



# Federal Election 2025

**Reconciliation Australia**

**Leading towards a reconciled future: 2025 and beyond**



## Walking and working together

The next Federal Parliament will be faced with significant challenges as Australians battle a cost-of-living crisis and the impact of international uncertainty and political upheaval.

Reconciliation provides a strong foundation for a unified society.

Our work shows the majority of Australians support reconciliation and expect governments to act.

Reconciliation has always had multi-party support, and the next Federal Government, working across the parliament, must place the key tenets of reconciliation at the heart of its work. It must show determined leadership in Australia's reconciliation journey.

The incoming government must ensure this journey is framed by unity and strength, not division and hesitancy.

Inflammatory commentary and behaviour – especially during election campaigns – fuels racism, distress and disengagement.

Now more than ever we must all commit to working together to build a socially cohesive and economically strong nation for all Australians.

The 2025 National Reconciliation Week theme, *Bridging Now to Next* urges all Australians to step forward together.

*Bridging Now to Next* draws on the ongoing connection between past, present and future and reflects the unrelenting efforts by First Nations and non-Indigenous allies to achieve reconciliation, self-determination and justice.

The resolve to continue that journey towards a reconciled Australia and justice for First Nations peoples is unstoppable.

The next Federal Government must continue to take steps to ensure the full and equitable participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the economic, social and cultural life of Australia.

Above all, Government policies must reflect the reality that First Nations peoples and communities know best what works and what the solutions are.

The incoming government must enable conditions for self-determination and uphold the unique rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as outlined in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to which Australia is a signatory.

The heavy lifting of reconciliation must be done in genuine partnership, the work should not be shouldered by First Nations peoples, communities and organisations.

Together we can create a nation built on unity, justice and respectful relationships as we bridge now to next.

## Six Foundational Actions: Bridging Now to Next

Reconciliation Australia believes there are six foundational action areas, linked to priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, that the Federal Government must take into the next term to set our course towards a reconciled nation that benefits all Australians:

PAST	<p><b>Don't walk away from our history   Priority Reform 1</b> Establishment of and support for a Makarrata Commission to drive an effective model of national truth-telling.</p>
NOW	<p><b>Improved health outcomes   Priority Reform 2</b> Further and continual investment in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) - an effective and proven model of health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p> <p><b>Support for anti-racism action   Priority Reforms 2 &amp; 3</b> Overcoming racism must be a national priority to close the gaps in health, education, employment and justice.</p> <p>Fully fund the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework and provide ongoing investment in anti-racism education and racism prevention measures through all levels of society.</p>
NEXT	<p><b>Invest in future generations   Priority Reform 2</b> Support a new funding model for Aboriginal community-controlled early education and care to help close the gap by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years.</p> <p>Invest in the future of Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali program.</p> <p><b>Ensure just and equitable futures   Priority Reform 2</b> Invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services to ensure equitable access to culturally safe and appropriate legal support (Targets 10 and 11).</p> <p>Prioritise the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by implementing UNDRIP fully at the federal level.</p> <p><b>Economic futures   Priority Reform 3</b> Governments must support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' aspirations for economic prosperity, and actively develop economic opportunities for First Nations people and businesses through a national macroeconomic development policy to support and encourage growth across all sectors.</p>

## Setting Our Course: Principles for foundational actions

### PAST

#### Don't walk away from our history

The imperatives outlined in the Uluru Statement from the Heart remain unchanged and need to be addressed.

Specifically, we call for the establishment of a Makarrata Commission to oversee a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations peoples and truth-telling about our history.

Alongside the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap, Makarrata will build a fair and honest relationship with government, and a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children based on justice and self-determination, by:

- recording the history of Indigenous peoples
- preserving the culture of Indigenous peoples
- enhancing Indigenous aspirations to take responsibility for their own communities
- actively supporting commercial aspirations for Indigenous peoples
- concluding agreements between governments and Indigenous peoples that address the four criteria above.

The level of community support for truth-telling is the foundation stone upon which we can build reconciliation, and progress in the education system to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Listening to the voices of First Nations peoples and providing opportunities for all Australians to learn from the vast knowledge and experiences which First Nations people possess, will ensure the best outcomes for this nation.

Truth-telling does not guarantee reconciliation, but meaningful reconciliation cannot occur without it.

## **NOW**

### **Improved health outcomes**

The incoming Federal Government must fulfil its obligations under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to support the delivery of improved outcomes across critical health and wellbeing indicators for First Nations peoples.

An expanding body of evidence, both nationally and internationally, clearly shows that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, people and organisations are best placed to provide solutions to meet their own needs. Community-controlled organisations and initiatives are powerful instruments for self-determination, giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and peoples meaningful control over their own lives and cultural wellbeing.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) deliver culturally safe and effective outcomes and are more efficient and cost effective than mainstream health services for First Nations peoples.

Sustainable and ongoing investment in ACCHOs will support thousands of jobs in hundreds of local economies in which ACCHOs run clinics and work towards closing the health gap.

### **Support for anti-racism action**

The pervasive problem of racism in Australia requires a strong commitment to anti-racism initiatives that address the systemic, structural and institutional racism that impacts the everyday lives and outcomes of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experiences of racism remain consistently and unacceptably high. Australian Reconciliation Barometer data shows an increase in racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the last decade.

