

Closing the Gap results still lag, as Shorten pledges compensation fund for Stolen Generations

Written by Michelle Grattan, Professorial Fellow, University of Canberra

The tenth Closing the Gap report, tabled in Parliament by Malcolm Turnbull on Monday, shows only three of the seven targets are on track to be met.

The targets for early childhood education and year 12 attainment are on track and the target to halve child mortality is back on track.

But the remaining targets are not on track - for school attendance, mortality, employment, and reading and numeracy.

The government will hail this year's outcome as the most promising result since 2011. Last year [only one target was being met](#) - on improved year 12 attainment.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten will mark a decade on from then prime minister Kevin Rudd's national apology by announcing Labor would set up a compensation scheme for survivors of the Stolen Generations in Commonwealth jurisdictions.

The scheme would give ex gratia payments of \$75,000 to living survivors. There would also be a funeral assistance fund with one-off payments of \$7000 to stolen generations members to assist with their funerals.

The compensation scheme would be accessible to about 150 surviving members of the stolen generations in the Northern Territory and any members in the ACT and Jervis bay.

Labor would also establish a \$10 million national healing fund "to support healing for the Stolen Generations and their families – in recognition of the inter-generational effects of forced removals".

Shorten will say that recently the number of children removed from their families has rapidly

increased.

“In 2017, more than 17,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were living in out-of-home care, compared with about 9000 a decade ago,” he says in a statement with shadow assistant minister for Indigenous affairs Patrick Dodson. In response, Labor would convene a national summit on First Nations Children in its first 100 days in office.

Shorten’s announcements would cost \$17.1 million over the forward estimates.

With four of the existing Closing the Gap targets expiring this year – child mortality, school attendance, reading and numeracy and employment - the Council of Australian Governments is working with Indigenous people to refresh the agenda.

The government will point to progress on a range of health indicators.

... Child mortality dropped by a third between 1998 and 2015.

... Overall mortality fell 15% from 1998 to 2015.

... Fewer indigenous people are dying from chronic conditions. Deaths from circulatory diseases declined by 45% between 1998 and 2016; respiratory disease deaths fell by 24% between 1998 and 2015; kidney disease death rates decreased by 47% from 2006 to 2015.

The proportion of Indigenous adults who smoke fell from 55% in 1994 to 45% in 2014-15.

Efforts are on track to eliminate trachoma as a public health problem by 2020. The prevalence of active trachoma in Indigenous children aged between five and nine in at-risk communities declined from 14% in 2009 to 4.7% in 2016.

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The gap in blindness and vision impairment halved between 2008 and 2016. Indigenous people have three times the rate of blindness and vision impairment compared to the non-Indigenous population. In 2008 the figure was six times.

Drinking during pregnancy halved between 2008 and 2014-15, and there was an 8% drop in binge drinking among Indigenous people from 2008 and 2015.

Indigenous Affairs Minister Nigel Scullion said the results demonstrated “the power of a collaborative approach between governments and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Even where we may not be on track, we have achieved solid progress in other target areas compared with a decade ago”.

The government will highlight the success of the Indigenous Procurement Policy. Its target was achieved three years ahead of schedule and it has now passed \$1 billion in contracts to Indigenous businesses. Scullion flagged the Prime Minister would be announcing “new measures to turbo-charge the Indigenous business sector”.

Michelle Grattan does not work for, consult, own shares in or receive funding from any company or organisation that would benefit from this article, and has disclosed no relevant affiliations beyond their academic appointment.

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