

## Question on Notice

No. 85

Asked on 15 February 2017

**MR PEGG** ASKED THE MINISTER FOR LOCAL GOVERNMENT AND MINISTER FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PARTNERSHIPS (HON M FURNER)—

QUESTION:

Will the Minister advise, as to what steps the Palaszczuk Government is taking in relation to Closing the Gap on Indigenous disadvantage in Queensland?

ANSWER:

I thank the Member for Stretton for his question.

The annually released Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report details progress against seven nationally agreed targets: child mortality; early childhood education; reading and numeracy; school attendance; year 12 school completion; employment and life expectancy. The report identifies the Year 12 attainment for Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are on track.

Queensland is progressing well on some measures and has a number of initiatives, policies and programs in place to continue to close the gap.

For example, Queensland has seen a decline in mortality rates for Indigenous children aged 0–4 years with a significant decrease of around 17 per cent between 2005–2009 and 2010–2014.

The Palaszczuk Government has committed more than \$200 million over three years through Queensland Health's *Making Tracks Investment Strategy 2015–2018* to focus efforts on those areas which will have the greatest impact on closing the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Queenslanders.

The Closing the Gap Report notes that in 2015, 85 per cent of Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were enrolled in early childhood up from 63 per cent in 2014. I can now further advise that the more recently released *Australian Bureau of Statistics, Preschool Education, Australia 2016* data reports that in 2016, Queensland achieved 93.1 per cent for enrolments.

Queensland continues to outperform jurisdictional counterparts with our State showing the largest improvements overall in reading, writing and numeracy levels. As the Member would be aware, it is through education, training and skilling opportunities that we frequently see improved employment outcomes.

The Palaszczuk Government has implemented the *Families as First Teachers* program in 20 locations across Queensland to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and their children with the opportunity to participate in play-based early learning activities, and access to many valuable take-home resources.

Likewise, this Government provides assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to complete Year 12 through its support for the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Foundation (QATSIF) and this Government has in place dedicated Indigenous Pathways Officers, Community Partnership Officers and Queensland Certificate of Education Coaches across the State supporting students' Year 12 outcomes.

In 2016, 2,003 of Queensland's Indigenous students completed Year 12 – an increase of 8 per cent from 1,854 in 2015 – with 97 per cent achieving either a Queensland Certificate of Education (QCE) or a Queensland Certificate of Individual Attainment (QCIA). The importance of this achievement is that, for the first time, the gap in Queensland certification is less than 1 percentage point.

The Palaszczuk Government has initiated the *Every Day Counts* campaign and is working alongside the Commonwealth Government through the *Remote School Attendance Strategy* to place attendance officers in a number of remote communities targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student attendance.

This Government is also working to close the gap on employment disadvantage, with the launch of *Moving Ahead*, a whole-of-Government strategy to increase the economic participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through jobs, training and business development opportunities.

As a key action under *Moving Ahead*, the Palaszczuk Government is developing a *Queensland Indigenous Procurement Policy* to target an increase in the proportion of Queensland Government procurement awarded to Indigenous businesses.

Our State has seen Australia's first ever Indigenous Start-up Weekend held in Brisbane in August last year. An event aimed at providing an inspiring and informative way to start a business, to build and launch a product, to bring an idea to reality, and to grow entrepreneurial skills and networks.

Further, my Department provides the *Youth Employment Program*, or YEP, which aligns with the Palaszczuk Government's *Jobs Now, Jobs for the Future* Strategy. Under YEP, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'Year 13s' (post high school students) are targeted, and my Department works collaboratively with the Department of Education and Training to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Year 12 students in Queensland's state schools.

The most recent Closing the Gap Report released by the Prime Minister raises the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the justice system, both as victims and offenders, and the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the out-of-home care system.

The Palaszczuk Government recently announced a comprehensive overhaul of Queensland's parole system, providing for improved rehabilitation of offenders. The increased focus on expanding rehabilitation services for prisoners including drug, alcohol and mental health services will contribute to addressing underlying causes of crime.

The Member will know that the Palaszczuk Government has already invested heavily in the areas of child and family support, child protection and also domestic and family violence reforms and that these reforms will contribute to reducing the over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families in the out-of-home care system in Queensland.

As the Prime Minister's Closing the Gap report approaches its 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary, COAG has committed by the end of 2017 to revisiting and refocussing national targets, and considering any additional benchmarks that may be appropriate for closing the gap on disadvantage.

Nationally, there is more work to be done.

Closing the Gap isn't something that can be achieved by government alone. It requires a collective initiative and partnership across communities, across industries and across the nation.

I look forward to working with my colleagues across Government and these groups to ensure that Queensland continues its efforts and positive performance to close the gap.