

12 December 2022

Productivity Commission

**RE: Proposed approach and invitation to engage with the Closing the Gap Review**

To the representatives of the Productivity Commission,

The Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Child Protection Peak (QATSICPP) welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission on the planned approach to assess progress of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and how it is being implemented.

QATSICPP is Queensland's First Nations child protection peak body representing, advocating for and supporting 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations covering the whole state. Our members deliver family support services, family wellbeing services and foster and kinship care services to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families. We work with practitioners and policymakers to promote and advocate for the rights, safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and families.

QATSICPP is committed to working with governments to embed the priority reforms in all our (and Queensland Government's work) as we believe they represent the largest opportunity to truly re-imagine a service system that desperately needs to change in order to achieve the 17 socio-economic targets. Unfortunately, it appears little progress has been made against the targets, with many still not on track. QATSICPP would support any work undertaken by the Productivity Commission that and effectively link and measure the impact of embedding the priority reforms on achieving the socio-economic targets.

Below, we provide our reflections on the Productivity Commission's:

- Engagement approach;
- Review of Queensland's Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap; and,
- Use of case studies

#### **Engagement approach**

QATSICPP believes that the proposed engagement approach outlined by the Productivity Commission is generally sound. We believe there is an opportunity to strengthen engagement by elevating cultural safety as a stand-alone engagement principle. We would be happy to work with the commission on co-designing a range of practices to support this.

We would also like to note the principle of free, prior, informed consent needs to be explicitly embedded in the engagement practice. It is critical that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participate in your review clearly understand how their data is going to be used, and give informed consent prior to sharing anything internally and publicly. And to paraphrase former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Human Rights Commissioner Mick Gooda, it's the obligation of those seeking consent to resource those giving it to inform themselves.

It was great to hear in our face-to-face consultation with the Productivity Commission, the eagerness to engage with young people on Queensland's implementation plan on Closing the Gap. We suggest ensuring this approach is meaningful and robust, the engagement approach of young people should be more comprehensively outlined in the document.

QATSICPP have been working hard with a group of young consultants and our members to have our children and young peoples' voices elevated in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of the programs and services delivered for them. To support this, we have produced a Solid Voices of Tomorrow Guide (attached). The guide is a resource to support our staff and our members in engaging and empowering young people to participate meaningfully in these processes including their voices being central to leading change.

The guide highlights principles that young people prioritise as being central in creating change in their lives including:

- All work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people upholds their right to connect to their culture and family.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people must be provided with voice and choice over the issues that matter to their lives.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, no matter where they reside, have the right to access culturally safe services that ensure they can access education, adequate housing work and be supported to have healthy social and emotional wellbeing.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are provided with access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services that are better able to meet their needs and build their cultural strength when they require help.
- The strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are highlighted (not their deficits).

### **Review of Queensland's implementation plan on Closing the Gap**

As a general observation of the four Priority Reforms for Closing the Gap, there is no stated commitment to engage with children and young people to elevate their voice. Eight of the seventeen targets specifically impact on the health and safety of children and young people, yet there is a lack of dedicated engagement strategy outlined on how the views of children and young people will be heard in relation to the efforts to reach these targets. Therefore, very important that, as outlined in our consultation with the Productivity Commission, that young consultants are engaged for the Closing the Gap review.

Overall, there is limited accountability to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled organisations (ATSICCO's) sector with government demanding services report on service agreements and key performance indicators but share little in return. To make significant impacts, there needs to be a shift in accountability processes that move from services producing outputs to a place where government are having to be accountable on the improved outcomes they are achieving. To date there is limited accountability to regional and remote communities to be respectfully consulted in decisions about funding, service design and delivery. This behaviour flows to the shared struggle between ATSICCO's around the government relinquishing control and power over data that would allow communities to understand what is funded and what outcomes it is seeking to create.

From our observations, trust is still low between government and communities as there remains a lack of transparency in the procurement and commissioning processes across all departments. We know ATSICCO's are best placed and well-trusted organisations in all communities, with staff better able to achieve the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, families and communities with a holistic approach.

We support the Productivity Commission's approach to use of case studies to highlight what is and isn't working in communities. We look forward to sharing some case studies that we are collecting to highlight promising and emerging practice in ATSICCO's working to reduce over-representation of children in the child protection system. However, we caution that one of the greatest problems we experience is good practice rarely being taken to scale and further invested in.

We commend the Productivity Commission in embedding the mentioned approaches in your review processes and look forward to working collectively with you in providing insights from our communities and members as you progress this work.

Yours sincerely,

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