



Australian Government

A Stronger, Fairer Australia



Information on the government's social inclusion agenda
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Executive Summary

The problem – persistent social disadvantage

Despite the high levels of economic growth recorded in Australia over the last decade, too many Australians are still excluded from the opportunities they need to create the life they want. They can be trapped in a spiral of disadvantage caused by family circumstances, low expectations, community poverty, lack of suitable and affordable housing, illness or discrimination – often leading to early school leaving, long-term unemployment and chronic ill-health.

Some people are at greater risk of multiple disadvantages, such as jobless families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability and mental illness, vulnerable new migrants and refugees, those with low incomes and people experiencing homelessness.

The costs of this social disadvantage are high – to individuals, communities and the nation.

The solution – social inclusion

This problem can be overcome. But we need a new approach.

The old solutions of simply throwing more money at the problem won't work, so this strategy sets out a new approach. We call it social inclusion.

The Australian Government's social inclusion policies recognise that while every person is ultimately responsible for making a go of their lives, not everyone begins at the same starting point and some people strike setbacks or crises during their lives. This strategy aims to give every Australian the help they need to access the opportunities society has to offer.

The emphasis is on supporting individuals and communities to work their way to a better life. Policies and programs are needed that work together to deal with the different problems people face, rather than working on single issues in isolation.



Social inclusion policy operates in three important ways:

- > improving the quality of essential government services particularly in areas like education and training, employment, health and housing;
- > ensuring those services work more effectively in the most disadvantaged communities; and
- > developing partnerships between governments, businesses, not-for-profit organisations and the community and engaging disadvantaged communities to help find solutions to address their particular needs.

Social inclusion principles

Social inclusion policies are based on a number of important principles: building on individual and community strengths; building partnerships with stakeholders; developing services tailored to the needs of communities; early intervention and prevention; joined-up government services; the greater use of evidence to inform innovative policy making; using a locational approach to tackle entrenched poverty; and planning to build future resilience in disadvantaged families and communities.

Early actions

In its first two years the Australian Government has taken a number of actions to tackle social exclusion by: creating fairer workplaces; reforming age pensions; investing in early childhood education and schools;

responding to the global economic downturn with employment, training and stimulus measures to limit its impact on vulnerable people and our economy; reforming higher education to help more students, including disadvantaged students, go to university; and working to strengthen third sector (not for profit and community) organisations.

Importantly, the Government responded to the global economic downturn in a way that supported economic growth, protected jobs and helped affected communities adjust through compacts with retrenched workers, young people and local communities.

Reform priorities

Major reforms are currently being implemented or trialled to tackle the major causes of social exclusion in six priority areas:

1. **targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity:** a new employment services network – Job Services Australia – has been created that provides better support to disadvantaged job seekers including parents in jobless families, new family-friendly workplace rights and support services that help parents prepare to re-enter the workforce. Innovative community-based and family-centred employment projects focused on parents in jobless families will trial wrap-around services aimed at increasing the economic and social participation of jobless families



- 2. improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage:** the Government has developed the first ever National Early Childhood Development Strategy; building at least 35 new Children and Family Centres in areas with high Indigenous populations and high levels of disadvantage; making some welfare payments conditional on meeting the needs of children; making major investments and reforms in the school sector, such as \$1.9 billion for *National Partnerships including a partnership on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities* to improve outcomes in schools serving the most disadvantaged communities; and providing an unprecedented coordinated effort to prevent abuse and neglect through the National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children;
- 3. reducing the incidence of homelessness:** the Government aims to halve overall homelessness and offer supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020 at a cost of \$1.1 billion; it is adding up to 50,000 low-income dwellings into the housing market through the National Rental Affordability Scheme; it is constructing or refurbishing more than 70,000 public housing dwellings; and it is reforming homelessness services, including better linking accommodation and other services to better deal with the causes as well as the effects of homelessness;
- 4. improving outcomes for people living with disability or mental illness and their carers:** the Government is implementing major reforms, including new demand-driven Disability Employment Services, including support for employers to take on people with disability and mental illness; a National Disability Strategy, including investigating the feasibility of a long-term care and support scheme for people with disability, the Fourth National Mental Health Plan and a National Carer Strategy;
- 5. closing the gap for Indigenous Australians:** the Government has adopted a number of ambitious but achievable targets to reduce Indigenous Australians' infant mortality and improve life expectancy, access to early childhood education, literacy and numeracy school attainment and employment levels by 2020. To achieve these targets the Government is providing universal access to preschool for Indigenous four year-olds; establishing 35 new Children and Family Centres in urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations and disadvantage; and increasing the provision of Indigenous maternal and child health services; and

6. breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities: the Government is providing a coordinated response in 20 priority employment regions and 29 remote priority locations, including the employment of Local Employment Coordinators in priority regions to work with business and the community to create job opportunities, improve local services and build long-term community resilience and the appointment of a Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, to drive the implementation of service delivery reforms in remote priority locations. Community and not-for-profit organisations will have a big role to play in implementing the Government's social inclusion priorities at the local level.

Future directions and Implementation

This social inclusion strategy will be implemented in partnership with local communities, relevant third sector organisations and State and Territory governments, with advice from the Social Inclusion Board. The Australian Government will support innovative projects to build new partnerships and test new solutions to enduring problems and monitor the outcomes that these approaches achieve for the disadvantaged in our society. Successful models will be expanded or applied in suitable mainstream services to reach more individuals, families and communities in need.

Where the next steps to tackle particular social inclusion challenges are not yet clear, the Government will investigate new and innovative responses to disadvantage, such as the recently announced inquiry to investigate the feasibility of a no-fault social insurance scheme for people with profound disability, and the new Taskforce on Strengthening Government Service Delivery for Job Seekers to examine new and innovative ways to help job-ready people into employment quickly while using more tailored solutions for the most vulnerable.

Over time, the Government will continue to develop policies designed to make sure that all Australians are able to access the opportunities society has to offer, such as a new cultural diversity policy and a national volunteering strategy.

The social inclusion strategy will have a major emphasis on transparency and accountability to properly monitor all reforms and pilot programs. New indicators will be created to measure progress in reducing social exclusion – including a new Social Inclusion Indicator Framework – with consolidated annual reporting by all relevant Commonwealth departments, and continuing reporting by the Commonwealth, States and Territories through the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) reform process.



1

Towards a stronger and fairer Australia

This new policy statement addresses one of our nation's most pressing issues: how do we make it possible for all Australians to create the sort of rewarding and fulfilling lives we want for everyone? It isn't a simple issue. After all, everyone must succeed in their own way; no-one can tell others what their goals should be and no-one can do the hard work for them.

Some people can overcome almost any obstacle to achieve success and fulfilment, and we all know someone who has battled the odds to make it, whether by studying hard at school, overcoming illness to return to work, establishing a successful business, or simply by being a good parent. We all applaud their hard work and success. But for others the obstacles can be more formidable and may be impossible to overcome without help. Usually – as with disadvantaged children, people with disabilities, or those suffering discrimination – the obstacles are not of their own making. Sometimes whole communities miss out on a fair go. They deserve our help so they can help themselves.

A lot of approaches have been tried and have failed in the past. One thing is for certain: just throwing buckets of money at the problem won't work.

The Australian Government is therefore adopting a fresh new approach. It is based on the simple proposition that while everyone is ultimately responsible for their own life and has a duty to work hard and make a go of it, not everyone starts with the same advantages and some people face setbacks or crises during their lives. If Australia is to remain a fair country, everyone should have similar opportunities so they can aim for their own goals and succeed according to their own talents and abilities.

For most Australians this means the opportunity to participate fully in society and work. For some, such as those with a profound disability, it is the opportunity to enjoy a decent quality of life. For older Australians, it may be the opportunity to live active and dignified lives.

So this policy sets out a new way of helping people lift themselves out of disadvantage or poverty to achieve their goals. We call it social inclusion – making sure that, over time, everyone can access the opportunities our society has to offer.

Creating social inclusion requires a community-wide effort, involving partnerships between individuals, families, communities, the not-for-profit sector, businesses and all levels and branches of government.

We need an approach that invests to develop the capabilities of every person so they can succeed to the best of their abilities. The best ways to do this are through giving people a good education, access to training, help with getting a job, good health care, decent housing, removing discrimination, surrounding them with a supportive and caring community, and – perhaps most importantly of all – giving them the incentive to create a better life for themselves. While the starting point for an inclusive society is good economic policy to create growth and jobs, economic growth alone is not enough.

Financial resources are limited, so help will have to be directed to where it can do the most good. This means improving the quality of essential services like education and training, employment, health, housing and welfare. And it means making sure those services work more effectively in the most disadvantaged communities. Because the needs of every community are different, social inclusion policy can't involve a one-size-fits-all approach; communities themselves must help find the solutions they need through the involvement of local leaders drawing on local experience. Increased bureaucracy is not the answer.

2 Breaking the cycle of disadvantage

While Australia has an inclusive society by international standards, too many of our people are still excluded from the mainstream. They are caught in a spiral of disadvantage from which they find it difficult to break free, no matter how hard they struggle.

The obstacles they face are all-too-familiar: coming from a jobless family; having low income due to unemployment; not having an opportunity to participate in early childhood education like pre-school or kindergarten; not completing education; suffering from poor health and accidents; facing discrimination; feeling unsafe at home; or living in a community with high rates of unemployment.

These problems can reinforce each other, creating a vicious cycle that undermines people's attempts to create a better life. Multiple problems are more prevalent among particularly vulnerable groups of Australians, including single parents, public housing tenants, jobless families, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with disability and mental illness, vulnerable new migrants and refugees, those with low incomes and people experiencing homelessness. A small number of highly vulnerable neighbourhoods or regions also tend to face higher levels of multiple problems.

Research¹ found that the most disadvantaged 3 per cent of localities across the country have more than twice their share of long term unemployment, disability support, criminal convictions and imprisonment.

The statistics are revealing about the unequal circumstances faced by people in these groups or neighbourhoods:

- > **Increased likelihood of unemployment:** In 2008, 10% of local areas² had unemployment rates of 1.5% or lower, while 10% had unemployment rates of 6.9% or higher³. Indigenous Australians are only two-thirds as likely to have a job as other Australians.⁴
- > **Early school leaving:** people who do not have a Year 12 education, or an equivalent non-school qualification, are 18 per cent less likely to be in the workforce than people who do. If they are in the workforce, they are 1.6 times more likely to be unemployed.⁵ Students from families with the highest income and education are three times more likely to go to university than those from families with the lowest income and education.⁶
- > **Poorer health:** children born in the most disadvantaged areas can expect to live, on average, two to four years less than children born in the least disadvantaged areas.⁷ The gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians is estimated to be 9.7 years (for women) and 11.5 years (for men)⁸. People with mental illness have an estimated 2.5 times higher mortality than the general population.⁹
- > **Fewer friends to help out:** living in disadvantaged locations Australians tend to have access to fewer sources of support in times of crisis.¹⁰
- > **Less access to the internet:** low income households are only half as likely as other households to have access to the internet at home – an increasingly important factor in a child’s education and an adult’s employment prospects.¹¹

3 The costs and consequences of social exclusion

The costs of social exclusion to our nation are high. Social disadvantage results in costs to:

- > the budget – through costs in health care, welfare and justice;
- > the economy – from lower workforce participation and productivity;
- > the community – through higher crime rates and lower levels of social capital; and
- > individuals and families – through financial hardship, social and physical isolation, chronic or persistent health problems, family breakdown, and missed opportunities.



