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Federal Budget does little to close life expectancy gap

A commitment to provide home visits by health professionals to assist Aboriginal children was one glimmer of light in an otherwise bleak Federal Budget for Indigenous Australians, Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation (ANTaR) and Get Up said tonight.

ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said the modest increase of around \$30 million in Aboriginal health spending was well below what is needed to overcome the shortfall identified by Access Economics and the Australian Medical Association.

“With the budget in surplus, the Government has squandered a unique opportunity to provide the additional \$450 million to begin to lift Aboriginal access to primary health care up to the level enjoyed by other Australians,” Mr Highland said.

Get Up Executive Director, Brett Solomon said the budget would do little to close the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians. “As the 40th anniversary of the 1967 referendum approaches, this generation has missed a unique opportunity to deliver health equality to the next generation,” Mr Solomon said.

“The Indigenous health gap is so wide you could drive a budget surplus through it.”

Mr Highland said it was too early to determine whether the Government’s push to encourage private home ownership would succeed in overcoming Indigenous disadvantage. “Additional home ownership opportunities should be welcomed, but these must be on Indigenous peoples’ terms – not imposed by Government,” he said.

“Home ownership seems to be the Government’s two word mantra in response to all of the complex issues confronting Indigenous people. However, it will remain a hollow promise while most Aboriginal men still don’t live long enough to pay off their mortgage.”

Mr Highland said that education and housing initiatives in the budget ignored the more than 70 percent of Indigenous people who live in cities and regional towns.

“This is a budget aimed at gaining short term votes, not solving the long term challenge of closing the life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians,” he said.

More than 21 thousand Australians recently signed an online petition organized by Get Up urging significant increases in the Indigenous health budget.

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