

**Extracts from
COUNCIL OF AUSTRALIAN GOVERNMENTS MEETING**

PERTH

2 October 2008

COMMUNIQUE

Preamble

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) held its 23rd meeting today in Perth. The Prime Minister, Premiers, the Chief Minister of the Northern Territory and the President of the Australian Local Government Association, were joined by Commonwealth, State and Northern Territory Treasurers. Australian Capital Territory (ACT) officials attended as observers against the background of the forthcoming ACT election.

Further tangible steps were taken in the course of the meeting to advance COAG's reform agenda to boost productivity, increase workforce participation and mobility and deliver better services to the community. The reform agenda also contributes to the broader goals of social inclusion, closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage and environmental sustainability.

COAG agreed that the present unprecedented upheaval in global financial markets and renewed international scrutiny of their regulation underlines the importance of pressing forward with the COAG reform agenda to enhance the productive capacity and flexibility of the Australian economy. Building on its agreement in July 2008, COAG endorsed an implementation plan to strengthen the Australian financial services and credit regulation framework.

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Closing the Gap for Indigenous Australians

COAG has agreed to six ambitious targets for closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians across urban, rural and remote areas:

- to close the gap in life expectancy within a generation;
- to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade;
- to ensure all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities have access to early childhood education within five years;
- to halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for Indigenous children within a decade;
- to halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates by 2020; and
- to halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

Today COAG reaffirmed the national importance of closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and agreed to hold a dedicated meeting in 2009 to:

- agree between all governments, a national strategy for achieving the six COAG Closing the Gap targets;
- provide a formal opportunity for exchange between jurisdictions of programs and initiatives that are working successfully to advance the areas covered by the Closing the Gap targets; and
- maximise the contribution that private and community sector initiatives in education, employment, health and housing can make to the success of the overall strategy.

Indigenous Early Childhood Development

In a further demonstration of all governments' commitment to sustained engagement and effort in achieving COAG's Closing the Gap targets for Indigenous people, leaders signed COAG's first National Partnership (NP) covering Indigenous Early Childhood Development. This follows in-principle agreement at the July 2008 COAG meeting to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years, with an initial focus from birth to three years. Bilateral plans for implementing the reforms have been developed between each jurisdiction and the Commonwealth.

Through the agreement, the Commonwealth and the States and Territories will work together to improve the early childhood outcomes of Indigenous children by addressing the high levels of disadvantage they currently experience to give them the best start in life. The NP comprises \$564 million of joint funding over six years to address the needs of Indigenous children in their early years. As part of the initiative, 35 Children and Family Centres are to be established across Australia to deliver integrated services that offer early learning, child care and family support programs. The funding will also increase access to ante-natal care, teenage reproductive and sexual health services, and child and maternal health services.

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Next Meeting

COAG will hold its next meeting in Canberra on 17 November 2008.