4

The way forward – a framework for policy

The good news is the effects of social exclusion can be overcome. Disadvantage is not destiny. People can work their way back to a better life. The right policies from government can help people to help themselves.

The Australian Government's new social inclusion strategy is part of a fresh approach to building a stronger and fairer Australia.

It is built on five pillars:

1. **Economic growth:** maintaining a strong, internationally competitive economy to secure jobs for the future and create opportunity for all.
2. **Equitable social policy:** creating the opportunities and resources that every Australian needs to participate in the economy and community life through education, skills training, employment strategies, incentives for entering the workforce, and providing adequate income support when people need it.
3. **Quality services:** delivering world-class services that meet the needs of every Australian in crucial areas like education and training, health, housing and social support, and targeting extra support to the communities where it can do the most good, most notably disadvantaged Indigenous communities.
4. **Strong families and communities:** supporting families and building strong and cohesive communities through better family services that build capabilities and by improving community infrastructure.
5. **Partnership for change:** building new and innovative partnerships with all sectors of the economy by creating joined-up government and getting government, businesses and not-for-profit organisations working together to build stronger communities and create new opportunities for disadvantaged people.

In its first two years, the Government has taken strong, early and decisive action across all of these five areas, including:

- > responding to the global economic downturn to support employment, build skills and modernise important community infrastructure;
- > abolishing Work Choices and replacing it with a *Fair Work Act*;
- > reforming the pension system to ensure a decent standard of living for all Australians;
- > investing in early childhood education and schools;
- > starting work on a national health reform plan with the states and territories;
- > reforming higher education to increase the number of young Australians, including those from disadvantaged backgrounds, who can get a diploma or degree;
- > announcing reforms to the delivery of human services through Centrelink, Medicare, the Child Support Agency, CRS Australia and Australian Hearing;
- > providing tax relief to working families including increasing the low-income tax offset;
- > establishing a new federal financial relationship with the states and territories; and
- > developing a compact with the not-for-profit and community sector.

5

Social Inclusion principles and priorities

The Australian Government, assisted by the Social Inclusion Board, has developed a set of principles to guide governments, businesses, community organisations and individuals as they formulate social inclusion programs.

Principles for social inclusion in Australia

1. Building on individual and community strengths:

Making the most of people's strengths, including those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people from other cultures.

2. Building partnerships with key stakeholders:

Getting governments, organisations and communities working together to get the best results for people in need.

3. Developing tailored services:

Getting services working together in new and flexible ways to meet each person's different needs – recognizing that some people need additional specialist help.

4. Giving a high priority to early intervention and prevention: Heading off problems by understanding the root causes and intervening early.

5. Building joined-up services and whole of government solutions: Getting different parts and different levels of government to work together in new and flexible ways to get better outcomes and services for people in need.

6. Using evidence and integrated data to inform policy:

Finding out which programs and services work well and why – to share good ideas, keep making improvements and put effort into programs that work.

7. Using locational approaches: Working in places with high levels of disadvantage – to reach the people most in need and to understand how their different problems are connected.

8. Planning for sustainability: Doing things that will help people and communities deal better with problems in the future, as well as solving the problems they face now.

The Government has focused its initial efforts on six social inclusion priority areas:

1. targeting the number of jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity;
2. improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage;
3. reducing the incidence of homelessness;
4. improving outcomes for people living with disability or mental illness and their carers;
5. closing the gap for Indigenous Australians; and
6. breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities.

Targeting jobless families with children to increase work opportunities, improve parenting and build capacity

Having at least one parent with a job helps to give children a positive start in life – it is a valuable source of economic security, family stability and positive role modelling.

Reducing the numbers of jobless families remains a huge challenge. In October 2009 there were 235,000 Australian families with children under the age of 16 years old where the parents had not had a job for at least a year. 126,000 of these had been jobless for at least the last 3 years. 84 per cent of these families were headed by single parents, and most were mothers.¹² Many jobless single parents also left school without a qualification and have a child or children under 5 years old.¹³

Children with parents on long term income support are more likely to leave school early, suffer from poorer health and get into trouble with the law – all of which increases their own risk of unemployment in adulthood.¹⁴ But this cycle can be broken.

