



Australian Government
Department of Health

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums

Commonwealth Department of Health Update

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums (the Partnership Forums) provide a formal mechanism for engagement, collaboration, planning and data information sharing between members to achieve improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Membership of the Partnership Forums comprises the signatories to each jurisdictional Partnership Framework Agreement: the Australian Government (represented by the Department of Health) the State / Territory Government (represented by the Department of Health) and the jurisdictional Aboriginal health peak body. Arrangements relating to the participation of other guests vary between the Forums, and may include the Primary Health Networks and representatives of the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The eight Partnership Forums aim to meet 3-4 times per calendar year. The *Commonwealth Department of Health Update* provides Partners with the latest information about the Department's business relating to Indigenous health policies and programs. This includes updates on projects that impact the sector or stakeholders; tenders, evaluations and opportunities for consultation; and significant policy developments.

Please feel free to share this update with your networks.

For further information, please contact the Commonwealth Department of Health Partnership Forums Team: Commonwealth.Partnership.Forums@health.gov.au.

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New Updates

1. Investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Medical Research

On 8 December 2019, the Australian Government announced the \$13.5 million grant opportunity in Indigenous health and medical research over three years (2019-20 to 2021-22). Up to \$2 million is available per research project which aims to drive improvements in outcomes for one of the four key health challenges – ending avoidable blindness, ending avoidable deafness, preventing chronic kidney disease and improving adolescent mental health.

The grants are part of the Australian Government's \$160 million, 10-year investment in the Indigenous Health Research Fund (2019-20 to 2028-29) under the Medical Research Future Fund.

This grant opportunity will open on 13 December 2019 and close on 5 February 2020.

Information on this grant opportunity and how to apply is available on the GrantConnect [website](#).

2. 2019-20 Budget measure – supporting implementation of the aged care workforce strategy

Improving access to care for people whose needs span the health and aged care systems remains an ongoing issue for all levels of government.

On 27 November 2019, all governments participated in a workshop on integrated care models for older Australians. This included specific challenges and opportunities with integrated care models in rural and remote communities.

The workshop will inform the implementation of the aged care workforce strategy. The Department will engage Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACHHS), Primary Health Networks (PHNs), local hospital networks, the acute care sector, aged care assessment teams, providers and consumers in the development of options to improve the transition of older people between care settings.

3. National Obesity Strategy

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) Health Council agreed to develop a national obesity strategy for Australia. Overweight and obesity is an urgent public health problem affecting our whole community. The Queensland Department of Health is leading the development of the Strategy in close collaboration with all other COAG members. The Strategy will prioritise actions over the next 10 years to reduce the impact of chronic disease associated with overweight and obesity.

A national public consultation process was held in November -December 2019. The Strategy is expected to be finalised towards the end of 2020.

4. PHN/Indigenous health sector policy forum

The Australia Government Department of Health will facilitate a PHN and Aboriginal community controlled health sector policy forum in late March 2020. This forum will be an opportunity to continue to improve engagement between PHNs and the Indigenous health sector, and build better working relationships to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There will be a focussed discussion on reviewing the current PHN and ACCHS Guiding Principles, which includes commissioning arrangements and current governance structures. A confirmed date for this forum will be circulated imminently.

5. NSW ACCHS & NSW PHNs Partnership Group

The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) has formed a Partnership Group with NSW PHNs. This group will support consultation and planning across sectors and produce and monitor actionable outcomes to improve the health and well-being for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in NSW. The group consists of three NSW PHN CEOs, three representatives of NSW ACCHS, the Chair of the NSW PHN Aboriginal Health Network, the AH&MRC, NSW Ministry of Health, and the Australian Government Department of Health.

The Partnership Group is reviewing the current Guiding Principles between ACCHS and PHNs to better reflect the NSW sectors and how they can work and co-design services to improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. This will feed in to the forum outlined in Section 4 above.

Routine Updates

6. Indigenous Australians' Health Programme Primary Health Care Funding Model Update

On 6 November 2019, the Hon. Greg Hunt MP, Minister for Health, announced finalisation of the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) Primary Health Care (PHC) Funding Model. The purpose of the funding model is to distribute funding fairly and transparently, based on activity levels, the cost of delivering services and the relative health needs of locations.

From 1 July 2020, funding for eligible ACCHS delivering comprehensive primary health care under the IAHP will be calculated using the funding model.

Key benefits include:

- \$90 million additional investment over three years (2020-21 through to 2022-23);
- Three year funding agreements;
- Annual indexation;
- Current funding levels maintained or increased based on the model; and
- Streamlined grant application processes.

Only those ACCHS whose model-calculated funding is higher than their current funding will be offered additional funds through this investment; so not all ACCHS will receive additional funding under the funding model calculations.

