



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Public
Accounts and Administration

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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The "Closing the Gap" bill in the ACT for senior executives is critical because it aims to embed accountability for the National Agreement on Closing the Gap into the operational framework of the ACT government. This will support Ministers to achieve the goals of the Government and the community they serve.

Current successes The ACT government has proven that when they work in partnership with Aboriginal peoples, they can achieve transformational change. The Our Booris Our Way Committee and the ACT government have worked together to achieve many changes, including a significant reduction in the number of Aboriginal children in the Out of Home Care System. Not only does this improve the lives of children and their families, it also offers financial benefits for the government by moving towards earlier supports rather than expensive responses later down the line that do not offer as positive trajectories for the community. However, this has not been easy without legislative framing for accountability.

Systemic and Cultural Change: The bill is designed to go beyond simple policy and create a legal obligation for senior public servants to actively work towards the goals of Closing the Gap. By making it a requirement for senior executives, it forces a shift in the entire public service culture, moving away from a "business-as-usual" approach. This is seen as a crucial step to address the long-standing and entrenched inequality faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Accountability and Transparency: The legislation would require government agencies and senior executives to report annually on the specific, concrete actions they have taken to deliver on Closing the Gap commitments. This creates a new level of transparency and accountability, ensuring that progress (or a lack thereof) is clearly visible. It also links these commitments to the performance agreements and KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) of senior staff, making them personally responsible for outcomes.

Addressing Entrenched Disadvantage: The bill is a response to the fact that, despite previous efforts, significant gaps remain in areas like health, employment, education, and justice. The ACT, for example, has been noted for having the highest Indigenous incarceration gap in the country and a high rate of persistent homelessness among Aboriginal people. The bill is intended to provide a framework to address these specific and critical issues.

Giving Effect to Recommendations: The legislation aligns with recommendations from independent bodies like the Productivity Commission, which have called for stronger institutional accountability and systemic reform. It also reflects the ongoing call from the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (the Coalition of Peaks) for practical, structural reforms that deliver real change.

Shared Decision-Making: A core principle of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is shared decision-making and genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. By embedding the principles of the agreement in law, the bill supports the transformation of government organizations so that they work better with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This means moving towards a model where Indigenous people have at least a shared leadership role in the programs and services that affect their lives.

In essence, the bill is seen as a vital step to move from good intentions to concrete, measurable action, ensuring that the responsibility for Closing the Gap is no longer an abstract goal but a legally mandated part of every senior public servant's job in the ACT.

regards

Natalie Brown

Chair

Our Booris, Our Way