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## Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples – 9<sup>th</sup> Session 11-15 July 2016

### Australia Statement on Item 5: Study and advice on the right to health and indigenous peoples, with a focus on children and youth

Australia was pleased to contribute to the Expert Mechanism's study on the right to health and indigenous peoples and looks forward to its presentation to the Human Rights Council in September.

The gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians is a major concern for Australia.

To address this major concern, in 2008 all Australian governments agreed to a set of intertwined targets, known as the Closing the Gap targets, which either directly or indirectly linked to health improvements.

The intertwined targets recognise the social determinants of health, and that health cannot be addressed in isolation.

Improving Indigenous health outcomes is complex and requires long-term actions and sustained effort. Actions and strategies must be evidence based, understanding the links between health, social and emotional wellbeing. Indigenous people must be central to decision making and service delivery.

Australia believes that its' National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan exemplifies these requirements. It is a long-term, evidence-based plan, stretching from 2013 to 2023. It emphasises the centrality of culture in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, aims to ensure health, social and emotional wellbeing, and it promotes positive health behaviours.

The Implementation Plan for the Health Plan, developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, recognises the different elements that make up effective health support. It has a strong focus on prevention, and recognises the importance of local and regional responses to identified health needs.

Australia understands that ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth have the best foundation for a healthy life requires a holistic approach.

For children, this means maternal and child health programmes, parenting and family support services, early childhood education and addressing environmental factors. An example of Australia's holistic approach to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children have the best foundation for a healthy life is the *Better Start to Life* initiative aimed at improving prenatal, postnatal and child health and parenting.

For youth, the importance of culture, positive role modelling and a strong sense of identity, all assist with the growth of resilience and gives a foundation to making positive health choices.

We look forward to learning more from the study, and exploring how the study's findings can be used by Australia.