

# Budget 2020 – Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females

## Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females: Overview

There was little to no response to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females in the budget. Measures via the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Minister for Indigenous Australians appear ad-hoc, and other measures such as tax cuts and superannuation membership reform will not reach the majority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female population due to their young median age and their not yet participating in the workforce.

Lack of investment in community-controlled programs was clear. The \$46.5 million allocation for Closing the Gap in health equity is inadequate to meet targets, and does not provide infrastructure support for 550 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health clinics with over 1 million episodes of care per annum. Conversely, \$39 million was allocated to one mainstream charity for a sport program to encourage school attendance. Most other allocations are to the Government's own services, corporate entities or statutory authorities not Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations, despite little evidence for their effectiveness. Allocations are not adequate to address social determinants of health, multi-morbidities, holistic care, legal needs or diversity, to which government has made policy commitments.

## Impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females

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### The Budget

#### Machinery of government for women

The lack of inclusion or naming of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or females by the Australian Government in the budget papers is obvious. This is despite Priority Reform One of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (to reduce inequities that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience in relation to others, devised by the Australian Government, focussing on *Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making* (Australian Government, 2020a). The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition of Peaks (2020) advocated for and became partner

to the Australian Government for the 2020 refresh of the bi-partisan Closing the Gap targets, having been excluded in the mid-2000s when initial targets were developed. The Coalition of Peaks has been able to advocate only within the parameters governments have set, has not had a process of collaboration with communities supported, nor are articles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2008) clearly supported. Neither the Closing the Gap budget measures nor the 2020 refresh make mention of recent processes for the Australian Government to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, including through the First Nations Constitutional Convention (2017) and its report, culminating in the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* which outlines steps for governments to better engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Climate and energy

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have cultures, languages, identities, wellbeing and economies inextricably tied to Australia’s landscape, climate and natural resources and have done so since time immemorial. All measures in the budget about climate and energy have a bearing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females.

There is little detail within budget measures about how the rights of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been or will be upheld including in decision making; few allocations are to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and limited detail suggests exclusion thus far.

Through the *Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package* the Government has committed \$269.6 million over four years from 2020-21 for measures indicated in Table 1 below, and \$9.8 million per year ongoing. This is based on a 2020 independent assessor’s report which highlighted that whole-of-government responses are required for the health of the Murray-Darling basin (Sefton et al, 2020). However, items below relate to only a small number of governments and departments. While the independent assessment has many mentions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations and recommends funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, no measures have been included directly in the budget. Funding is to Government’s own National Indigenous Australians Agency (see Table 1 below), and only for the short term. The allocation to the National Indigenous Australians Agency is for Indigenous River Rangers and no further funding or information is available about whether and how funds will go to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community groups.

**Table 1: Environmental care  
Murray-Darling Communities Investment Package**

Payments (\$m)

	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Murray-Darling Basin Authority	17.3	32.3	2.4	2.4
Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment	13.3	52.8	5.2	12.9
National Indigenous Australians Agency	0.5	3.6	-	-
Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development and Communications	-	-	-	-

Department of the Treasury	-43.6	30.7	29.7	23.6
Total — Payments	-12.5	119.5	37.3	38.8

Source: 2020 Budget Paper No. 2, p. 52.

The 2020-21 budget does not clearly itemise any funds directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for climate and energy. A mention of ‘expanded Indigenous engagement in park management’ is made as part of an overall \$28.3 million over four years allocated for marine parks, although no detail is available on whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations will be funded (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 53).

No mention is made of budget measures for the Torres Strait Islanders, who have been described as becoming the world’s first climate refugees with sea levels rising and encroaching on communities (Banister, 2020; Steffen, Hunter, & Hughes, 2014).

While allocations for energy developments are in the budget, including \$459 million for the CSIRO, \$1 billion research funding for universities and \$1.9 billion to support low emissions and renewable technologies, no Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are named as recipients or partners.