To help parents in jobless families move into employment, it is important to deal with the needs of the whole family, build parents' skills through education and training and overcome practical barriers to work, such as lack of affordable child care or transport. Many parents choose to care for their children at home through the early years, with beneficial outcomes. Some parents, including some single mothers, may need extra support to prepare to re-enter the work force as their children grow up.

In addition to the measures in its economic stimulus packages, the Government is implementing a number of major policy changes and policy trials aimed at reducing long-term unemployment. These include:

- > Job Services Australia – a new employment services network that provides flexible and tailored support to job seekers;
- > extra support for parents to return to the workforce – through the extension of Jobs, Education and Training Child Care fee assistance, increasing the Child Care Rebate, the introduction of Paid Parental Leave and new flexible participation requirements to enable unemployed parents to retrain or start their own business while balancing their caring responsibilities; and
- > compacts – targeting assistance to retrenched workers and young people to keep them connected to training and work, and working in partnership with vulnerable communities.

Improving the life chances of children at greatest risk of long term disadvantage

Too many Australian children are exposed to abuse or neglect, live in families experiencing homelessness or family violence, are caring for parents or siblings, or don't have the resources they need to learn and grow. These experiences in childhood can have lifelong effects.

High quality early childhood development services for the most disadvantaged babies and children can improve their outcomes and help to break the cycle of disadvantage.

There are a number of challenges for the social inclusion agenda to address:

- > to increase the positive influences on children's development by empowering parents and carers to help their children to learn and grow;
- > to improve parenting skills and keep families together where possible; and
- > to improve early childhood development and education services in the most disadvantaged communities.

To help children grow and learn, the Council of Australian Governments has developed the first ever *National Early Childhood Development Strategy*. The Strategy aims to create an early childhood development system that addresses the full extent of children's most important needs. Some of the current commitments include:

- > improving access to and uptake of antenatal care and maternal and child health services;
- > guaranteeing access to 15 hours a week of play-based early childhood education (such as through preschool or kindergarten) for 40 weeks in the year before full-time school;
- > establishing at least 35 new Children and Family Centres in urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations and high levels of disadvantage to deliver a range of integrated services including early learning, child care and family support programs;
- > introducing a National Quality Framework with improved standards, including staff-to-child ratios and staff qualifications, to raise the quality of early childhood education and care for the more than one million children attending child care centres and preschools;
- > undertaking the first ever national rollout of the Australian Early Development Index to help governments and communities pinpoint the extra services, resources and supports that young children need;

- > funding the Home Interaction Program for Parents and Youngsters, a home-based parenting and early childhood enrichment program that empowers parents and carers in disadvantaged families to be their child's first teacher; and
- > agreeing a National Framework for Protecting Australia's Children – an unprecedented coordinated effort with the States and Territories to prevent abuse and neglect.

The Australian Government also supports families through one of the most targeted and redistributive tax and transfer systems in the OECD. This includes Family Tax Benefits, the Child Care Benefit, the Child Care Rebate and income support payments such as the Parenting Payment. These payments help children grow up within families with a sufficient level of income to care for them.

To ensure that income support and welfare payments benefit children, the Government is trialling new ways to encourage parents to build family capability and support their children's development. This includes making some forms of welfare payment dependent on meeting certain conditions, such as spending the money on rent, bills and nutritious food and ensuring children attend school.

While early childhood development is one of the best ways to prevent disadvantage, a fair nation doesn't give up on those in need. Positive help must therefore continue right through a child's school and post-compulsory education years to help them make a good transition to adulthood.

Schools have a crucial role to play in reducing social exclusion. The Government is making major investments and reforms to support every school with new buildings, improvements to teacher quality and a new national curriculum. The Government's new transparency agenda will drive further quality improvements by making schools accountable for their performance.

