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## **Indigenous Social Justice Commissioner Reports: Governments must listen and act**

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) has urged all Australian governments – state and federal to adopt the deadlines for ending Indigenous health inequality recommended by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Tom Calma, in his Annual Reports issued today.

ANTaR National Spokesperson, Dr David Cooper, said the deadlines proposed by the Commissioner – 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 – were realistic and achievable.

“It’s shocking to think it would take a quarter of a century to lift the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the level enjoyed by other Australians. However, the situation has been so bad for so long that only a major, long term national effort of the kind proposed by Commissioner Calma will ensure success,” Dr Cooper said.

“The lack of an agreed time frame has allowed the national scandal of Aboriginal health to fester for far too long. We must put a deadline on ending this appalling situation and governments have to be called into account so that they meet it,” he said.

Dr Cooper said that improved cooperation between Federal, State and Territory Governments provided an unparalleled opportunity to seriously tackle Aboriginal health problems.

“The Commissioner is right to commend recent improvements in whole of government coordination. But this hard work will be wasted unless it’s accompanied by significant additional investment,” Dr Cooper said.

Dr Cooper said there was currently a \$400 million annual shortfall in Indigenous health spending.

“The only way Governments will be able to meet the challenge issued by Commissioner Calma is if they finally match their rhetoric with resources,” he said.

Dr Cooper urged the Federal Government to act on the Commissioner’s recommendations across other key areas of Indigenous policy including:

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**Shared Responsibility Agreements.** “ANTaR has been critical of these from the start. The Commissioners’ comments about the lack of transparency, Indigenous input, government accountability and sufficient benchmarks and targets have confirmed our concerns about this program,” Dr Cooper said.

**Lack of Indigenous Representation.** “The Commissioner has pointed to significant gaps in Indigenous representation at local, regional and national levels. This is compounded by the exodus of experienced Indigenous officers from the Australian Public Service. This has to be turned around so that Indigenous people can once again have a proper say in decisions affecting their lives,” Dr Cooper said.

**Indigenous land leasing.** “The Commissioner considers that converting Indigenous lands under communal title to freehold or leasehold title breaches Australia’s human rights obligations and will not lead to improved outcomes for Indigenous people. The Government should abandon its individual leasehold proposal and consider the alternative strategies proposed to increase Aboriginal home ownership,” Dr Cooper said.

Dr Cooper said the Commissioner’s Reports should be read and acted upon by all Federal and State Ministers, their Shadows and Department heads.

“The reports make disturbing reading, but they also propose a positive way forward. It’s now up to the community to urge our politicians to act on their recommendations,” he said.

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