

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

(Extract from Australian Labor Party National Platform Pages 140-141)

In 2008 Labor initiated a national partnership between federal, State and Territory governments to address the shameful gap in life expectancy and health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians. The annual Closing the Gap address to Parliament is our national report card on progress in achieving Closing the Gap targets in health. Unfortunately, progress has been too slow and our commitment needs to be renewed.

Labor's approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health is built on:

- A commitment to Closing the Gap targets;
- An evidence-based approach to policy and programs that establishes clear targets and accountability mechanisms;
- A commitment to fully implement the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and Implementation Plan, which set out the strategy for meeting those targets;
- An understanding that healthy lives are heavily influenced and determined by the social, cultural and economic determinants of health and easy access to culturally safe health care;
- Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and the importance of cultural competency within the health care system;
- A commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and community controlled health organisations to improve health outcomes, noting the positive impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led health and related services have; and
- A commitment to address systemic racism and ensure the entire health system is equipped to provide safe, culturally responsive and effective health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

Labor will emphasise:

- The social and cultural determinants of health;
- Building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research, evidence, translation, evaluation and monitoring capability for stronger impact;
- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership;
- System-wide changes that embed cultural safety and responsiveness across the health system and remove racism and other structural barriers to health access and outcomes;
- Implementing programs that underpin a healthy start to life;

- Preventive health, by addressing the social, economic, environmental and cultural determinants as well as specifically addressing common risk factors such as tobacco use, alcohol misuse, poor diet and physical inactivity, including amongst young children;
- The impact of incarceration on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, including for the families of those incarcerated;
- Mental health and wellbeing, with specific regard to addressing the unacceptable tragedy of suicide, particularly amongst young people;
- Addressing diseases with a high prevalence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, such as vision loss, otitis media, acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease, as well as emerging diseases such as HIV and sexually transmitted infections;
- Cultural safety within the health workforce, increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health care professionals, and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations; and
- Improving coordination between public, private and non-government health care providers, including Primary Health Networks and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services.