Further investments through the *National Partnership Agreement on Low Socio-Economic Status School Communities* will improve outcomes in the most disadvantaged schools. This will provide additional support for struggling students, encourage stronger links between the school and its community, and encourage the best and most highly motivated teachers to teach in the most disadvantaged schools.

To help ensure all young people are healthy and fully equipped to take their place as adults and citizens, the Government is also developing a National Strategy for Young Australians. The strategy will empower young Australians to be active in their communities and will strengthen early intervention programs to help young people in need get their lives back on track.

Reducing the incidence of homelessness

In Australia, around 105,000 people are homeless on any given night – often as a result of problems like family violence, drug and alcohol addiction, mental illness, long-term unemployment and severe housing stress.¹⁵

Because of its catastrophic effects on people's well-being, reducing homelessness is a major objective of social inclusion policy.

In its December 2008 white paper on homelessness, *The Road Home*, the Government adopted the goals of halving overall homelessness and offering supported accommodation to all rough sleepers who seek it by 2020 – at a cost of \$1.1 billion. The White Paper's initiatives include:

- > adding up to 50,000 low-income dwellings into the housing market through the National Rental Affordability Scheme;

- > constructing or refurbishing more than 70,000 public housing dwellings;
- > improving the supply and quality of remote Indigenous housing; and
- > reforming homelessness services through the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness to ensure they better address the wider needs of people who are homeless, including young people, Indigenous people, older people and women dealing with family violence.

New ways of preventing homelessness through early intervention for people at risk are also being implemented and trialled, including:

- > better support through Centrelink Community Engagement Officers (specialist outreach workers) and support for people reliant on Centrelink payments to manage their finances;
- > a policy of 'no exits into homelessness' for people leaving out-of-home care, prison, hospital, mental health and drug and alcohol services;
- > new models of supported housing for people at risk of homelessness, such as *Foyer* and *Common Ground*;
- > the introduction of weekly Centrelink payments to those at risk of homelessness;
- > help for women and children experiencing family violence to stay safely in the family home; and
- > new partnerships, like the HOPE (Home Options and Pathways to Employment) Project, where employment services and homelessness services work together to help homeless job seekers.

Progress towards these goals will be guided and monitored by the Prime Minister's Council on Homelessness, informed by new data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics and the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare.

Improving outcomes for people living with disability or mental illness and their carers

People with disability or mental illness and their carers suffer from some of the highest rates of disadvantage in Australia.

Common causes of this disadvantage include discrimination, isolation, low educational attainment and unemployment. People with disability have a Year 12 completion rate of just 30 per cent and a workforce participation rate of just 53 per cent compared with 49 per cent and 81 per cent respectively for other Australians. People with mental illness (psychological disability) have a labour force participation rate of only 28.2 per cent.¹⁶

With 750,000 Australians now on the Disability Support Pension, reducing the disadvantage of people with disability and mental illness is a national priority.

To guide its response, the Government is currently developing a National Disability Strategy to increase the social, economic and cultural participation of people with disability, to reduce the discrimination they experience and to improve disability support services for families and carers.

A number of important initiatives are now underway or in development, including:

- > the National Disability Strategy, being jointly developed with the states and territories to increase the social and economic participation for people with disability, reduce discrimination and improve support services for families and carers;
- > the commencement in November 2008 of a new National Disability Agreement providing \$5 billion

over five years to states and territories for the provision of specialist disability services;

- > the release in September 2009 of the new National Mental Health and Disability Employment Strategy, incorporating a new demand-driven Disability Employment Service and new incentives and resources to encourage and enable employers to take on people with disability and mental illness;
- > the agreement in September 2009 of a Fourth National Mental Health Plan, focusing on prevention and early intervention, service delivery improvement, and changing community attitudes; and
- > the establishment of a National Carer Strategy, recognition of carers in legislation, and the introduction of a permanent annual supplement of \$600 for carers.

