



## MEDIA RELEASE

### **Closing the gap - actions must speak louder than words**

Children's Ground are deeply concerned by the Australian Government's announcement that nationally, only 5 of the 19 Closing the Gap targets are on track and 4 are worsening.

In the Northern Territory, 8 targets are worsening.

This announcement highlights governments stubborn reluctance to step away from business-as-usual and genuinely engage with grassroots, community-led and owned solutions.

In the 16 years since the statement of intent for Closing the Gap was signed, federal, state and territory governments are failing to achieve critical reform needed for First Nations people to live with basic dignity. On this current trajectory, the Closing the Gap Policy will broadly fail within its timeframe of achieving outcomes by 2030/31.

If Closing the Gap was a business, it would be broke. Our people are a captive audience who rely on government investment in communities. If this isn't done right, as we see with the current results, they suffer the harsh realities.

In 2024 the Productivity Commission's review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap stated that progress is unlikely unless government organisations fundamentally rethink their systems, culture and ways of working.

While the government procrastinates, First Nations children aren't meeting early development targets, they continue to be taken away from families and held in out-of-home care, and our people continue to be incarcerated, our cultures and languages are under threat and the rates of suicide grow.

The status-quo is failing First Nations people. It has to change.

At Children's Ground we are working directly with communities and local leadership to drive change. We have recognised evidence that community-led approaches are achieving tangible results against Closing the Gap targets where government is failing.

Communities leading Children's Ground have seen a drastic increase of the number of children engaged in early childhood learning, growing from 14% to 68% within 3 years. Across the same

period, the number of children 0-8 years old engaged in nutrition education nearly doubled, with a 98% increase.

Employment of local First Nations staff continues to increase, with 71% not employed before working at Children's Ground and staff retention growing to 80%.

People want to work, want to lead and want the very best for their children and families.

When First Nations people are placed at the heart of solutions, we see positive results.

While peak bodies play a role, they do not represent the full spectrum of First Nations led solutions. Government must also partner with grassroots organisations to deliver evidence-based, community-led solutions that work.

Now is the time to act – our children cannot wait any longer.

**END**