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**Alliance Backs COAG Call Out on Closing the Gap**

The National Rural Health Alliance – the peak advocacy body representing the health needs of 7 million Australians – is joining the 13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies that have written to Council of Australian Governments (COAG) First Ministers seeking a full partnership approach between Indigenous people and governments to refresh the Closing the Gap strategy.

The partnership and a call to refresh the Closing the Gap process, will be put to COAG for consideration in Adelaide on 12 December, but they are being proposed without the full engagement and endorsement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies.

The letter to First Ministers, signed by 13 peak Indigenous bodies, seeks a meeting with COAG representatives to determine a framework for reaching agreement on a refreshed Closing the Gap strategy.

The letter calls on the First Ministers to use COAG to instead endorse a formal partnership mechanism be included in the Closing the Gap refreshed framework.

Alliance Chief Executive Officer Mark Diamond said a fully inclusive Closing the Gap partnership is fundamental to the success of refreshing the Closing the Gap Strategy and needed to be agreed by all levels of government.

“If there is one lesson that we must have learnt by now, it is that the best health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will only be achieved through the full involvement of Indigenous people in determining what action is required and how it should be implemented,” Mr Diamond said.

“This is a crucial step. It is essential that we don’t repeat the mistakes of the past – the peak bodies need to be involved otherwise the gap will not close.

“COAG has made a commitment to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and a genuine partnership model is the only way to do it.”

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