Funding of five gas basins in Queensland and the Northern Territory was announced despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations having the very recent experience of mining destroying a culturally significant site with no reparation (Borschmann, 2020). The Minister for Energy and Emissions claimed that “more gas at a lower price will support jobs in Australia’s manufacturing sector” (Taylor, 2020); however no analysis is included of economic contributions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Housing

Table 2 below identifies \$150 million in total over three years to its corporate entity Indigenous Business Australia for the *Indigenous Home Ownership Program*. The Prime Minister indicated this was for 360 new housing construction loans for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in regional areas (Frydenberg, 2020). This will not meet need including to address overcrowding and government housing in disrepair (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2019) and fails to deliver for the larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations who live in urban centres (Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), 2018).

**Table 2: Equity Injection to the Indigenous Home Ownership Program**

Receipts (\$m)	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Indigenous Business Australia	0.8	3.0	4.3	4.6

Source: 2020 Budget Paper No. 2, p. 12.

While the Australian Government claims this equity injection will provide “an immediate, targeted fiscal stimulus to regional Australia by injecting liquidity into the financial and construction sector and generating positive flow-on effects for regional businesses” (2020 Budget Paper No. 2, p. 12), there is no evidence this will be among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses or people. Evidence indicates such developments are generally to the contrary (Denny-Smith, Williams, & Loosemore, 2020).

The \$100 million already allocated to Queensland Government in 2020-21 for *Funding for Remote Indigenous Housing in Queensland* is part of the Queensland Government taking full responsibility for housing in the future (p. 147). It is, however, unlikely to meet need.

Minimal discussion on affordable housing in infrastructure spending occurred in the budget except in relation to rebuilding public housing damaged in 2015 by tropical cyclones and the \$17.5 million *National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements*, in a location where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a greater proportion of the community than the rest of Australia (ABS, 2018) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females may be likely to benefit.

The COVID-19 Response Package includes \$51.4 million to renew essential services for water, electricity and sewerage in the Commonwealth national park jurisdiction of Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park, and Mutitjulu Community – just one of dozens of remote communities who require such support (Easteal, 2016).

Overall, support for housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females is poor.

### Social services

Many of the Department of Social Services payment measures are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females. One potentially relevant budget measure is \$45.7 million over four years for the *Individual Placement and Support Program* under the Youth Employment Strategy to increase workforce participation of young people with mental illness (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 103). However, mainstream organisations tend to have low levels of participation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Davy, Harfield, McArthur, Munn, & Brown, 2016); staff have not completed training or developed skills in cultural safety (Fitzpatrick, Haswell, Williams, Meyer, & Jackson Pulver, 2019); and racism is frequent in mainstream government services (Kelaher, Ferdinand, and Paradies, 2014). These concerns will limit uptake by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, and effectiveness in program delivery.

Most other social services measures are ill-defined and do not indicate at all the extent to which they will reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females such as \$35 million over four years for the *Safer Communities Fund* (Budget Paper No 2, p. 111) and \$28 million over two years for the *Stronger communities Programme* (Budget Paper No 2, p. 128).

The allocation of \$37.3million in the COVID-19 recovery period “to promote Australian values, identity and social cohesion” (Budget Paper No 2, p. 112) is particularly concerning given the mainstreaming Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into general population services (Parliament of Australia, 2005) has not produced successful outcomes (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018), and no discussion has occurred to form a national identity that includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognises sovereignty and the detrimental impacts of colonisation (First Nations Constitutional Convention, 2017).

The Cashless Debit Card, however, continues to be supported, which has been overwhelmingly biased in use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with no evidence for its effectiveness and contrary evidence of detrimental impacts and lack of support by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community leaders having been found (Bielefeld, 2018).

National Redress Scheme funding allocations for institutional child abuse have been made but not publicly released, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females thought to be over-represented as claimants, and reach being limited (Kimberley Legal Service, n.d.).

The two \$250 payments for eligible recipients including those on age and disability pensions as part of the COVID-19 Response Package fall short of meeting need and will do little to reduce socio-economic disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience.

