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Media Release

2018 BUDGET DOESN'T GO FAR ENOUGH FOR FIRST NATIONS

The 2018-19 Budget has included announcements about the key following items, amongst others, that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

- An increase in health spending with the target for the additional funding being directed towards addressing hearing loss (\$30m), vision impairment (\$34.3m) and scabies (\$4.8m)
- Improved access to culturally safe aged-care services in remote communities (\$105m)
- The introduction of a Medicare item number for remote dialysis. Upgrades to Outback roads in the Northern Territory
- Changes to the Community Development Program (CDP)
- Matching the Northern Territory's \$550m commitment to remote housing
- An extension of the Indigenous Rangers Program.

Quotes attributable to Sue Tilley, Manager Aboriginal Policy and Advocacy, Uniting Communities:

Health and new Medicare item for remote dialysis

Uniting Communities welcomes the targeted funding for specific health conditions such as \$34.3m for eye disease, \$30m for hearing loss and \$4.8m to address scabies. While much more funding is needed to address these persistent and largely preventable health conditions, this is a good start.

The Budget allocation for a new Medicare item that will support the delivery of dialysis in remote areas to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with kidney disease is a very exciting and welcome development. The new item will mean that the funding will follow the renal patient, and that dialysis service providers in remote communities will be able to access payment per dialysis treatment rather than having to fundraise for these costs.

Organisations such as the Purple House, NPY Women's Council and the Anangu Lands Paper Tracker Project of Uniting Communities, have worked alongside community leaders for many years to improve access to community-based dialysis. The new Medicare item for remote dialysis will mean that many more people can stay home on country and receive dialysis treatment.

Remote housing

The Northern Territory has received some positive Budget news with its \$550 million in matching funding for remote housing. However, a similar level of budget allocation hasn't been directed towards South Australia's remote communities. There is still no clarity about any funding for South Australia's remote housing after June this year. With housing being a key social determinant of health and wellbeing, this lack of funding will have a significant and negative knock-on effect on people's health and wellbeing.

Community Development Program

The proposed reforms to the Community Development Program through supporting 6,000 jobs through a new wage subsidy program and a reduction from 25 hours work activity per week to 20 hours does little to address the lack of a labour market in remote communities and fails to respond to persistent calls to overhaul the CDP. This is compounded by the absence of an increase in NewStart, the low amount of income support benefits and the continuation of punitive income management strategies.

Indigenous Rangers Program

We are pleased to see that funding for the Indigenous Rangers Program has been extended, as part of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy. The \$250m over three years will enable the employment of approximately 2,000 people to work on their traditional lands, rehabilitating and managing the environment – both land and sea.

General comments

In the face of the 2014 budget when the Coalition government cut over \$500 million dollars from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs, and with the majority of targets not being met in *Closing the Gap* on Aboriginal disadvantage, the lack of adequate allocations in this budget for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and programs is shameful. One would have expected more attention to be paid to addressing the persistent and growing gaps in disadvantage. This lack of allocation is all the more worrying in light of the Coalition Government's negative response to the *Uluru Statement from the Heart* and the call for an Aboriginal Voice and does little to build reconciliation.

For media comment:

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