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## **Key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations Respond to the 2017 Budget**

The National Congress of Australia's First Peoples coordinated a meeting with over 30 representatives from key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations in Canberra tonight to discuss our response to the 2017 budget and the implications it will have for First Peoples.

The urgent needs of our peoples are almost invisible in the budget. We are concerned by the lack of specific measures for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly given six of the seven Closing the Gap targets are not being met.

We welcome the \$52.9 million allocation over four years for research associated with Closing the Gap provided it produces effective and efficient programs that make a tangible difference to the lives of our peoples.

We support the appointment of a Productivity Commissioner dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services but believe that the funds for the position should not come from the Indigenous Advancement Strategy.

Insufficient funds have been allocated for frontline services, which will have a negative effect on health, justice, education and other targets, and increase the burden on these services, many of which are already over-stretched.

At around \$10 000 per participant, the administrative overheads for the cashless welfare card, make the program shockingly inefficient. The outcomes of this program are questionable. In spite of this, the Government plans to expand the program to include two new sites without having announced the locations.

"This budget continues the trend of punitive measures on welfare recipients," said Rod Little, Congress co-chair. "This further stigmatises the most vulnerable members of society and is counterproductive to social cohesion," added Congress co-chair Jackie Huggins.

We call on the Governments to work collaboratively with us, by implementing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led-solutions, as outlined in the Redfern Statement.

-ENDS-

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