To close the gaps in health, education, employment and justice, overcoming racism must be a national priority at community, structural and systems levels. That must be backed by effective institutional and legislative measures and supported by public education.

Governments must fully invest in the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework, as a key established mechanism to address systemic racism in Australia. Strengthening protections against racial discrimination and sustainably resourcing the National Anti-Racism Framework will provide critical mechanisms to address and prevent racism.

## **NEXT**

### **Investment for the future – education**

- Support in the early years

In a just, equitable and reconciled Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Indigenous children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background.

Without educational opportunities, the health, wellbeing and potential of a child is greatly diminished. Investment in education to increase human capital from an early age has social benefits for individuals, communities and regions.

The Federal Government must invest in a new and sustainable funding model for Aboriginal community-controlled early education and care to help close the gap by ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education. Investment must extend beyond this to ensure that all mainstream early childhood education and care services provide culturally responsive and safe learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families.

- Investing in reconciliation in education

In the 2019 Mparntwe Declaration, Australian governments recommitted to the importance of reconciliation and to ensuring that all students learn about the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. The Federal Government must realise goal 2 of the declaration that:

“Australian Governments commit to working in collaboration with the education community to support all young Australians to become...active and informed members of the community...who possess the knowledge, skills and understanding to contribute to, and benefit from, reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians”.

Schools and early learning services are a critical driver of the intergenerational change process. Reconciliation is a professional responsibility for all educational leaders and institutions across the country, regardless of where a school is located or how many First Nations families are enrolled.

We call on the Federal Government to invest in the future of Reconciliation Australia's Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education program as part of its Mparntwe Declaration commitment and to promote social cohesion in our communities.

Narragunnawali – now in its tenth year – has connected 200,000 teachers and educators with professional learning resources, and 2,500 schools and early learning services have a published Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The program has a strong track record and provides the tools and resources required to support teachers, educators and school leaders to confidently champion reconciliation.

### **Ensure just and equitable futures**

- Self-determination and UNDRIP

Self-determination must be at the heart of addressing issues of inequality, systemic racism, and instances where the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are ignored, denied, or reduced. It is a necessary pre-requisite to closing the social and economic gaps in outcomes.

The United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is becoming more significant in how sectors understand and articulate their responsibilities to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

As a signatory to the UNDRIP, the Australian Government must prioritise the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by ensuring its full implementation at the federal level.

Reconciliation Australia's RAP program's framework can be used to guide the work on embedding the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the day-to-day functioning of organisations.

A key requirement of the RAP framework is that organisations commit to actions that increase knowledge of First Nations histories, cultures, rights and interests both in the workplace and beyond.

The application of UNDRIP is becoming visible in the operating practices of organisations across diverse sectors. Organisations with RAPs are increasingly going beyond the minimum commitments by applying UNDRIP to their operating practices, to become vehicles for significant social and economic change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

As well as implementing UNDRIP fully at the federal level, the government must support mechanisms such as the Reconciliation Action Plan program that can promote and encourage civil society and corporate organisations to ensure their practices are compliant with the UNDRIP.

- Aboriginal Legal Services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise 3.8% of the total Australian population yet are 32% of the adult prison population. While state and federal governments have agreed to reduce rates of incarceration by 15% by 2031, incarceration rates have increased by 12% in one year, and 20% since 2019.

Aboriginal legal services are advocates and protectors of the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Their work offers community-driven solutions to Closing the Gap Targets 10 and 11.

Adequate investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander legal services is essential to ensure equitable access to culturally safe and appropriate legal services. Current funding for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (NATSILS) is insufficient to meet community needs despite National Partnership Agreement commitments.

Investment in housing, healthcare, education and employment, and funding for evidence-based, community-led solutions is part of addressing the underlying factors driving over-incarceration.

This investment will contribute to reducing First Nations youth contact with police and the criminal justice system which is imperative to closing the justice gap.

The Federal Government must commit to providing ongoing needs-based funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services to address the increasing legal need in First Nations communities, and further invest in wrap-around services that address underlying factors driving over-incarceration.

## Economic futures

Strong economic participation and a prosperous self-reliant Indigenous business sector are key First Nations' aspirations to advance equity and equality. A thriving, diverse Indigenous business sector benefits all elements of Australian society through the significant cultural, social, environmental and economic contribution.

A new report from the Coalition of Peaks, *Informing a Partnership on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Economic Development*, warns that a lack of real partnership with First Nations communities in economic policy continues to disadvantage First Nations businesses, and leave young Indigenous people with no clear pathways to economic security.

Government, corporate and social sectors must actively promote and develop economic opportunities for First Nations peoples and businesses through participation in reconciliation and supporting the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, and under the direction of a macroeconomic policy framework.

The next Federal Government must sustainably support the economic prosperity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and actively develop economic opportunities for First Nations people and businesses, to benefit communities and the Australian economy.

The Indigenous Procurement Policy has driven economic outcomes through the increased growth of Indigenous businesses to meet the demands of federal government departments. Supply Nation's Indigenous Business Direct database now lists more than 5,000 verified Indigenous businesses.

## RAP Impact 2024 by the numbers

- **3,300 Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) partner organisations** have collectively procured over **\$4.8 billion in goods and services** from Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander owned businesses.
- **5.6 million** people worked or studied in an organisation with a RAP.
- **75,054 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were employed** by an organisation with a RAP.