Further details, including Factsheets and Frequently Asked Questions are available on the Department of Health's [website](#).

Development of the model is a significant achievement which has now only been possible as a result of the shared commitment of key stakeholders via the Comprehensive Primary Health Care Sustainability Advisory Committee (SAC). The Department will continue to work closely with the SAC to further refine the model over time, with the next meeting scheduled for 18 December 2019.

From early 2020, the Department will work with key stakeholders to consider how other funded organisations (including state and territory health services and other funded primary health care services) can be factored into the model in the future.

7. Primary Health Care Funding – Grant Opportunity Guidelines Update

The Department has developed new Grant Opportunity Guidelines for the next round of PHC funding under the IAHP. One set of Guidelines has been developed for those organisations that are in the PHC Funding Model and another set of Guidelines has been developed for those organisations that are currently outside of the PHC Funding Model. Organisations in the PHC Funding Model will be offered a three year grant agreement and those organisations that are currently outside of the PHC Funding Model will be offered a one year grant agreement with an extension option of one or two years. A funding model will be implemented during this time if one can be developed within this timeframe.

Eligible organisations are not required to submit an application for these grant opportunities. The Department will assess suitability for these opportunities through a review of documentation already held by the Department including performance reports, Activity Work Plans and Budgets, financial declarations submitted to the Community Grants Hub and any correspondence with the eligible organisation.

The Department published these opportunities on GrantConnect in late November 2019. Organisations currently in receipt of PHC funding under the IAHP will have received a notification from the Department informing them of the grant opportunity.

8. Next Iteration of the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013- 2023

The Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023 is being revised to:

- embed the social determinants of health and cultural determinants of health;
- ensure it aligns with relevant policies and priorities; and

- simplify its goals and actions.

An Implementation Plan Working Group, comprising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health experts, will drive this work. Ms Donna Murray chairs the group.

The revision of the Plan is using the Health Plan and the Closing the Gap Refresh as the overarching policy framework. The proposed Implementation Plan framework recognises the importance of culture in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples.

The proposed policy framework has been sent to members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums for feedback.

Further information is on the Department of Health's [website](#).

9. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Plan

Since the last Commonwealth Update Newsletter, an extensive project scoping phase has been undertaken in furthering the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Plan (Workforce Plan).

Scoping activities reiterated that wide reaching and genuine consultation is critical to the success of the Workforce Plan. As a result, over 230 stakeholders have been or will be invited to participate in consultations. This includes the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled and mainstream health sectors, education and research institutes, health workforce peak organisations, mental health organisations, Commonwealth agencies, state and territory governments and state and territory health and hospital services.

The consultation process is being undertaken via various methods including regional workshops and multiple face to face and telephone interviews. Alternatively, written submissions are also welcome. If you would like to participate in these consultations, you can do so by contacting Cultural Fusion at: connect@culturalfusion.com.au

Further information about the project can be viewed on Cultural Fusion's [website](#).

It is anticipated that the final Workforce Plan will be delivered to COAG Health Council for endorsement in mid-2020.

10. Increasing Uptake of MBS 715 Health Assessments

Work continues on increasing the rates of MBS 715 health assessments. The Department is working with 33 Creative, an Aboriginal owned and managed communications, media and events company, to develop and distribute communication products targeted at both Aboriginal and mainstream health practitioners and patients. The materials developed include a patient journey to assist health practitioners to map the "whole of practice" approach to undertaking 715 health checks. In addition, a suite of communication materials has been developed with a range of distribution approaches used, including through social media channels; and a podcast and animation which are available on the Aboriginal Health Television Network, in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and in some General Practices.

Posters and brochures have been mailed to services and stakeholders, and are also available on the Department of Health's [website](#), or by emailing info@33creative.com.au. Following the success of the materials, this project has now entered its second phase with further case studies and an additional podcast being developed. These are due for completion in 2020.

11. Evaluation of the Australian Government's investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care (PHC) under the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) (also known as 'IAHP Yarnes')

The evaluation has a whole of system, person-centred approach that not only focuses on PHC under the IAHP, but its interactions and influence on other parts of the PHC and wider health system. The evaluation will assess the appropriateness and effectiveness of the IAHP, and actively support the health system to produce sustained improvements in service delivery and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The evaluation team (managed by Allen + Clarke) would like to thank the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums' Members for advice on the proposed site selection as part of the evaluation. Engagement with potential partners across (up to) 20 sites across the country continues. Potential partners in almost all states and territories have been contacted. The project team will continue to engage with sites over coming weeks. Updates are being progressively provided to relevant Health Partnership Forums.

The site studies will assess the impact of the IAHP on the ground and support improvements at the local level. Benefits of participating in the evaluation include:

- Employment and training opportunities for local evaluation coordinators to support local capacity building; and
- Regular tailored evidence to support planning and continuous improvement at the local, regional, state and national levels.

