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Labor's Closing the Gap Efforts Falter Amid Ongoing Challenges

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Minister Malarndirri McCarthy claims progress in Closing the Gap, but data shows persistent failures in reducing Indigenous disparities, raising doubts about the Australian Labor Party's (ALP) strategy.

The Australian Labor Party (ALP) government, led by Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy, insists it is “moving forward” with efforts to close the gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. However, a 2025 Productivity Commission report reveals that only four of 19 socio-economic targets under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap are on track, with child removals, youth detention, and adult incarceration rates worsening, per ABC News. This paints a grim picture of the ALP's progress since taking office in 2022.

McCarthy highlighted to the Ministers' Media Centre a \$842.6 million, six-year partnership with the Northern Territory (NT) Government and Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO NT) to fund policing, health, and education in remote communities. She also pointed to the Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program, aiming to create 3,000 jobs, and 200 new homes built in the NT to address overcrowding, per the 2024 Closing the Gap Annual Report. "The government is committed to partnership," McCarthy told ABC News, emphasizing community-led solutions to improve outcomes.

Yet, the Productivity Commission's 2024 review criticized the ALP for "weak" action and a "disregard" for Indigenous community input, warning the agreement risks failure without reform, per The Guardian. Indigenous children are 10.2 times more likely to be in out-of-home care (OOHC) and 27 times more likely to be in youth detention, per the 2025 Family Matters report. Coalition Senator Jacinta Nampijinpa Price argued to Sky News Australia that the ALP's focus on symbolic gestures, like the failed Voice referendum, distracts from practical solutions like economic empowerment.

The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) oversees the agreement, but critics, including the Coalition of Peaks, argue that shared decision-making remains inadequate, per the National Indigenous Times. With only 96.7% of Indigenous children enrolled in early childhood education meeting targets, per the 2024 Closing the Gap report, the ALP's claims of progress ring hollow against persistent gaps in health, housing, and justice. The Opposition calls for a refocused framework, prioritizing local outcomes over national rhetoric.