### Education and training

The \$458.3 million over two years to extend the National Partnership Agreement on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education (2020 Budget Paper No 3, p. 3) and undertake the related National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection in early 2022 are relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females but only in universal ways and not targeted to need. This lack of targeting to need disadvantages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people given they have historically had less access to mainstream services, with mainstream services biased away from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and producing more experiences of racism (Carson, Dunbar, Chenhall, and Bailie, 2007).

The National Early Childhood Education and Care Collection is no exception and such data collections fail to ascertain needs or protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females (Thurber et al, 2020). Rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in early childhood education are increasing, but are still less than others – in 2018, 86.4% for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander four year-olds compared to 91.3% for non-Indigenous children – indicating that resourcing has not been adequate to meet need or to invest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of engaging families (Australian Government, 2020b).

Table 3 below indicates student support funds to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people via the Australian Government’s National Indigenous Australians Agency. Amounts are small, not targeted, not sustained over time and not directed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

**Table 3: Students Support Package**

Payments (\$m)	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Department of Education, Skills and Employment	16.6	25.0	42.0	44.0
National Indigenous Australians Agency	1.3	3.8	2.6	-
Total — Payments	17.9	28.8	44.6	44.0

Source: 2020 Budget Paper No. 2, p. 81.

This Student Support Package includes the highly controversial \$39.8 million over four years for the Clontarf Foundation to expand and extend its existing program. This is despite its 122 outlets and 9000 students participating in a sport program reporting moderate success and not delivering education as such (Clontarf Foundation, 2020). This amount is almost equal to the \$46.5 million provided to the 550 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health clinics with their evidence of success with over 1 million episodes of care per annum (NACCHO, 2020). Clontarf is not governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and overwhelmingly targets young males (Clontarf Foundation, 2020).

The Vocational Education and Training system reforms and \$263 million allocation to improve quality make no mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, although the 2019 Expert Review of Australia’s VET System noted that improving accessibility for Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people was a 'main issue' for the sector (Joyce, 2019, p. 27). This was not addressed directly in the budget.

The budget provides some measures in response to the recommendations of an independent review resulting in the National Regional, Rural and Remote Tertiary Education Strategy report (Halsey, 2018), which named better enabling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from rural and remote areas to access Commonwealth-supported tertiary education places, given few tertiary institutions have or meet target numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Universities Australia, 2020). To this end \$17.1 million over four years was allocated in the July Economic and Fiscal Update, including \$0.5 million in capital funding and \$13.9 million per year ongoing.

In addition, \$7.1 million was allocated over four years for the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program (HEPPP) (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 232). HEPPP aims to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, but underwent major reallocations in early- to mid-2020 with some universities' funding already halved; this, in addition to some coursework fees increasing (Patty, 2020), may overall serve to further exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The budget highlighted funding from existing programs being consolidated to establish the *Indigenous, Regional and Low SES Attainment Fund* (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 234), in an attempt to encourage universities to improve higher education attainment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The \$48.8 million allocated over four years and \$20.9 million per year ongoing for partnerships between regional universities, other higher education providers and local for research (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 232) show commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities but belie the fact that the majority of the population are in urban areas, have low higher education participation, do not address reasons for low participation nor are enough to address inequity.

There is insufficient detail to understand how the \$800 million over four years for a *National Priorities and Industry Linkage Fund* (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 233) will increase partnerships between universities and industry and whether this will assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to gain skills and experience.

Research allocations have a history of excluding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and organisations (Nakata, 2007). There is no mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to \$12.5 million over three years offset by redirecting existing 2019-20 Australian Research Council National Competitive Grants Program (NCGP) funding into funding specifically allocated to addressing Australia's history, society and culture (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 234).

## Employment

In terms of employment in research, the Department of Education Skills and Employment *JobMaker Plan – Research package* mentions investment in improving eResearch platforms including Indigenous e-research although no details are provided (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 79). No detail is provided on inclusion of Indigenous peoples or priorities in the \$1.0 billion allocated through the Research Support Program for universities – to date capacity and outputs

are minimal including consistently underperforming and not meeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or student targets (Universities Australia, 2020).

