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Investing in solutions led by First Peoples key to Closing the Gap

As communities across Australia mark National Close the Gap Day, leaders of the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), the Uniting Church and UnitingCare Australia have come together to call for enduring reforms to support self-determination and tangible outcomes for First Peoples.

"After thirteen years of Closing the Gap, it is time to turn rhetoric into real action that genuinely empowers First Peoples and delivers lasting benefits," Pastor Mark Kickett, UAICC Interim Chair.

"The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap has the potential to be a game-changer. But we are yet to see the structural change and funding commitments needed to achieve real reform, and pressure needs to be kept on governments to maintain their commitments and to apply the principles of reform that they signed off in 2020.

"Real change requires more than words and minor policy tinkering. It requires closing the gap between rhetoric and action. And it requires enduring structural and constitutional reform to empower First Peoples to take leadership in their affairs, in true partnership with government.

"The response of our communities to COVID-19 demonstrated the benefits of community-led action and the enduring resilience, creativity, and decisiveness of First Peoples leaders and governance," said Pastor Kickett.

Uniting Church in Australia President Dr Deidre Palmer said the Uniting Church lamented with First Peoples the ongoing health inequality, lack of self-determination, experiences of racism, high incarceration rates and the tragic prevalence of preventable deaths in custody.

Dr Palmer said investing in solutions led by First Peoples was key to Closing the Gap.

"As demonstrated by the Close the Gap Campaign Report, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have shown leadership, resilience and strength in responding to the challenges of 2020.

"When it came to COVID-19, First Peoples have completely reversed the gap, with the number of cases among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples six times lower than the rest of Australia.

"As a first step to Closing the Gap, we continue to stand with UAICC in calling for the Government to respond to the Statement from the Heart and its asks for a First Peoples Voice, for treaty-making and truth-telling.

"It is our hope for First Peoples of our country to live out their right to self-determination and for policies that reflect socially just and culturally safe relationships, where we listen and learn from one another."

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little called on governments at all levels to back up their commitments to Closing the Gap with long-term investment and comprehensive reform.

“Meaningful and lasting change will require translating the priorities identified by First Peoples into tangible and properly funded actions.

“The rapid response to COVID-19 showed what can be achieved when there is political will and investment to support strengths-based community-led action by First Peoples.

“If we are going to bridge the gaps in outcomes, it is vital the Federal Government works with First Peoples in a genuine partnership across all key areas of policy, including health, justice, employment, housing, disability, and children and families.”

[ENDS]

The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) consists of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia and members in fellowship who may also be members of other denominations. The UAICC aims, in collaboration with other people, to bring to an end to the injustices which hold Aboriginal and Islander people at the fringes of Australian society and to help Aboriginal and Islander people achieve spiritual, economic, social and cultural independence.

UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church’s community services network in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people every year across urban, rural and remote communities. We give voice to the Uniting Church’s commitment to social justice through advocacy and by strengthening community service provision.

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