



# WORKING TO CLOSE THE GAP

## Equitable and culturally safe health care

A clear way forward to close the gap

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous Australians. In order to make progress where it is needed the Greens will invest in key health programs, and work to make sure the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan succeeds.

Despite some modest gains in health indicators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, much more must be done to close the gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

There is a life expectancy gap of around ten years between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians,<sup>1</sup> and tragically the death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is almost twice the rate for non-Indigenous children.<sup>2</sup>

There are major social and economic disadvantages that contribute to these poorer health outcomes and the Greens have announced policies to address these issues. But there is also more that can be done in direct health service provision. The Greens have a sensible, long term plan to support community controlled health services and fund effective programs to improve eye, ear and kidney health amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In addition to restoring more than half a billion dollars cut by the Coalition, including major cuts from the health budget,<sup>3</sup> the Greens will provide additional funding of **\$179.4m over four years**, including:

- \$42.3m to work to limit preventable blindness;
- \$99.8m to close the gap in hearing health;
- \$10m to address the challenges of chronic kidney disease, and
- \$27.3m to improve support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives.

<sup>1</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, [Fact Sheet: Life Expectancy Estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians](#), 2013.

<sup>2</sup> [Mortality](#), HealthInfoNet.

<sup>3</sup> [Empowering and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#).

### > EFFECTIVE IMPLEMENTATION

The Greens will support the success of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (NATSIHP) and associated Implementation Plan, with a targeted resourcing strategy. The goals of the NATSIHP and Implementation Plan provide a sound blueprint for progress towards closing the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But the government has failed to demonstrate how the NATSIHP will be realised. To make sure we turn the plan into a reality, the Greens will advocate for the development of a Resource Plan, to establish the specific needs across workforce, infrastructure and information management as well identify and commit the funding required. The Resource Plan will also include:

- Establishment and resourcing of an independent oversight committee responsible for monitoring progress against the strategies of the Implementation Plan; and
- Development of a strategic plan for capacity building of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.

### > KEY MEASURES

To address identified areas of need, the Greens will implement a range of measures. The Greens will invest **\$42.3m over four years** to work to limit preventable blindness, including:

- **\$12m** to develop a comprehensive national eye health and vision strategy;
- **\$10m** for an awareness campaign to drive up rates of eye examinations and awareness of risk factors;
- **\$13m** for monitoring and research of national eye health and vision care, and
- **\$7.3m** to implement the recommendations of the *Roadmap to Close the Gap for Vision*.

To close the gap in hearing health, **we will invest \$99.8m over four years:**

- **\$2m for a national database** to track children with a hearing impairment.
- **\$15m annually for early evidence-based language and communication intervention** for all children with hearing impairment prior to them starting school.
- **\$4m annually** for sound field systems for new classrooms, and in all existing classrooms where there is a significant population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- **\$5m for an exemplar multidisciplinary project** to address incidence of otitis media in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) communities.
- The Council of Australian Governments to prioritize hearing screenings and follow-up for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from remote communities on commencement of school.
- **A \$30m million fund over three years from 2016-2017**, for targeted training and induction programs to equip teachers based in schools in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities with the knowledge and skills to teach effectively in these environments.
- Improve support for people with hearing impairment accessing the NDIS by providing **\$2m annually over two years to develop an accreditation scheme** to identify clinicians with the ability to provide appropriate services to adults with complex hearing rehabilitation needs. The Greens will also provide demand-driven funding for interpreters where needed for NDIS participants with hearing disabilities – expected to match the funding under the current Australian Government Hearing Services Community Service Obligations Program.

To address the rise of chronic kidney disease, the Greens will **invest \$10m** to establish a national strategy on chronic kidney disease, involving:

- **\$2m for a National Action Plan on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander chronic kidney disease;**
- **\$4 million for education and training** for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. Developing appropriate training and educational resources for health professionals will increase awareness and early detection;<sup>4</sup>
- **\$4 million** for appropriate patient support services in remote and regional locations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives play a crucial role in delivering services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities. To respond to the shortage in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives, **we will invest \$23.7m**, including:

- **\$1m for the development of a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nursing Workforce Strategy.**
- **\$12.54m over three years for 95 targeted places** for Indigenous nursing students to study for 3 years.
- **\$412,672 over three years for a peer mentoring program** for 95 students over three years.

- **\$2.9m over three years** for a Leaders in Indigenous Nursing and Midwifery Education (LINMEN) program.
- **\$2.75m** to support the important work of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM).

## > REVERSING COALITION CUTS

The Greens have announced **additional funding of \$556m over four years** for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services.<sup>5</sup> Improving funding for community services will improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes, by ensuring culturally appropriate services are available where they're needed in communities.

## > MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

As part of additional funding announced in our mental health initiative, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples will benefit from:

- **A \$400m increase** to Primary Health Networks' flexible mental health funding pool,
- **\$280m in additional mental health funding** for regional, rural and remote communities,
- **\$40m in funding for a series of strategies to reduce mental health stigma**, including a targeted campaign for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This funding will recognise the needs of regional and remote communities, including **allocating at least \$24m to regional Western Australia over four years**, and a minimum of **\$17m in additional funding for services and workforce in the Northern Territory**, including remote communities.

The Greens are disappointed that funds previously committed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention strategies have not been spent. The Greens want to see this money (now worth **\$25m**) **immediately spent on suicide prevention**, with a heavy investment to address the ongoing Kimberley suicide crisis.<sup>6</sup>

Given recent tragic suicides by young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is important to build resilience in young people through cultural education programs. We need to support on-country community-led programs such as mentoring and youth leadership.

## > SUPPORT FOR ABORIGINAL HEALTH

A multi-party approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health is essential to ensuring we close the gap. The Greens will build on the commitments of past governments by focusing on tangible outcomes and targeted and secure resourcing strategies.

<sup>5</sup> [Empowering and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.](#)

<sup>6</sup> [Senate Estimates](#), p. 64.

<sup>4</sup> Kidney Australia, [2016-17 Pre-Budget Submission](#), p. 10.