Closing the gap for Indigenous Australians

One of the major aims of social inclusion policy must be to close the gaps in life opportunities between Indigenous and other Australians.

These gaps are wide and unacceptable in a fair society. For instance, compared to other Australians, Indigenous Australians are:

- > up to three times as likely to die in infancy;¹⁷
- > only just over half as likely to complete Year 12 or Certificate II;¹⁸
- > two thirds as likely to be employed;¹⁹
- > fourteen times more likely to be imprisoned;²⁰ and
- > on average expected to live 9.7 (for women) and 11.5 (for men) fewer years.²¹

These statistics are even worse for those living in remote communities.

In response, governments have adopted a *National Integrated Strategy for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Disadvantage*. Its specific targets are to:

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

To make progress towards these targets, the Government, through COAG, has allocated \$4.6 billion in funding for five new national partnerships with the states and territories in the areas of indigenous early childhood, health, housing and economic participation.

Early benefits from these national partnerships will include:

- > reduced housing overcrowding in remote areas through the construction of 4,200 new housing units and the refurbishment of 4,800 more;
- > increased provision of maternal and child health services for Indigenous children and their mothers; and
- > a minimum of 35 Children and Family Centres in urban, regional and remote areas with high Indigenous populations and high levels of disadvantage.

Closing the Gap in Indigenous disadvantage is an opportunity to achieve lasting change for a fairer society.

Breaking the cycle of entrenched and multiple disadvantage in particular neighbourhoods and communities

One priority of the National Action Plan on Social Inclusion, being developed with the states and territories, will be to tackle concentrated disadvantage experienced by many neighbourhoods and communities.

The Government has identified 20 priority employment regions and 29 remote priority locations for a coordinated response. Governments will work together in these regions to design and deliver the most effective coordinated solutions to the problem of concentrated social disadvantage. Local Employment Coordinators are working with business and the community in the 20 priority employment regions to create job opportunities, and suggest innovations to improve mainstream service delivery and build future community resilience. A Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services has been appointed to oversee and monitor improvements to government services and facilities in the 29 identified remote priority locations. Innovation is especially important for finding better ways to deliver government services to small and dispersed communities in remote areas.

Locational disadvantage will also be tackled through better strategic planning of our cities. COAG's Cities Taskforce, along with the Major Cities Unit of Infrastructure Australia, will encourage future urban development that delivers social inclusion by promoting equitable access to education, employment, health, transport and other important services.

Not-for profit and community sector organisations will have a major role to play at the local level. They are at the front line of involving disadvantaged people in finding the solutions and strategies they need to work their way to a better life.

6

Future directions – what next?

The Government will support innovative projects to build new partnerships and test new solutions to enduring problems, such as:

- > new family-centred employment projects that deal with the needs of the whole family to address barriers to employment;
- > innovative community-based employment projects – including over 70 new social enterprises that provide stepping stones to employment;
- > innovative models of housing that support people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness and support them to reconnect with society and become self-reliant;
- > joint work with states and territories in selected locations to improve service design and delivery and develop local solutions to overcome entrenched disadvantage;
- > piloting the Australian Indigenous Minority Supplier Council – a partnership between corporate purchasers and Indigenous business to increase Indigenous business and employment;
- > implementing a new Indigenous Education Action Plan with States and Territories to establish high expectations for Indigenous students and get better outcomes for them from wider education reforms;
- > trialling different models of conditional income support to promote children's welfare; and
- > establishing a National Representative Body, the *National Congress of Australia's First Peoples*, to give Indigenous peoples a voice in decisions that affect them.

The Government will monitor the outcomes that these approaches achieve for those experiencing disadvantage in our society and will work to expand the successful models and apply them to mainstream services to reach more individuals, families and communities in need.

