



AIGI

Web www.aigi.com.au
Email aigi@aigi.com.au
Phone 0498 880 025
Post PO Box 4788
Eight Mile Plains, QLD, 4113

Closing the Gap Review

Productivity Commission
Locked Bag 2, Collins St East
Melbourne Vic 8003
E: ctg.review@pc.gov.au
P: 02 6240 3252

6 October 2023

AIGI SUBMISSION: NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP DRAFT REPORT

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute (AIGI) welcomes the opportunity to make a written submission in response to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap Draft Report.

AIGI brings its 10+ years expertise to this review as an independent, Indigenous-led centre for governance knowledge and excellence. We connect Indigenous Australians to world-class governance practice, resources, and professional development to meet their self-determined governance needs. Our services are designed to improve social, cultural and economic outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

We envision a future Australia where Indigenous peoples, communities and First Nations experience self-determination, and enjoy political, social, cultural and economic development through strong self-governance. To fulfil our vision, we:

- leverage research and on-the-ground practice to develop a knowledge base that encourages and highlights effective Indigenous governance;
- facilitate and implement training and education within communities and regions;
- mentor, coach and support Indigenous groups, individuals and organisations over the long-term to build their governance capacity;
- lead sector-wide collaboration and work with networks and partners to develop practical, culturally-informed governance tools and resources; and
- lead advocacy for policy debate and change regarding Indigenous governance.

AIGI touches upon the Closing the Gap priority reforms and processes in a number of different ways:

1. We work with ACCOs and other Indigenous organisations on strengthening their governance, including through our education and advisory work;
2. We have informal relationships with government agencies who utilise our tailored education and advisory services; and

The Australian Indigenous Governance Institute acknowledges the Traditional Owners of all lands for which we live and work. We honour and celebrate their Elders past and present.



3. We have delivered education and advisory services to various organisations funded by NIAA.

The importance of Indigenous governance

Our theory of change asserts that practical, effective and culturally legitimate governance is the fundamental building block for real change. Having effective and legitimate governance benefits families, communities, and First Nations. It is a powerful predictor of success in economic and community development and in maximising self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

AI GI's experience first-hand is that one challenge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face is to govern effectively while holding true to two forms of accountability: the culture, laws, rules and forms of accountability of their peoples and those of the wider environment. AI GI calls this 'two way-governance'. Our evidence base indicates that successful Indigenous organisations have governance structures which work well 'two ways'.

All four priority reforms in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap require strong Indigenous governance, and reciprocal respect by government of those Indigenous governance structures.

Partnership with government

AI GI has strong valued partnerships with the private sector. For example, we have a longstanding philanthropic relationship with the BHP Foundation. We also undertake projects for and with large private sector organisations such as the Australian Institute of Company Directors and Rio Tinto.

AI GI has completed paid consulting work for bodies funded by the NIAA, yet we have found it difficult to achieve meaningful engagement when approaching government agencies directly. We have spoken with various government officers of different levels of seniority within key departments over a number of years without gaining much traction.

We believe that as an organisation we have the experience, skills and track record to work with the government more collaboratively to Close the Gap. We would like to reach a point in our relationship with the government where there is confidence to come to us directly.

AI GI is well equipped to assist government agencies and the organisations they fund to strengthen their governance capability. We welcome discussions on how we can work together on this, with the aim of supporting the progression of all four priority reform areas.

Documenting governance best practice

We also note the Commission's interest in examples of good practice in transferring service delivery from mainstream organisations to ACCOs. Relevant to this question:

- AI GI maintains Australia's only online *Indigenous Governance Toolkit* (<https://aigi.org.au/toolkit>) of case-study information and resources for Indigenous governance building initiatives;

- AIGI is co-convenor with Reconciliation Australia (RA) of the biennial Indigenous Governance Awards (IGAs). The IGAs acknowledge and celebrate outstanding stories of success and best practice in the field of Indigenous governance throughout Australia. Since 2014, AIGI has published the *Stories of Success* report, which presents analyses of IGAs finalists' governance practices, models and innovative solutions. The multi-year analyses identify key research findings, as well as overarching narratives of Indigenous governance, determinants of success and emerging trends.

AIGI has the expertise to assist the Commission in identifying and documenting ACCOs with effective governance and service delivery. AIGI can also assist ACCOs that are becoming service providers with their governance development to support a smooth transition.

Relevant to Priority Reform Area 4, IGI also shares a keen interest in data governance, recently having convened a Data Governance Summit in Cairns on 12 June 2023, in collaboration with Maiam nayri Wingara. The communique from this event, which serves as a guiding document for best-practice data governance in Australia, can be accessed here: <https://www.maiamnayriwingara.org/research>.

The invitation

AIGI possesses the necessary expertise and resources to contribute significantly to achieving Outcomes 1, 8, 14, 15, 16 and 17 on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. We are actively seeking to establish a long-term partnership with the government to effectively leverage our research in shaping government policies and in service delivery of professional development and advisory services. We encourage government agencies to do more of the following:

- Make a concerted effort to fund Indigenous-led organisations to do work with and for their communities, such as organisations like ours.
- Meaningfully engage with Indigenous-led organisations, and think proactively and innovatively about how government can involve organisations such as ours on government projects and initiatives to help Close the Gap. AIGI is open to all types of 'collective impact relationships', including program alliances, collaborating on specific projects, knowledge partnerships where information and research can be exchanged, and strategic advocacy-focussed interactions and generally anything that involves designing and delivering training, governance reviews, or other advisory work.
- Government comes to AIGI as a regular contributor and advisor on issues touching upon Indigenous governance.

Please contact me to continue this discussion.

Yours sincerely

Jessica Bulger

Chief Executive Officer

Email: