



Speech by

**Hon. Curtis Pitt**


**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

Hansard Thursday, 24 March 2011

---

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENT

### Close the Gap Day

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Minister for Disability Services, Mental Health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships) (10.08 am): National Close the Gap Day is a day for our nation to shine a light on the issues facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is a day for government to commit to working even harder and to continue to take practical steps to close the gap on health, education and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is a day to acknowledge our past and to continue to take practical steps to look at the problems that flowed when children were wrenched from their families and forced to grow old in cold institutions where some were physically and sexually abused. It is a day to reflect on the dire consequences of being denied the health, education, housing and employment opportunities which were used to justify that flawed government policy in the first place. As a nation and as a state we have moved on from the days when visible difference led to discrimination.

In our partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we have developed policies and delivered services that are helping to make a difference. We share a common goal: to build stronger communities, communities that will stand up to the scrutiny of future generations.

Our practical programs are having a direct and positive impact. In the most recent COAG report, we are performing above the national average across major key indicators: life expectancy at birth, infant mortality ratio, low birth weight babies, year 3 reading and numeracy, 20- to 24-year-olds attaining at least a year 12 equivalent, and the unemployment rate—to name a few.

I could speak of the billions of dollars the government is investing in working towards a better future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. But it is not about figures; it is about people. And Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will tell you they want a hand up, not a hand out. That is why we are building better homes, creating economic opportunities and improving health outcomes. We are rolling out programs under our Reconciliation Action Plan—the first whole-of-government plan of its kind in Australia.

There is more work to be done and we are determined to put in the hard yards to build a better, brighter future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.