



MEDIA STATEMENT

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Plenty of good news for Aboriginal health, but plenty of questions remain

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) welcomes the Budget initiatives targeting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. These include funding for the COVID-19 vaccine rollout, point-of-care testing, rheumatic fever strategy, bowel cancer screening, workplace training packages for health professionals in rural and remote areas, changes to the Midwife Professional Indemnity Scheme and changes to the Practice Incentives Program (Indigenous Health Incentive). These all seem to be very positive announcements. Also pleasing is the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the substantial aged care and mental health packages.

While these announcements are most welcome, there needs to be more clarity concerning implementation. It is important that Aboriginal community-controlled organisations are closely involved in the new initiatives to ensure success.

In Cairns this morning, Donnella Mills, the NACCHO Chair, said, “These Budget measures are very welcome, but we will need to work through the detail before we can be sure that what is proposed will work.

“It is pleasing to see that the NACCHO members are referred to in the Budget Papers in relation to a new role in the aged care sector and other areas. Certainly, the measures announced in the Budget won’t work unless Aboriginal people and organisations are fully involved in the design and delivery.”

The pandemic has proved the success of the model. The network of Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations in combatting COVID-19 shows what happens when local people are empowered to take local action.

Ms Mills said, “We have shown the world what can be done to keep First Nations peoples safe during a global pandemic. In the USA, the Navajo had the highest death rate of any ethnic population. In Australia, not one Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person has died.”

NACCHO welcomes the aged care package. The identification of \$630m to improve aged care access largely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders is a significant investment (about 3.6 per cent of the overall package). However, more will need to follow for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to receive their fair share of aged care (estimated at 7 per cent on population and eligibility).

Ms Mills said, “All Australians welcome the overdue investment in aged care. We all want our elders to be loved and cared for with dignity and respect. But Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders would like to see the specific details about how the measures will be tailored to our people and our communities and what role our services can play in all of this.

“We are keen to work with governments to ensure that the new funding is effectively invested. Governments need to start talking to us now, so that these good intentions deliver solid results on the ground for our elders.”



NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation

NACCHO also welcomes the increased mental health funding, particularly in suicide prevention. The critical factor for success for the programs for Aboriginal people is if the delivery is through Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, who are trusted by their clients. NACCHO members deliver culturally safe, services in communities dealing with extreme social and economic disadvantage, compounded by intergenerational trauma.

As the auspicing member of the Coalition of Peaks, NACCHO will also closely monitor the promise in the Budget that a genuine Closing the Gap package will be held back until the PM tables the Commonwealth implementation plan in mid-2021. Again, the early signs are positive, but NACCHO will need to see the detail before it can be confident that the measures will succeed.

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NACCHO is the national peak body representing 143 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations across the country on Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO represents over 6,000 ACCHO staff – of which 3,500 are Indigenous – and is the second largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Many NACCHO members have almost 50 years of experience in the delivery of comprehensive primary health care. Services are delivered through fixed, outreach and mobile clinics operating in urban, rural and remote settings across Australia.