Health funding, statehood and Indigenous economic development key COAG issues for NT

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The health funding challenge, statehood, domestic violence prevention and increasing opportunities for Indigenous economic development were key issues for the Northern Territory at today’s Council of Australian Governments (COAG) meeting.

Chief Minister Adam Giles said concerns about the looming health funding shortfall remained front and centre for the States and Territories, with more work to be done for the next COAG meeting.

“All States and Territories agree that funding the growing need for health services is the biggest financial challenge we all face,” he said.

“We all want funding certainty and I want to ensure that any proposed health funding reforms benefit all Territorians, including regional and remote Territorians.”

Mr Giles said today’s COAG meeting agreed on a number of reforms aimed at making the community safer.

“The Northern Territory Government has been working hard to tackle domestic violence and we welcome the introduction of a national Domestic Violence Order (DVO) scheme so DVOs issued in one state will be recognised in all others,” he said.

“The Northern Territory will also join with other States and Territories on initiatives to counter violent extremism with COAG agreeing to develop nationally consistent laws on post-sentence preventative detention for high risk terrorist offenders.

“Further, the National Ice Action Strategy agreed to today will complement the work of the Northern Territory Government such as new laws providing NT police with enhanced search and seizure powers for declared drug routes.”

The Chief Minister updated Leaders on progress towards statehood with a joint report from the Northern Territory and Commonwealth Governments to be provided at the next meeting of COAG in 2016.

“Statehood is about equality and ensuring Territorians are not treated as second class citizens so I’m pleased all Leaders continue to support the Northern Territory’s resolve to become Australia’s seventh state by 1 July 2018,” he said.
Mr Giles welcomed the Leaders’ agreement to a new approach that put Indigenous economic participation at the heart of the national agenda.

The Chief Minister said the Territory Government had implemented a range of innovative policies to significantly grow Indigenous business development and job opportunities across the Territory, especially in remote communities.

“We’ve set a number of ambitious employment targets and policies including doubling public sector Indigenous employment from 1800 to 3600 employees by 2020, and initiating Aboriginal employment requirements for all Government infrastructure contracts above $500,000,” he said.

“In addition, we’ve introduced a new remote contracting policy aimed at ensuring 70 per cent of small contracts for construction repairs and maintenance in remote Aboriginal communities go to local Aboriginal businesses by 2017.

“These policies set a clear direction and encourage Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal businesses to work together in a spirit of partnership across remote areas to build wealth creation for remote Aboriginal communities.

“The innovation in the Territory’s approach is that culture and economy are not treated as mutually exclusive, but as the essential ingredients in delivering improved social outcomes in areas of education, health and justice.

“The Northern Territory Government looks forward to working with the other States and Territories, the Commonwealth Government and Indigenous leaders to develop targeted actions to boost Indigenous economic participation right throughout the country.”

Chief Minister Adam Giles will take over from NSW Premier Mike Baird as Chair of the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) in 2016.

The CAF is an intergovernmental forum for State and Territory Leaders that meets to discuss and resolve important issues independent of the Commonwealth Government.

“2016 will be an important year for CAF as we work to address the health funding challenge confronting all States and Territories,” Mr Giles said.

Media Contact: Scott Whitby 0438 531 583