

MEDIA RELEASE

The Federal Budget will help Close the Gap in health – but more is needed

For immediate release: 15 May 2024

The Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT) today expressed cautious support for last night’s Federal Government Budget 2024-25, but said more needs to be done.

AMSANT CEO John Paterson said: “There are a number of positives in last night’s Federal Budget. However, it failed to deliver a comprehensive commitment to Closing the Gap. It was a missed opportunity put in place the fundamental reforms recommended by the Productivity Commission in their recent [Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#).”

However, Mr Paterson welcomed a number of the budget’s health measures, particularly:

- \$24.6 million to establish a medical school at Charles Darwin University, a measure that AMSANT has been advocating for some time in recognition that medical graduates who train in the Northern Territory are much more likely to stay and practice here,
- \$95 million to support communicable disease control in First Nations communities,
- \$22 million for suicide prevention and mental health,
- \$11 million to expand coverage of the Closing the Gap PBS Co-payment Program to all PBS medicines, and
- \$90 million to implement the recommendations of the Kruk review of the regulation of overseas health practitioners, given the reliance of Aboriginal community controlled health services on these staff.

He continued: “The Budget also confirmed the recent announcement of \$4 billion to improve [housing in remote Northern Territory communities](#) and \$1 billion from the Australian and Northern Territory Governments for [NT public schools](#). Housing and education are very important determinants of health and the previous lack of progress in these areas has held back health improvements for our people. These funds have the potential to be game-changers. But they must be administered effectively, transparently

and with formal Aboriginal oversight to ensure that they are effective. We were also pleased to see investment in a prison to employment program.”

Mr Paterson was critical, however, of the Budget’s failure to increase the rate of JobSeeker .

“JobSeeker payments are entitlements due to all Australian citizens, but the fortnightly payments are well below the poverty line, especially in remote communities where healthy food is prohibitively expensive for many Aboriginal families. In these places, [poverty](#) is increasing, inequality widening, and access to healthy food falling. This is unacceptable in a wealthy country like Australia. The remote allowance as part of Job Seeker goes nowhere near providing for the extra costs associated with living in very remote communities and this allowance is not indexed and has not increased for many years.”

“The budget has also not sought to close the health funding gap for Aboriginal health. Given an increasing burden of chronic complex illness and rising costs, it is imperative that this gap is addressed as soon as possible.”

Mr Paterson concluded by thanking the Federal Government for those measures that will help close the gap in health. But he also sounded a note of caution: “The health gap is closing in the Northern Territory, but too slowly. Our people are still living their lives much sicker and dying much earlier than non-Indigenous Territorians. More needs to be done.”

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