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DARING TO IMAGINE

According to research by Newspoll, 66 per cent of Australians do not expect to see an indigenous Prime Minister in their lifetime. Perhaps this reflects racism in the broader community, or perhaps it's a belief expressed in sorrow rather than bigotry, an acknowledgment of the systemic disadvantage which continues to marginalise indigenous communities throughout the nation. Or it's a combination of the two. But must it really be so that an Aborigine or Torres Strait Islander in The Lodge is out of the question?

A campaign by the Australian Indigenous Education Foundation dares the wider community to imagine the unimaginable: a first Australian as Prime Minister of Australia.

A series of prominent display ads which have run in *The Australian* newspaper feature the stately painting of a prime ministerial indigenous man, the national flag in the background, with a confronting message in capital letters: "This will never happen." On the following page, a display ad with the AIEF's logo declares in even larger capitals: "We say it can."

The AIEF, a federal government and private sector-backed non-profit organisation dedicated to providing disadvantaged indigenous children with education scholarships, has launched the campaign with the aim of raising \$100 million to educate 7000 indigenous children to at least Year 12 at schools and universities around Australia.

The chief executive of the AIEF, Andrew Penfold, says he is "disturbed but unfortunately not surprised" by the findings of the AIEF-commissioned survey that two-thirds of the nation cannot envisage an indigenous Prime Minister.

By increasing the number of indigenous children who complete Year 12 and mentoring and funding those who wish to go on to tertiary study, however, Penfold believes any career is possible – even Prime Minister of Australia.

Penfold says it is the AIEF's ultimate goal to help support the education of Australia's first indigenous prime minister. "We know that indigenous education inequality is the number one barrier preventing Australia from having an indigenous Prime Minister," he says.