



Australian Health Care Reform Alliance

C/- PO Box 280 Deakin West ACT 2600 ABN 64 051 645 674
www.healthreform.org.au

MEDIA RELEASE

15 June 2016

Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

The Australian Health Care Reform Alliance calls on all political parties to make the elimination of health inequality, discrimination and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a Federal election priority. The landmark Redfern Statement by Indigenous leaders on the 9 June 2016 succinctly appeals to all political parties to recommit to closing the gap to meet the national goal of achieving equality in life expectancy within this generation.

The 2014 Federal budget made damaging funding cuts to Aboriginal Health Services that have worsened the inequalities in health care.

Future funding needs cross party support. It needs to be allocated according to health needs and in consultation with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS). It needs to be indexed for growth in service demand and inflation, focussed on the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (2013-2023) and maintain support for universal access to Medicare-funded health services.

It has become increasingly apparent that mainstream services lack the ability to provide culturally appropriate, sustainable person-centred care which includes both a biomedical and preventive health focus. The ACCHS need to be considered as the preferred provider of health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Where it is appropriate for mainstream services to provide a service they should be looking to partner with the ACCHS to better meet local community needs. The incoming government needs to take the financial strain off the ACCHS by resuming the indexation of Medicare.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have difficulty in accessing appropriate care resulting in unnecessary welfare dependency, homelessness, drug and alcohol abuse, suicidality, as well as intolerable pain and suffering felt by people, their families and their communities.

The Federal government needs to ensure that mandated formal agreements between the Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and the ACCHS are maintained to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at all levels, best practice and culturally appropriate primary health care.

The flawed tendering process, application, grant selection and roll out of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) needs to be evaluated and made transparent. Essential funding needs to be reinstated to key health programs and services.

While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have shown extraordinary resilience over past decades, they also have one of the highest suicide rates in the world, more so the young people. Funding is needed for the social and emotional wellbeing of the community, including an Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy. That Strategy should focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, and external bodies to developing local, culturally appropriate interventions to identify and respond to those most at risk.

The next Federal government needs to implement a sustainable National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Determinants of Health Strategy to adequately address housing, education, employment and community support. The Strategy must be developed in association with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and incorporate a holistic view of the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australian people.

What we should be hearing from politicians of all persuasions are answers to questions like:

- How do your policies increase access to care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
- How do your policies ensure a sustainable partnership between the PHNs and the ACCHS?
- How will your policies improve the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and reduce suicide rates?
- How will your government work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop and implement a sustainable National Social Determinants of Health Strategy?
- How will your government be addressing, reviewing and evaluating the tendering process of the Indigenous Advancement Strategy?

Contact

Dr Vanessa Lee

AHCRA Indigenous Health Spokesperson

0417 983 001