



National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

For IMMEDIATE RELEASE

MEDIA RELEASE

FUNDS URGENTLY NEEDED TO ADDRESS KILLER DISEASE

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) wants the Australian Government to urgently fund a national strategy to combat Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in Aboriginal communities – a disease that is all but eradicated in mainstream Australia.

NACCHO's call coincides with the launch today, by the National Heart Foundation and Cardiac Society of Australia & New Zealand, of an evidence based review for the diagnosis and management of Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in Australia.

“NACCHO is pleased to have been involved in supporting the development of this important Review. The next step though is for the Australian Government to adequately fund a national strategy to eliminate the disease,” said NACCHO Chair, Mr Henry Councillor.

Aboriginal people are 26.5 times more likely to die of the disease than non-Aboriginal people, with premature death due to the disease more than four times that reported from all developing countries. Tragically, almost all cases of RHD and associated deaths are preventable. It is a classic disease of poverty, with the highest rates in young children aged 5-14 years and is particularly prevalent in Northern and Central Australia.

Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease is caused by bacterial infection. It affects heart valves causing an inflammation of the heart, joints and skin. As the disease progresses heart valve surgery is needed, as is lifelong medications, including monthly injections.

“This Review provides valuable information about the diagnosis and management of Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease and will assist in the development of standard management protocols for GPs and services, but the Australian Government must ensure its effect goes further.”

“We have evidence of the impact of this devastating disease. It is time to now listen to the advice of Aboriginal communities and experts and commit to a nationally funded prevention program and strategy to ensure no more children die from new cases of Rheumatic Fever in Australia.”

The Diagnosis and Management of Acute Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease in Australia Review will be launched 26 June at 10am, at the Rover Thomas Auditorium, Australia Council, 372 Elizabeth Street, Surry Hills, Sydney.

For comment contact:

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