

## **Australian Government input to UN Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Consultation on the right to health and indigenous peoples**

The Australian Government actively supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's right to health through the development and implementation of a cohesive national plan to improve health outcomes, the setting of targets, and the funding of initiatives. Information on Australia's approach is provided below.

The Australian Government has set targets to Close the Gap in outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. Two of these targets, to halve the gap in child mortality by 2018 and close the life expectancy gap by 2031, go directly to improving health outcomes. These are influenced by social determinants of health such as education and employment.

The Australian Government is investing \$3.3 billion over four years from 2015-16 to 2018-19 through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme and funding for Indigenous-specific mental health services and drug and alcohol treatment services.

### **Australia's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023**

The Australian Government's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 provides a long-term, evidence-based policy framework to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.

The Plan builds on the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It adopts a strengths-based approach to ensure policies and programmes improve health, social and emotional wellbeing, and resilience and promote positive health behaviours. It emphasises the centrality of culture in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the rights of individuals to a safe, healthy and empowered life.

The Plan supports good health and wellbeing across the life course, and targets risk factors at key life stages. The different stages of life provide strategic points of intersection between health, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. The different life stages also provide an opportunity to focus on specific health priorities and reduce health inequalities at the point at which they are most likely to occur.

The Plan provides a patient-centred platform for different agencies, organisations, government, stakeholders and representative bodies to work together to deliver coordinated and focused programs.

### **Implementation Plan**

In 2015 the Australian Government released the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023. The Implementation Plan sets out the broad changes needed to make the health system more comprehensive, culturally safe and effective.

The Implementation Plan adopts a systems and life-course approach to identifying and responding to local needs and outlines strategies, actions and deliverables over seven domains: health systems effectiveness; maternal health and parenting; childhood health and development; adolescent and youth health; healthy adults; healthy ageing; and social and cultural determinants of health. It has a

strong focus on prevention, as well as on improving the patient journey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the health system. It also focuses on supporting local and regional responses to identified needs.

It is intended that the Implementation Plan will expand to include the contributions of other Australian Government departments, state and territory governments, and non-government and private sector health care providers.

### **Indigenous Childhood Health and Development**

The Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 recognises that using cultural knowledge and teaching enables children and their families to draw on their strengths, have pride and confidence, and ensure holistic health for their children.

Early childhood development programmes that include access to childhood education, family support and parenting are a highly effective means of reducing health inequalities and providing life-long benefits. A focus on environmental factors (e.g. poverty, poor and overcrowded living conditions and poor hygiene) can also reduce the risk of poor health. The Plan includes actions that enhance the achievement of developmental milestones, support immunisation, and integrate education, family and support services.

The Australian Government’s strategy for supporting the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is to ensure that they, their mothers, fathers, extended families and carers are able to access culturally appropriate, evidence-based, early health diagnosis and coordinated and quality treatment services.

To assist in improving health outcomes for Indigenous children, the Australian Government has also set the following goals:

- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 0–4 years who have at least one health check in a year from 23% to 69% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at age 1 who are fully immunised from 85% to 88% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at age 2 who are fully immunised from 91% to 96% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at age 5 who are fully immunised from 92% to 96% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children 5–14 years who have at least one health check in a year from 18% to 46% by 2023.

### **Programme Example:**

The Australian Nurse-Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) is a nurse led home visiting programme that supports women pregnant with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander child to improve their own health and the health of their baby, until the child is two years old. It is an adaptation of the evidence-based Nurse-Family Partnership programme in the United States of America (USA) and can only be delivered under license to the University of Colorado.

The programme aims to improve:

- pregnancy outcomes by helping women improve their prenatal health;

- child health and development by helping parents provide more sensitive and competent care; and
- parental life-course by helping parents develop a vision for their future and fulfil that vision by planning future pregnancies, completing their education, and finding work.

Further information on the ANFPP is available at [www.anfpp.com.au](http://www.anfpp.com.au).

### **Adolescent and Youth Health**

The Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 also recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth should receive the services and support needed to thrive and grow into healthy young adults. Preserving and sharing cultural heritage gives young people a sense of the future and strengthens their identity. Being part of an active community with influence ensures protective resilience factors in young people. A strong foundation of positive cultural identity is important for health and wellbeing, for community safety and strength, and for successful engagement in education and work. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are the leaders of tomorrow.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth are being supported to be positive role models and participate in decisions that affect them, their future and their communities. Leadership among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth is enhanced by a strong sense of identity and connection to culture. The Implementation Plan supports actions that will create environments for young people to increase health literacy and make healthy choices, identify and address health issues early, and excel in avenues such as sport, music, art and education to achieve their aspirations.

The Australian Government's Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023 includes the following strategies to support Indigenous youth:

- Young people have a voice in the development and implementation of programmes and policies that are affecting them.
- Young people are supported to be resilient and make informed and healthy choices about living, including being proud of identity and culture.
- Young people are able to access culturally appropriate and non-racist services that address health risk behaviours.
- Young people have good education and good employment prospects.

The Implementation Plan also includes the following goals:

- Reduce the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 15–17 years who smoke from 19% to 9% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 15–17 years who have never smoked from 77% to 91% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 18–24 years who have never smoked from 42% to 52% by 2023.
- Increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth aged 15–24 years who have at least one health check in a year from 17% to 42% by 2023.