



MEDIA RELEASE

Embargoed to 0001 AEDT February 20, 2024

Closing the Gap report is a wake-up call

A new report into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing must be the starting point for renewed action.

Australian Catholics are being encouraged to reflect upon the implications of last week's Productivity Commission Report on the Closing the Gap agreement.

In 2020, all Australian governments committed to 16 targets to tackle Aboriginal disadvantage, by improving outcomes for First Nations peoples.

The previous Closing the Gap scheme had largely failed in its aims across successive years.

The latest report has found that improvement will continue to fail without fundamental changes, adding that successive governments have "failed to fully grasp" the challenges.

It calls for urgent changes to rescue the landmark agreement, accusing the federal government of "weak" action on key areas, not fulfilling its promises and a "disregard" for the suggestions of First Nations communities.

It said that efforts to eliminate institutional racism in areas such as justice and health have "received little effort".

In his first major speech on Aboriginal affairs since the defeat of the Voice to parliament referendum last October, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese highlighted four key measures in the report that were getting worse: small children were failing to thrive; more children were now in out-of-home care; more adults were in prison; and the number of suicides had increased.

The report found that just four of 19 socioeconomic outcomes for Aboriginal Australians were on track to meet their targets, while 11 of 19 were improving.

Four measures – Aboriginal Australians' access to secure and affordable housing, young people being engaged in employment or education, people enjoying long and healthy lives, and babies being born healthy and strong – were found to have improved but were not on track.

In response to the report, Bishop Charles Gauci - chair of the Australian Catholic Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders - emphasised the pressing need for Australian Catholics to collaborate with their First Nations counterparts to achieve tangible improvements in their lives.

"As a Church, we are called to illuminate and enrich Australian society, particularly in the realm of Indigenous affairs," Bishop Gauci said.

"Now more than ever, we must unite, deliberate, and take meaningful action."

He underscored the importance of Catholic institutions in fostering holistic well-being for all First Nations people.

"This moment urges us to contemplate how our Church entities can better support the health and prosperity of Indigenous communities," Bishop Gauci said.

Bishop Gauci urged ongoing reflection and engagement, guided by the wisdom of the Holy Spirit, to ensure a more inclusive and supportive future for First Nations peoples.

Contact:

Greg Baynie, Executive Secretary
Bishops Commission for Relations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
Tel: 02 6201 9865 Email: Greg.Baynie@catholic.org.au

FULL STORY

<https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/albanese-commits-to-treaty-and-truth-telling-as-indigenous-children-fail-to-thrive-20240213-p5f4lg.html>