The Health Sector Co-Design Group (HSCG) is continuing to guide the evaluation throughout implementation and met on 8-9 October 2019. The HSCG includes membership from key stakeholder groups, such as NACCHO, the state and territory affiliates and Primary Health Networks. The HSCG also provided reflections and advice to the Productivity Commission to inform its work to develop a whole-of-government Indigenous Evaluation Strategy. The discussion recognised the unique nature of this evaluation, including its focus on co-design, systems-orientation and Indigenous leadership.

Comprehensive information about the evaluation, including the latest HSCG Communique is available on the evaluation team's [website](#).

12. Data Collection and the Health Data Portal (The Portal)

Work is underway to prepare for the next National Key Performance Indicators (nKPI's) collection, which opens on 1 January 2020 and will close on 14 February 2020. A number of new features and enhancements of current features have been built into the Health Data Portal as a direct result of our recent round of co design workshops. These features were tested prior to the release on 4 December 2019.

New features include total percentages displayed for all 24 indicators and a downloadable report detailing for health services any data validation flags raised and how the health service responded. Enhancements include substantial performance improvements in loading, navigating and saving the nKPI form in the Portal.

In addition, all 88 of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) validation rules have now been built into the Portal. This means that the AIHW's review workload should be significantly reduced, with more rapid processing and finalisation of data.

The forthcoming nKPI collection through the Health Data Portal will be the last time health services will use the AusKey for authenticated Portal access. From March 2020 onwards, all Portal users will be required to set up a MyGovID credential to log in to the Portal. Information about this change will continue to be communicated to health services through our monthly newsletter, and the Portal team will provide support for the transition.

Health services are receiving monthly updates through the dedicated Portal newsletter, which has over 1,200 subscribers. If you would like to subscribe to the newsletter please send your email details to Indigenousreporting@health.gov.au.

13. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) review of nKPI and OSR

In May 2018 the Department of Health commissioned the AIHW to conduct a comprehensive review of the nKPI and OSR data collections. The purpose of the Review was to identify the current strengths and weaknesses of the two collections as they currently exist, and to develop actionable options for how they can better meet the future needs of the funders, health services, policymakers, and researchers.

The report was provided to the Health Services Data Advisory Group (HS DAG) and formed the basis for a strategic planning workshop that was held on 9 December 2019. This workshop was facilitated by KPMG and considered multiple recommendations on the nKPI and OSR data collections with a view to establishing a future roadmap for the implementation of data and governance reforms.

14. Update on Enhanced Response to the Syphilis Outbreak Affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities in Northern and Central Australia

The next Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) Syphilis Enhanced Response Governance Group meeting is 16 December 2019. The group will consider the proposed scope for the review of the syphilis enhanced response, which is scheduled for the second half of 2020.

Links for further information:

[Enhanced response to the syphilis outbreak](#)

[Syphilis - CDNA National Guideline for Public Health Units](#)

[National Pregnancy Care Guidelines - syphilis](#)

[Listing of benzathine benzylpenicillin \(Bicillin L-A\)](#)

15. National Bowel Screening Program

As of 18 November 2019 the National Bowel Cancer Screening Program (NBCSP) will be supported by the National Cancer Screening Register (NCSR) which also supports the National Cervical Screening Program. Health care providers will now provide referrals, results, diagnosis and staging data in relation to bowel cancer screening as well as cervical cancer to the NCSR.

The Department of Health funded a National Indigenous Bowel Screening Pilot \$3.2 million to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the NBCSP. The Pilot tested an alternative approach which involved 47 Indigenous primary health care services promoting the NBCSP to their clients, giving out NBCSP screening kits, and supporting their clients to participate in bowel screening for a 12 month period ending November 2019.

While the pilot has completed and is now being evaluated, Pilot services are continuing to offer kits to their patients through the National Cancer Screening Register.

16. National Immunisation Program – Increasing Levels of Vaccination in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children

The Australian Government's Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign continues to have a big impact.

National immunisation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are at record levels in five year olds. Data for the September 2019 quarter shows that coverage for five year olds increased by more than a percentage point over the previous two years to 97.05 per cent. Coverage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander five year olds is now higher than for all five year olds.

Two-year-old Indigenous coverage continues to improve, reaching 89.51 per cent after consecutive increases in the March, June and September 2019 quarters.

One-year-old Indigenous coverage continues to rise towards the national target of 95 per cent, with September 2019 coverage increasing to 92.48 per cent.

Phase three of the Childhood Immunisation Education Campaign delivered public relations targeted at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents of children aged five and under.

It reinforced the need to vaccinate on time, that vaccines are safe and the benefits for the entire community.

The latest coverage data is available on the Department of Health's [website](#).