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NEW CLOSING THE GAP AGREEMENT A CHANCE FOR CHANGE

The historic National Agreement on Closing the Gap has the potential to be a gamechanger in improving health and life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, AMA President, Dr Tony Bartone, said today.

“Each year for the past decade, we have seen disappointing progress in the Prime Minister’s annual report on Closing the Gap,” Dr Bartone said.

“This new National Agreement presents an opportunity for governments to drive real change, in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“The AMA is cautiously optimistic that governments will hold up their end of the bargain and fully implement the actions under this new Agreement.

“Yet best intentions will not work without sustainable, guaranteed funding for programs and services. No new funding was announced, yet funding is key to meeting these new targets.

“In considering the detail of specific targets, increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies with a healthy birthweight to 91 per cent is one of the best ways to ensure a best start to a long life. Doing so requires new commitment to maternal health services.

“Reducing the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults held in incarceration by at least 15 per cent could have been assisted by Attorneys General this very week agreeing to lift the age of criminal responsibility from 10 to 14 years. I don’t know why they failed to act.

“However, the commitment to reducing institutional racism in mainstream organisations is one the AMA wholeheartedly endorses. The AMA will do its bit to tackle and rid the health system of all forms of discrimination.

“With the targets principally developed by a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, they are set up for best possible success.

“Yet without needs-based funding, the health and life expectancy gaps will remain wide and intractable.

“We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have better health and life outcomes when they have a say over their lives and the policies and programs that affect them.

“The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and the new way of governments working in close partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is vital for us to see demonstrable improvements in health and wellbeing.”

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