The Government has committed \$16.3 million over three years to incentivise seasonal participation in the agricultural industry, by creating a temporary pathway for young people who are seeking to qualify as independent for the purposes of assessing Youth Allowance (student) and ABSTUDY payment eligibility (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 155). No evidence base has been established for this decision-making or its viability among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females.

Some JobKeeper wage subsidy measures stimulated by COVID-19 may meet needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females, however given their different demographic profile (younger median age, earlier age at death) to the mainstream Australian population for whom the measures have been designed, parts of the package are not equitably relevant such as early access to superannuation and business-related payments. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander small businesses have reported not meeting eligibility criteria and struggling to complete JobKeeper administration (Syron, 2020).

There are issues about the risk of long-term unemployment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, who already experience higher unemployment rates and for longer than other women in Australia (Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, 2018).

Tax cuts will not reach the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, whose median age is 23, with one third under 15 – not yet working age (ABS, 2018).

Most of the items in the *JobMaker Plan — Second Women’s Economic Security Package* (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 62) have relevance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females – not, however in a universal targeted way to meet need.

A total of \$231.0 million has been allocated including \$90.3 million over three years for relaxing the Paid Parental Leave concessional work test arrangements in response to COVID-19, meaning parents with births and adoptions between 22 March 2020 and 31 March 2021 would qualify if they had worked in 10 of the last 20 months, instead of 10 of the last 13 months. Given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females have higher rates of unemployment and underemployment around age at childbirth (ABS, 2016), they are not likely to benefit equitably.

The *Women’s Leadership and Development Program*, to receive \$47.9 million over four years, reports few details on culturally-responsive programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

The \$2.1 million over three years allocated to establish a Respect@Work Council to address sexual harassment in Australian workplaces is not accompanied by funds to address racism, which is a frequent experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females at work (Bargallie, 2020), as well as when accessing services and support, with major detrimental impacts on health and wellbeing (Kelaheer et al, 2014).

The \$25.1 million over five years for *Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Industry Cadetship* program and \$14.5 million over four years allocated for *Women in STEM Ambassador Program*, *Women in STEM Entrepreneurship Grants Program* and the *Girls in STEM Toolkit* require Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-oriented

strategies to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females. These, however, have not been identified.

The \$24.7 million over four years for *ParentsNext* may have minimal impact – no evaluation has indicated its effectiveness with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females (see *ParentsNext* section).

## Health

After the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition of Peaks fought for the Australian Government to include them as a partner in the refresh of the bi-partisan Closing the Gap targets to reduce health inequity, an allocation of \$46.5 million over four years has been made (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 146). The Minister for Indigenous Australians described this as being for building capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health organisations (Wyatt, 2020). The Convener of the Coalition of Peaks, Ms Pat Turner AM, indicated it was to begin Priority Reform Two but that governments must also make their contribution to meet the 16 targets (NACCHO and Coalition of Peaks, 2020). Allocations in the 2020-21 budget will do little to achieve other Closing the Gap priority reform areas, particularly social determinants of health, no to replace cuts by former Prime Minister Abbott (Holland, 2018).

There is little investment in social determinants of health, or infrastructure development among the 550 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health clinics, according to NACCHO Chairperson Ms Donella Mills. NACCHO estimate that \$900 million is required to address infrastructure development needs of the 550 clinics and 410 000 clients across urban, regional and remote locations (McInerney, 2020).

As indicated in Table 4 below, the Government will provide \$10.1 million over four years from 2020-21 (and \$2.6 million per year ongoing) to the Productivity Commission for its reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service delivery and an improved dashboard for measuring Closing the Gap progress.

**Table 4: Closing the Gap reporting**

Payments (\$m)	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	2023-24
Productivity Commission	1.2	2.9	3.5	2.6
National Indigenous Australians Agency	-	-	-	-
Total — Payments	1.2	2.9	3.5	2.6

Source: Budget 2020-21 Budget Measures Budget Paper No. 2 2020-21, p. 146.

