



## **Uniting Church leaders call for renewal of commitment to justice for First Peoples in recognition of National Close the Gap Day**

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On National Close the Gap Day, leaders from the Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC), the Uniting Church in Australia and UnitingCare Australia are reflecting on progress against the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and are calling on parliamentarians, church members and all members of the community to renew our commitment to justice.

Speaking on behalf of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia, UAICC Interim Chairperson Rev Mark Kickett said the Government's recent announcement of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031 (National Workforce Plan) must have cultural safety front and centre.

"Investing in attracting, recruiting and training Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into roles in the health sector such as doctors, nurses and allied health workers will be a factor in improving health outcomes for First Peoples. It will also facilitate culturally safe practices, cultural sensitivity and cultural care, transform communities in a sustainable way and begin to close the historical gaps," said Rev Mark Kickett.

"It is also essential that the workforce is based in community and can make a difference for the people on the ground. We can't afford to compromise on implementation or fail to achieve the objectives. It is vital that we maintain momentum to Close the Gap – future generations are counting on us."

UnitingCare Australia National Director Claerwen Little said the National Workforce Plan is a step in the right direction and acknowledged the alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

"We're pleased to see that the Indigenous health workforce plan has been designed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, peak bodies and the community-controlled health sector."

"The UnitingCare network has a long and proud history of providing services to our First Peoples and working together to genuinely meet community need. Our specialist services in the Northern Territory run by Australian Regional & Remote Community Services (ARRCS) are a terrific example of what can be achieved through genuine partnership. Our tailored recruitment programs run by Uniting Country SA are another example of how a different approach can achieve amazing outcomes, especially for our First Peoples", said Ms Little.

Rev Sharon Hollis, President of the Uniting Church in Australia, said the national day was an opportunity to reflect on the Uniting Church's covenanting relationship with First Peoples.

"Today we renew our commitment to stand with our First Nations siblings in their struggle for justice. We renew our calls for justice for First Peoples. And we recommit ourselves to working for reconciliation in this land."

"But we know there is much more work to be done. We stand here today with our friends in the UAICC and UnitingCare Australia to call for real action on Closing the Gap, especially for improved health and work outcomes," Rev Hollis said.

*About UnitingCare Australia*

*UnitingCare Australia is the national body for the Uniting Church's community services network and an agency of the Assembly of the Uniting Church in Australia. The UnitingCare network is one of the largest networks of community services in Australia, supporting 1.4 million people across 1,600 sites in urban, rural, and remote communities, with over 50,000 staff and 30,000 volunteers.*

*The Uniting Aboriginal and Islander Christian Congress (UAICC) consists of Aboriginal and Islander members of the Uniting Church in Australia and other denominations in fellowship.*

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