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## ***MEDIA RELEASE***

### **Catherine Freeman and Ian Thorpe urge Australia to close the gap on Indigenous health**

Olympic champions Catherine Freeman and Ian Thorpe returned to Sydney's Telstra Stadium today to launch Australia's largest ever campaign to improve Indigenous health.

Catherine and Ian became the first people to sign the online Sea of Hands developed by Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR).

They joined more than forty Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations to urge the Federal, State and Territory governments to commit to closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said the online Sea of Hands would enable all Australians to demonstrate their support for the campaign and urge action from politicians.

"We are asking all governments to commit to the deadlines proposed by Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma to close the Indigenous life expectancy gap within a generation," Mr Highland said.

"These deadlines – 10 years for achieving equal access to primary health care and health infrastructure and 25 years for achieving equality of health status and life expectation – are realistic and achievable. But only if we act now."

Mr Highland said the lack of an agreed time frame has allowed the national scandal of Aboriginal health to fester for far too long.

"These commitments can't be an empty promise. They must be accompanied by measurable action plans that are properly funded."

"We are asking the Prime Minister, Premiers and Chief Ministers to place Indigenous health and the achievement of these deadlines at the top of the COAG Agenda," he said.

Mr Highland said the online Sea of Hands would enable people to upload a personalised hand image with their details on the site.

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They will also be able to simultaneously send a message to politicians asking them to commit to Commissioner Calma's deadlines.

"Once you've uploaded your hand you'll be able to send an email via the site to friends and colleagues inviting them to participate," Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said that as more people join the campaign the Sea of Hands will increase in size and density. People will be able to scroll over the site and see their own hand and those of thousands of others.

"ANTaR hopes millions of people will sign up to the virtual Sea of Hands to show politicians that the community expects action on Indigenous health," Mr Highland said.

Broadcaster, Jeff McMullen, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Chairperson, Henry Councillor joined Catherine and Ian in launching the campaign.

On average, an Indigenous child born in 2007 will still live for 17 years less than other Australian children.

Although Indigenous infant mortality has improved since the 1970s, it is still over three times that of the total Australian population. Indigenous children are almost five times as likely to die before the age of five as other children.

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