Few areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females' health are specifically targeted in the 2020-21 budget. The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) is one of the few areas apart from COVID-19 named; the National Disability Insurance Agency and the NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission will receive \$798.8 million over four years – described as 'additional funding' (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 156) to support an estimated 500 000 people. However, the NDIS is under-accessed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to others (People With Disability Australia, 2019) and has been difficult to access and administer by some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations (Griffis, 2020).



## COVID19

In the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update, through the *COVID-19 Response Package — support for Indigenous and remote communities*, the Government provided \$19.8 million over two years for three Commonwealth wholly-owned Indigenous subsidiaries that had been severely impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic. Funding in 2020-21 will support the Northern Territory, South Australia, Western Australia, and Queensland with the cost of implementing COVID-19 related travel restrictions to remote communities. These costs will be met from the existing resources of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy and negotiations with jurisdictions are not yet final (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 268).

Crisis relief and targeted support for organisations, artists and arts workers will mean \$27.0 million over two years from 2019-20 for Regional Arts Australia, Support Act and Indigenous Art Centres and Fairs (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 215).

National Parks services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Traditional Owners of jointly managed National Parks will receive \$12 million over two years from 2019-20 Fairs (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 215) to maintain service levels and provide temporary support for tourism – important parts of community economic and cultural life including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females across the lifespan.

The *Remote Point of Care Testing Program* in regional and remote Indigenous communities throughout Australia has been supported with \$4 million (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 96).

The doubling of Medicare funded psychological services from 10 to 20 through the *Better Access Initiative* (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 96) is unlikely to be of significant use to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females given the lack of training service providers have had in culturally safe care (Fitzpatrick et al, 2019).

## Child and family care

Improved administration to the Child Care Subsidy (CCS) and Additional Child Care Subsidy (ACCS) was mentioned in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update to better ensure families' childcare entitlements reflect their circumstances including changing relationship status and occurrences of children at risk of serious abuse or neglect (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A p. 235). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are over-represented in reports to child welfare systems (Australian Institute of Family Studies, 2016) however, these and other funds allocated (\$40.1 million over three years to continue *Children and Parenting Support Services — Additional Services* (Budget Paper No 2, p. 153) without evaluation specifically from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives are not sufficient to address inequity or meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females' and families' needs (McInerney, 2020).

Funds to address family violence are minimal. The COVID-19 Response Package funding for domestic and family violence support of \$150 million announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 274) is still being negotiated and is not specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families' needs. Recent cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family violence services have not been rectified despite Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women being more likely than others to be hospitalised for family violence (Andrews, 2020).

A range of family support programs announced in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update will be funded through 3 100 grants managed by the Department of Social Services at a cost of \$64.2 million (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 274) with no guaranteed flow to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community services.

### Legal

While \$6.2 million over four years was allocated to assist the states and territories in the July 2020 Economic and Fiscal Update for administering the National Legal Assistance Partnership (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 211), there has been no reinstatement of the Indigenous Legal Assistance Program cut in 2019. Through the NLAP Legal Aid Commissions (LACs), Community Legal Centres (CLCs), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Legal Services (ATSILS) and Family Violence Prevention Legal Services compete for funding, with inadequate increases to meet increasing demand. A very small allocation in comparison to need of \$2.6 million in 2020-21 was made for the Family Violence and Cross Examination of Parties Scheme, to protect victims of family violence in family law proceedings (2020 Budget Paper No 2, Appendix A, p. 211).

On the other hand, a further \$450 million is provided for law enforcement, with record funding for the Australian Defence Force (Frydenberg, 2020).

### Cultural heritage

The Government will provide \$10.1 million over four years from within existing National Indigenous Australians Agency resources to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) to facilitate the return of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural heritage material held in overseas collections to traditional owners and custodians (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 149). AIATSIS has identified over 100,000 items overseas; funding will be used to build relationships with overseas institutions and private holders, maintain a database of material and support repatriation.

