

## **Closing the Gap: Indigenous suicide and incarceration rates rising**



*Just three of the 17 new Closing the Gap targets are on track to be met.*

By Cameron Gooley  
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Indigenous people are still far more likely to be jailed, die by suicide and have their children removed than non-Indigenous people a year after the new Closing the Gap agreement was signed, according to the Productivity Commission.

The Commission today released its first batch of annual data on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

But it can't say how progress on ten of the 17 targets is going due to a lack of new figures to compare against the baseline data being used.

"The Agreement is now 12 months old, but the most recent available data for monitoring these socioeconomic outcomes are only just hitting the commencement date for the Agreement," commissioner Romlie Mokak said.

"It is likely to be some years before we see the influence of this Agreement on these outcomes."

The federal, and state governments - alongside 50 peak Indigenous organisations - reached a historic agreement to address the inequality faced by First Nations people last July.

The new National Agreement on Closing the Gap is intended to be a proper partnership, to move beyond what Minister for Indigenous Australians Ken Wyatt described as a decade of failings.

Among its 17 ambitious targets, the Agreement is aiming to reduce the Indigenous incarceration rate by 15 per cent in the next decade.

But the Productivity Commission's report said the rate of Indigenous prisoners rose from 2077.4 per 100,000 people in 2019, to 2081 in June 2020.

Australia's high Indigenous incarceration rate has come under renewed scrutiny this year, after a spate of Indigenous deaths in custody.

The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which handed down its report 30-years ago, found that Indigenous people weren't more likely to die in custody but they died at higher rates because they were grossly over-represented in prisons.



*Indigenous Australians Minister Ken Wyatt has previously said the Agreement would achieve better outcomes through shared accountability.*

Back then 14 per cent of all prisoners were Indigenous. That figure is now 30 per cent, according to the Bureau of Statistics.

First Nations people make up about three per cent of all people in Australia - meaning in the prison population there are ten times as many Indigenous people as there should be proportionally.

Promisingly, however, the rate of Indigenous children in detention has gone down. It was 31.9 per 100,000 in 2018-19, compared to 25.7 the following year.

Another key target in the Agreement was to achieve a sustained reduction in the suicide rate of Indigenous people, with a goal of heading towards zero.

The report said the suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 27.1 per 100,000 people in 2019, up from 24.9 from the year before.

Other measures like increasing life expectancy and reducing the rate of children being placed in out-of-home care are not on track to meet their targets either.

The report says another two targets were improving, and on track to be met: the number of children enrolling in pre-school, and the number of children being born at healthy birth rates.