



NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

Media Release

31-01-2012

Aboriginal Health Services response to Australia Day events

The actions of a small minority of Aboriginal people and the media portrayal of the events around the Australia Day protest have concerned the spokespersons for the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service for failing to appreciate the significance of the day to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal communities around the country have been troubled by the imagery and the perceptions that have been drawn from the protest actions, according to the Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and the CEO of the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service.

“The celebrations for the fortieth anniversary of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy were a very important milestone for Aboriginal Australia,” Mr Justin Mohamed, Chair of NACCHO, said today.

“There was a great deal of positive acknowledgement of achievements over the last forty years at the Anniversary celebrations, and the very important role that the Aboriginal Tent Embassy had played in driving public attention on the position of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people.”

Julie Tongs, CEO of Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service in the ACT, stated that the Tent Embassy will continue to be a symbol for Aboriginal communities of their struggle for justice and fairness.

“Australians use a variety of symbolic and historical events and imagery to represent national values and achievements. They do not lose value or significance because things have progressed and times have changed,” Ms Tongs said.

“Nor should there be any suggestion that, because some progress has been made in tackling the needs of Aboriginal peoples, it is time to forget the continuing role of the Tent Embassy.”

“Australia Day is a sensitive time for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people across the country,” Mr Mohamed commented.

“The only imagery that came across national media was of anger and allegations of violence on the part of a few, with no attempt to place this into a broader context,” Mr Mohamed said.

“I do not condone or support the actions of some individuals who sought to exploit the emotional environment of that Anniversary.”

“Those events did not reflect the real purpose of the Anniversary, nor the views of the vast majority of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people. This is not the way we seek to advance positive action on the significant issues which impact daily on our lives.

“Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people will continue to debate, campaign and demonstrate for our rights and a better future for our communities,” Mr Mohamed said.

NACCHO Contact: Justin Mohamed on 0409105090

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Service Health Clinic Contact: Julie Tongs on 0418206156