### Infrastructure

Infrastructure development to meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females' needs is minimal with allocations ad hoc and directed to only a few locations such as Perth city. This is only a partial allocation through the Infrastructure Investment Program of \$2 million for preliminary design of a cultural centre (2020 Budget Paper No 2, p. 142). This site selection over others is not explained.

## Gender implications

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### Why is this an issue for women?

Many budget allocations are relevant to the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females require universal services and equitable access to resources as do other females in Australia. However, because of social, health and economic inequities experienced as a result of being colonised by British forces only within the last three to six generations, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females also require recovery support to overcome burdens and multi-morbidities from colonial violence, systematic social exclusion and intergenerational poverty, with care that matches current demographic profile and needs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females are 50.1% of the 798 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, who overall are 3.3% of the Australian population (ABS, 2018).

This minority population is over-represented in socio-economic disadvantage and preventable health conditions, with a higher mortality rate and younger age at death (ABS, 2018).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander female population is also diverse, and no one Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity or response to issues is feasible or appropriate (Jackson Pulver, Williams, and Fitzpatrick, 2019).

These points, in addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people having a younger median age of 23 compared to 37 in the general Australian population (ABS, 2018) indicate where government expenditure is required.

With a young population, prevention is key. The 2020-21 budget does not allocate expenditure expressly for prevention or name it for a national preventive health strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Allocations are not adequate to address social determinants of health, multi-morbidities, holistic care or legal needs of females, to which government has committed in policies.

Articles in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples are not identifiable in the budget. Recent processes for the Australian Government to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, including through the First Nations Constitutional Convention are not drawn on or resourced.

Discriminatory measures such as the Cashless Debit Card are, however, in the budget.

The 2020-21 budget does not clearly itemise any funds directly to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for climate and energy management or caring for Country.

No mention is made of measures to reduce the climate change impact already occurring with rising sea levels in the Torres Straits.

Research funding for universities including for renewable technologies makes no mention of inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Funds for housing are allocated to a government entity and are not sufficient to meet need or reinforce rights to community control.

Higher education engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is promoted, yet universities are not considered culturally safe places; they have also experienced funding cuts and a major crisis from COVID-19-related drops in enrolments.

Recent funding cuts to family and legal services have not been rectified but demand by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females has grown during COVID-19.

The reality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females is that all domains of the budget have an impact, and unless Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women see themselves named in the budget, are likely to instead have been excluded.

### What are the 2020 Budget impacts on women?

The net impact of the 2020-21 budget will be negative because:

- Investments have been made inequitably into mainstream organisations' services that do not demonstrate evidence for effectiveness with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people commensurate with evidence for effectiveness that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations are able to demonstrate.
- The budget fails to provide targeted initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females who have a different demographic profile to other females in Australia.
  - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a younger median age than the general population, with a higher birth rate, earlier age at death, poorer socio-economic status, more involvement in the criminal justice and child welfare systems, histories of child removal and Stolen Generations and a population more evenly spread across urban, regional and remote locations.
- Prevention initiatives have not been invested in.
  - Prevention is required given one third of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under 15 and those in early childhood make up the largest proportion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.
- Few, if any, initiatives relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures have been funded despite Australian governments' own policies and frameworks indicating 'culture is at the centre' and services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are to be holistic in accordance with cultural protocols.
- The budget has not responded to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander females including increasing demand for services including legal assistance and health care.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services have been largely excluded from budget decision making.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services have been largely excluded from COVID-19 recovery responses in their local areas.

- Mainstream services that receive the majority of funding in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are set up to fail because their staff have little cultural knowledge or cultural safety training.
  - Workforce training is still underdeveloped to support the mainstream workforce to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
  - Mainstream agencies have persistently demonstrated their inability to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students or service users.

The net result is that mainstream services set up to fail by trying to meet needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services are overlooked and further disenfranchised.

## Recommendations

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1. Government should constructively engage with the Coalition of Peaks to determine COVID-19 recovery responses and funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
2. Government should reorient funding away from mainstream services that are unable to demonstrate culturally-responsive evaluations and evidence for effectiveness for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and allocate it to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations who can demonstrate effectiveness.

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