



Speech By  
**Hon. Curtis Pitt**


**MEMBER FOR MULGRAVE**

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**MINISTERIAL STATEMENT**

**National Close the Gap Day**

 **Hon. CW PITT** (Mulgrave—ALP) (Treasurer, Minister for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships and Minister for Sport) (9.48 am): This government will not accept the idea that one group of Queenslanders should live shorter, unhealthier or poorer lives than others in our state. Today is National Close the Gap Day, an opportunity to reflect on our success and refocus on the work still to be done to ensure Indigenous Australians do not continue to experience those preventable outcomes.

Progress has been made in closing the gap in a number of areas and further progress is being made, but there is much more to do. The stark truth delivered by the Prime Minister's eighth *Closing the gap* report is that more effort is needed in a range of areas. The 2016 report showed some improvements, but progress has been varied across different indicators.

There was a significant 34 per cent decrease in mortality rates nationally between 1998 and 2014. For year 12 attainment there was an increase from 45.4 per cent in 2008 to 58.5 per cent in 2012-13. We saw the largest improvements in seven of the eight national minimum standards tests from 2008 to 2015 for Queensland Indigenous students. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 64 years currently employed fell from 53.8 per cent in 2008 to 47.5 per cent in 2012-13.

To close the gap requires national commitment and resolve and a shared responsibility at all levels of government. The Palaszczuk government allocated more than \$200 million over three years for evidence based initiatives to address the health gap. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander justice strategy under development will leverage existing investment for child protection, domestic and family violence, youth justice and adult detention. The Palaszczuk government will continue to implement school attendance strategies through the National Partnership on Universal Access to Early Childhood Education. The Palaszczuk government is working to close the economic gap through the Working Queensland strategy and economic participation strategy.

We will work with the Federal government, whether it be Nigel Scullion or our federal counterparts Shayne Neumann or Warren Snowden, to continue progress. Cutting funding is not the way to close the gap. The Abbott government made massive cuts to federal Indigenous programs and services. The current Prime Minister must show leadership and reverse these cuts in the federal budget.

A shocking illustration of the work we still must do is provided by the report on youth sexual violence and abuse, known as the Smallbone report, which was recently released in a redacted form by the government. The report, commissioned in 2011 and delivered in 2013, focuses on West Cairns and Aurukun. As Professor Stephen Smallbone said—

The two communities named in our report are not the only communities in which such problems exist.

There are undoubtedly other places in Australia, and in many other parts of the world, where there are serious problems with sexual violence and abuse.

A high level steering committee, led by former Supreme Court judge Stanley Jones, will provide an interim report to government in mid-2016 and a final report by the end of the year. While a range of initiatives have been taken since the report was handed down, the steering committee's priority will be to find ways to stop the abuse across Queensland and make recommendations to government on what further legislative, policy and service changes may be needed. I will update the House on the steering committee's work. This government remains committed to closing the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.