Where the next steps to tackle social inclusion challenges are not yet clear, or new opportunities arise, the Government will investigate new and innovative responses to disadvantage, such as:

- > the *Taskforce for Strengthening Government Service Delivery for Job Seekers*, Taskforce on Strengthening Government Service Delivery for Job Seekers which will report in mid-2010 on new and innovative ways to help job-ready people into employment quickly while utilising more tailored solutions for the most vulnerable.; and
- > the Productivity Commission Inquiry announced in November 2009, which will report back by mid 2011, into ways of improving long-term care and support for people with disability – including the feasibility of a no-fault social insurance scheme for people with profound disability.

To build on the work already started across the social inclusion priorities, the Government will develop policies designed to help all Australians access the opportunities society has to offer. Policy work already under way includes:

- > the development of a national volunteering strategy; and
- > a new cultural diversity policy.

7 Achieving our goals – an implementation strategy

This statement has set out the Government's goals and approach to create a more socially inclusive nation in which people are supported to overcome disadvantage and achieve their goals in life.

To achieve the goals contained in this social inclusion strategy, the Government will:

- > create new collaborative structures, including partnerships with key stakeholders across the government, business and not-for-profit and community sectors;
- > closely monitor the progress of reforms and pilot programs to inform further innovation;
- > set up a framework to regularly measure the state of social inclusion in Australia to determine where progress is being made and where future efforts should be focused; and
- > be publicly accountable by regularly reporting on social inclusion outcomes.

The Government will work closely with the Australian Social Inclusion Board, which was set up in 2008 to bring together wide-ranging expertise on social inclusion. In 2010, the Board's priority will be to provide advice on breaking the cycles of disadvantage.

The Government is also engaging closely with states and territories to develop a collaborative approach to social inclusion. This will be reflected in a *National Action Plan on Social Inclusion* due to be completed in 2010. Collaborative action will focus on children at risk of

disadvantage, disengaged young people, jobless families and disadvantaged locations.

The Third, or not-for-profit, sector is an important and growing partner in our society at the national and local levels. Extensive discussions between the Government and the Third Sector have resulted in a National Compact, a statement of shared principles and aspirations. The next step is to develop action plans that describe how the Government will work with the Third Sector to achieve these joint aspirations. These action plans will address issues surrounding the funding of diverse organisations, reducing red tape and dealing with paid and volunteer workforce issues.

The policies and goals will also be pursued with the support of the Social Inclusion Unit in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, which has been established to help to address social inclusion issues across Australian Government portfolios and support the Australian Social Inclusion Board.

Regional and local partnerships will also have a crucial role to play developing local solutions that help communities help themselves. Recent initiatives to support local and regional collaboration include the establishment of the Australian Council of Local Governments, placement of Local Employment Coordinators in twenty priority employment regions, the appointment of a Coordinator General for Remote Indigenous Services, and the establishment of the Regional Development Australia Network.

In addition to measures already in place to monitor reforms to health, education, housing and social support programs, all Australian Government departments will be required to report annually on their social inclusion activities. This information will be collated by the Social Inclusion Unit to produce an annual consolidated report on progress on social inclusion across the Australian government.

An important implementation task will be the development of an authoritative evidence base on which to base policy. Working with the Australian Social Inclusion Board and other experts, the Government has developed a Social Inclusion Indicator Framework to help us measure the broad levels of social exclusion in Australia in areas such as education, employment, health, housing and social and community engagement, including their concentration in particular population groups.

In future progress in social inclusion will also be monitored through intermediate steps (strategic change indicators), which might include changes in pre-school attendance, the availability of crisis and social housing and welfare receipt among people in the most at-risk groups.

Monitoring these indicators will help to:

- > increase our understanding of the extent and nature of social inclusion in Australia;
- > assess progress in achieving greater inclusion over time; and
- > strengthen accountability and encourage wider debate through public reporting.

All reporting against the social inclusion measurement and reporting framework will be publicly available.

More information

To find out more about the Government's Social Inclusion strategy, see A Stronger and Fairer Australia – National Statement on Social Inclusion in full. The statement can be downloaded or ordered from the www.socialinclusion.gov.au.

Endnotes

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