

Mohamed calls for political unity on 10 year funding deal

Australia's peak Aboriginal health body has given its support to the Federal Government's 10 year funding commitment and called on the Federal Opposition to get behind the plan to make a real difference to Aboriginal disadvantage.

Justin Mohamed, Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) believes no real difference can come about when Aboriginal organisations are chasing their tails in one, two or three year funding cycles.

"Most Federal Governments can change within three to six years, so what a 10 year funding cycle will definitely do is give the capacity for our AMSs (Aboriginal Medical Services) to be able to plan and not be consumed as much as we have been in the past with basically fingers crossed as to who is the next in power," Mr Mohamed said.

"Ten years will give us a fantastic platform to be able to say this is what we want to do in two years, this is what we want to do in five years, this is what we want to do in seven years.

"That is a place that we haven't had in the past, security of guaranteed funding."

But with the electoral prospects of the current Federal Government looking increasingly bleak and the Federal Opposition Indigenous Affairs spokesman, Senator Nigel Scullion so far refusing to commit any future Coalition government to the plan, the 10 year funding commitment remains uncertain.

However, Mr Mohamed said he hoped he could rely on the bi-partisan nature of the Close the Gap statements of intent by all the political parties to ensure the 10 year commitment remains even if there was a change of government.

"I would go back to the statement of intent which was signed by both the Opposition and the government of the day, when Kevin Rudd was Prime Minister and most of those statements of intent have also been signed off by the government and opposition at a State and Territory level as well," Mr Mohamed said.

"When you talk about Closing the Gap, it has been continually emphasised that you will not close the gap within one term of

By National Indigenous Times reporter Geoff Bagnall



government or if a government is fortunate enough to have two terms, even in that period. It needs a generation," he said. "So we've got to start thinking about a generation.

"Ten years is not a generation, but 10 years is a big step towards thinking outside the square and saying we've got to have sustainable resources to address the crisis that we have in Aboriginal health."

Mr Mohamed believes the government, whichever party that is, must give Aboriginal Australia more than platitudes.

"If we want to address and Close the Gap in respect of Aboriginal health people have got to really put their money where their mouth is and the best investment for this is the community controlled health sector," he said.

"For Aboriginal organisations around the country it comes down to a very serious point of race relations in this country, do we trust Aboriginal people and organisations to manage government money the way we trust non-Aboriginal organisations or is there a latent racism at work?

"I know from the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector, we are monitored and the accountability levels are placed on the AMSs are higher than the accountability that is placed on other primary healthcare providers, equivalent organisations," Mr Mohamed said.

"The Apology has been given, there has been a lot of promises and symbolism and ceremony which the Australian government has done over the last four years now and those things are great and you need to have those things, but what flows on from that is even more important and there needs to be trust.

"We talk about partnership, the question is, is there true partnership or do they still expect Aboriginal people, Aboriginal organisations to come cap-in-hand, or do they want genuine partnership where we're sitting around a table equally planning, designing and advising?" he said.



Justin Mohamed ... you will not close the gap within one term of government.

Image: Geoff Bagnall