

# Lowitja Institute's 2022–23 Federal Budget Response

## Investment needed in developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce

The need for support and investment in the growth of the Aboriginal community controlled sector (ACCS), and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce has been a demand of prominent leaders in the sector over several budget cycles and successive government.

On Thursday 25 October 2022, the Australian Government announced \$314 million investment over five years towards the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, with individual funding measures aimed at addressing inequities in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. While this investment will see some growth of the ACCS<sup>1</sup>, it does not fully recognise the essential role that the ACCS play in Australian health systems. Sustained and long-term investment is needed to transform and strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations in upholding the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap* – this cannot be achieved in one budget cycle.

The Australian Government's investment of \$6.8 billion in research over the next four years recognises the value of the research sector. However, investment in infrastructure, aimed at developing both technical expertise and a skilled workforce of Indigenous health researchers was absent. This is essential in supporting the implementation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031* and should see provision of funding for additional research projects and scholarships.

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<sup>1</sup> Lowitja Institute, 2022, *2022 Federal Election Priorities*,  
<https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/policy-and-advocacy>



This is also critically important in establishing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research agenda, with a focus on the impacts of systemic racism in health systems. A focus on addressing systemic racism was also absent from budget announcements.

New funding opportunities for researchers focused on tackling health programs including dementia, and the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and their babies were welcomed commitments in the budget announcements last week.

Lowitja Institute has long advocated the benefits of Birthing on Country (BiOC) programs, which are evidence-based maternal health services that embed culture and Country into maternal healthcare and birthing services. Funding to establish a dedicated Birthing on Country Centre of Excellence at the Waminda health service in Nowra, New South Wales, helps ensure culturally safe services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the region, and Lowitja Institute urges government to extend this commitment and funding to allow for BiOC programs to be delivered in all areas across Australia.

The Australian Government has also committed \$99.7 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led climate change responses, including adaptation and mitigation. Lowitja Institute welcomes this investment but cautions that funding must be appropriately and equitably rolled out to communities. We urge the federal government to increase funding for climate change responses in the future to an amount commensurate with the crisis it poses and with a view to also invest in prevention. We also reiterate Lowitja Institute calls made ahead of the 2022 budget for the federal government to invest in ending energy poverty in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and for climate change investment to include money for pandemic planning<sup>2 3</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Lowitja Institute, 2022, *2022 Federal Election Priorities*,  
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Housing as a social determinant of health, has a direct relationship with health outcomes<sup>4</sup>. Lowitja Institute has repeatedly called for the Australian Government to invest in improving the quality, suitability and availability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander housing, and has worked in partnership with the Climate and Health Alliance (CAHA) to amplify these calls <sup>5 6</sup>. The federal government's \$100 million investment in housing and essential infrastructure in the Northern Territory is a good start. However, this investment is a two-year commitment only and is insufficient; longer term investment is required to address the housing crisis and hereby improve health outcomes.

We will continue to advocate to governments for further investment and commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and research, promoting the strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions to improve outcomes for the health and wellbeing of our peoples.

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<sup>4</sup> Lowitja Institute, 2022, 'National Housing and Homelessness Agreement Review: Submission to the Productivity Commission'

<sup>5</sup> Lowitja Institute, 2022, 'Transforming Power: Voices for Generational Change', *Close the Gap Campaign Report 2022*, prepared for the Close the Gap Steering Committee

<sup>6</sup> Lowitja Institute, 2021, 'Leadership and Legacy through Crises: Keeping our Mob Safe', *Close the Gap Campaign Report 2021*, prepared for the Close the Gap Steering Committee