Not on Track

The 2020 Report shows that the country is only on track to meet two of the seven government targets to reduce the disparity in health and education and employment.

First Nations' children still trail behind non-indigenous children in literacy, numeracy and writing skills.

Gains in First Nations' people's health have been the same or smaller to those for non-indigenous Australians, meaning gaps are persisting and, in the case of child mortality, widening. Life expectancy gap between First Nations and non-indigenous men is as high as 8.6years, and for women 7.8years There has been no improvement in school attendance rates. First Nations' people employment rates remain low and the gap between First Nations' people and non-indigenous employment rates has barely changed.

First Nations' Voices Key to Closing the Gap

Australia is an extraordinarily wealthy country, but we continue to fail First Nations' people in ensuring that there is no gap on any of these indicators and in ensuring that there is a stronger voice and recognition for First Nations' people in the country's legislature and constitution.

It is very likely that we will continue to see these unacceptable gaps unless the spirit, aspiration and dreams of the First Nations' *Uluru Statement from the Heart* are recognised, welcomed and acted on.

New Framework. New Partnerships

Local government associations and First Nations' organisations are working together to develop a new framework and targets in order to Close the Gap on disadvantage. The new national agreement will call on all relevant parties to maintain a commitment to achieving framework goals, including a higher level of accountability for progress

A joint council on Closing the Gap has been established, which is the first time a COAG ministerial group has included non-government representatives

The new framework will draw on First Nations' designed and lead health initiatives.

Success will be dependent upon a strong and well-resourced partnership with First Nations' people.

IEU Members Take Action

On 19 March 2020, IEU members call upon the Australian Government to

1. Commit to providing adequate and long-term financial resources to achieve First Nations' people's health equality;
2. Invest in real partnerships, including increased participation and control by First Nations' people around health service delivery; and
3. Address critical social issues of housing, education and self-determination that contribute to the health crisis affecting First Nations' people.

IEU members can pledge to Close the Gap by signing the ANTAR online petition at <https://antar.org.au/closethegappledge>

In addition, IEU members can contact the Prime Minister's Office at <https://www.pm.gov.au/contact-your-pm> or their local MP (http://www.aph.gov.au/Senators_and_Members/Members) and ask them to outline what steps will be taken to Close The Gap on Disadvantage.

Progress Against The Reform Agreement Goals

Target	Target Year	Progress	Results
Close the gap in life expectancy within a generation.	2031	Not on track	<p>In 2015 – 2017, the life expectancy was 71.6 years for Indigenous males (8.6 years less than non-indigenous males) and 75.6 years for Indigenous females (7.8 years less than non- Indigenous females)</p> <p>There has been no progress to the goal to close the gap as both mortality rates at improved at similar rates.</p>
Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade.	2018	No met	<p>In 2018, the Indigenous child mortality rate was twice the rate for non-Indigenous children.</p> <p>Since the 2008 target baseline, the Indigenous child mortality rate has improved slightly, by around 7 per cent. However, the mortality rate for non-Indigenous children has improved at a faster rate Hence the gap has widened.</p>
95 per cent of all Indigenous four year olds enrolled in early childhood education.	2025	On track.	<p>In 2018, 86.4 per cent of the estimated population of Indigenous children were enrolled in early childhood education programs, compared with 91.3 percent of non-Indigenous children. This was higher than the agreed trajectory point for 2018 to reach the target by 2025</p>
Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance by 2018.	2018	No met	<p>School attendance rates for Indigenous students have not improved over the past five years. Attendance rates for Indigenous students remain lower than for non-Indigenous students (around 82 percent compared to 92 percent in 2019). Gaps in attendance are evident for Indigenous children as a group from the first year of schooling. The attendance gap widens during secondary school.</p>

Halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous students.	2018	Not met.	<p>The target to halve the gap in the share of Indigenous children at or above national minimum standards in reading and numeracy within the decade (by 2018) was not met.</p> <p>One in four Indigenous students in Years 5, 7 and 9, and one in five in Year 3, remained below national minimum standards in reading. Between 17 to 19 percent of Indigenous students were below the national minimum standards in numeracy.</p>
Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates.	2020	On track	<p>In 2018–19, around 66 per cent of Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 years had attained Year 12 or equivalent.</p> <p>Between 2008 and 2018–19, the proportion of Indigenous Australians aged 20–24 years attaining Year 12 or equivalent increased by around 21 percentage points. The gap has narrowed by around 15 percentage points, as non-Indigenous attainment rates have improved at a slower pace.</p>
Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.	2018	Not met	<p>In 2018, the Indigenous employment rate was around 49 per cent compared to around 75 per cent for non-Indigenous Australians.</p> <p>Over the past decade (2008–2018), the employment rate for Indigenous Australians increased slightly (by 0.9 percentage points), while for non-Indigenous Australians it fell by 0.4 percentage points. As a result, the gap has not changed markedly.</p>