

7 December 2022

Mr Michael Brennan  
Chair, Productivity Commission

By email to: [CTG.Review@PC.gov.au](mailto:CTG.Review@PC.gov.au)

Dear Mr Brennan

**Re: Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the [review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#) (the review).

The RANZCP is responsible for training, educating and representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand with more than 7700 members including more than 5600 qualified psychiatrists. The RANZCP is well placed to provide assistance on the review given our expertise in the mental health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, informed by our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Committee.

The RANZCP welcomes actions thus far to address the priority reforms and socioeconomic outcomes outlined in the Agreement, and supports the Agreement's commitment to involve the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision-making that affects them.

Firstly, there is opportunity to improve the implementation of Priority Reform 2 (building the community-controlled sector), alongside Socioeconomic Outcomes 7 (youth are engaged in employment and education), 8 (strong economic participation and development of people and communities) and 14 (people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing) through development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health Workforce.

Outlined by [the National Indigenous Australians Agency](#), Indigenous people who are able to receive care from Indigenous health professionals have increased engagement and participation, which improves care outcomes. The RANZCP has effectively used programs such as the [Psychiatry Interest Forum](#) to encourage Indigenous junior doctors to pursue a career in psychiatry. The RANZCP also partners with the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) to implement AIDA's Specialist Trainee Support Program. The success of these is impacted by the number of Indigenous students pursuing and completing university-level medical studies.

Policies targeting Indigenous young people to pursue medical education and a career in medicine would develop the Indigenous medical workforce and support Socioeconomic Outcome 7. The upturn in Indigenous mental health workers providing mental health care to other indigenous people (via Community-Controlled Health Organisation's for example)

would also improve mental health outcomes and support Socioeconomic Outcome fourteen. For further information, please see [RANZCP Position Statement 50: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers](#).

As discussed in the RANZCP's [submission to the Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\) Declaration Implementation Plan 2022 – 2032](#), addressing the mental health needs of Indigenous people in the justice system is crucial to reduce over-incarceration. The [Productivity Commission](#) shows that 40% of adults in the justice system had a mental health condition. The over-incarceration of Indigenous people (30% of the prison population compared only up 3% of the general population) makes the mental health needs of incarcerated people an issue that significantly affects outcomes for Indigenous people.

Without treatment in prison, mental health conditions increase the risk of recidivism and institutionalisation and thwart rehabilitation efforts. These challenges continue to inhibit the progression of Socioeconomic Outcomes 10 and 11 (adults and young people are not overrepresented in the criminal justice system). Closing the Gap measures have not sufficiently capitalised on the opportunity to address multiple Socioeconomic Outcomes by providing much-needed mental health treatment for incarcerated Indigenous people.

The RANZCP highlights that consideration of the issues raised in our submission will support the development of an improved National Agreement. To discuss these further, please contact [REDACTED].

Yours sincerely

[REDACTED]  
Associate Professor Vinay Iakra  
**President**

Ref: 3555