

Media Release

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Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are Closing the Gap in Access to Medicines

Many more Aboriginal people are now getting the prescription medicines they need, along with tailored advice and assistance, under the QUMAX* program operating in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) according to an independent report.

“The report, available on the Department of Health and Ageing website**, shows the QUMAX program has been an unprecedented success in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s access to medicines,” says Justin Mohamed Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).

The report by Urbis Pty Ltd covers the QUMAX Program’s operation since November 2008.

“In a 6 month period, the number of medicines dispensed to clients of urban and regional Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services rose by 14% and outstripped the increase in medicines dispensed to all other Australians, by a factor of at least five times. This increase has also exceeded the increase seen in remote areas under the Section 100 scheme by a factor of seven times.

“Access to the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is significantly less than that for other Australians. For every \$1 spent by non-Aboriginal Australians on PBS medicines, only 60 cents is spent on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. We aim to ensure that Aboriginal peoples have access to the PBS at least equal to that of other Australians.” Mr Mohamed said.

NACCHO and the Pharmacy Guild of Australia jointly developed and manage the QUMAX Program. The Australian Government funded it under the 4th Community Pharmacy Agreement.

The QUMAX Program involved 69 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in rural, regional and urban areas with strong participation by community pharmacists and Aboriginal consumers. Over 540 pharmacies took part. Nearly 34,000 Aboriginal patients were registered to the program, and Pharmacists dispensed 271,000 medicines where the PBS co-payment was waived. Since 1 July 2010 the co-payment has been covered under the Closing the Gap PBS Co-payment measure.

The report says, “the QUMAX Program has succeeded in overcoming some of the known barriers to access to medications, medication compliance, and medical care by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”.

This was a good result with nearly 34,000 patients supported with medicines and medication aids.

QUMAX worked by subsidising the cost of medicines to eligible disadvantaged clients of ACCHSs. The program also supported local ‘quality use of medicines’ initiatives, including providing dose-administration aids, transport assistance, and increased local collaboration with community pharmacies.

“There was a widespread view from ACCHSs that good health outcomes flowed from the program including significant increases in how regularly patients attended their services for care. Aboriginal patients are visiting clinics earlier, treating their illnesses sooner and better managing chronic disease. They are now getting advice about using their medications tailored to their needs by a pharmacist,” Mr Mohamed said.

“The program is an example of true partnership in Closing the Gap. It demonstrates the significant impact that Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services can make in improving Aboriginal people’s access to health care, in partnership with industry and Government. If access to medicines is

improved, then chronic disease can be reduced, and we can start to see some improvements in Aboriginal people's life expectancy."

"To close the gap we need to also help those patients who are the most needy and hard to reach. Our member services are able to do that because our services know the community and they are run by the community, for the community," Mr Mohamed said.

The QUMAX pilot program began in 2008 when Opposition leader Tony Abbott was Federal Health Minister and has continued under Health Minister Nicola Roxon.

The Australian Government has extended funding for the QUMAX program to 2015 under the 5th Community Pharmacy Agreement.

*"QUMAX" is a contraction of "Quality Use of Medicines Maximised for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples"

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[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/5B1B138DA00BB9C7CA2578150083984E/\\$File/Final%20Report%20QUMAX%20Evaluation%20April%202011.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/5B1B138DA00BB9C7CA2578150083984E/$File/Final%20Report%20QUMAX%20Evaluation%20April%202011.pdf)