



The Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for Health and Aged Care

SPEECH

**Opening Remarks,
NACCHO (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health
Organisation) Members' Conference
National Convention Centre
Canberra
18 October 2022 /1.20 PM
5 minutes**

- Good afternoon. Thank you Donella and Pat for welcoming me here today.
- I would like to acknowledge we meet today on the land of the Ngunnawal and Ngambri people and pay my respects to the elders, part present and to our emerging leaders.
- It is a pleasure to be here on behalf of the Prime Minister who was regrettably unable to attend the event.
- Many of those emerging First Nations leaders have attended your youth conference here over the past day. I hope they found this opportunity to be beneficial and formed new connections.
- It is great to see our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth participating in these forums and interacting with each other and sharing their unique cultural learnings and understandings; bringing forward their culture and their identity to be part of a better and informed future.

Health Ministers' Meeting

- Just over a week ago it was great to be able to reconvene what we call the ATSI Roundtable for health – bringing together all the Health Ministers from States and Territories and the Commonwealth along with representatives from across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander community controlled and health sector leadership.
- The Roundtable has been unable to meet recently, and it was a priority for this government to convene it as quickly as possible following our election.
- The Roundtable was important for highlighting the challenges in workforce, in service delivery, in embedding culturally safe practices across the health system.
- All health ministers have prioritised this work, including the Commonwealth through myself and Assistant Minister Malarndirri McCarthy.

Puggy Hunter

- One way that the Commonwealth Government can lead in this work is to take real steps to implement the letter and the spirit of the Coalition of Peaks Priority Reforms.
- Priority reform 2 emphasises the role of the community-controlled health sector, and the role of governments in building and strengthening the sector.
- This is a critical area for this government to build and grow. The work of ACCHOs around the country isn't just a model for First Nations health, it's a model for the whole health sector.
- It's why I have directed the commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care to audit all programs delivering services to First Nations communities that are not currently being delivered by First Nations organisations.
- It's why I announced last week that the Puggy Hunter Scholarship Scheme – our leading program encouraging entry-level Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander health students to complete their studies and join the health workforce – needed to be handed over to First Nations control.

- For me, there couldn't be a more important first step in this process. Dr Arnold 'Puggy' Hunter was of course an incredible health leader and Chair of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).
- Our ambition is to transition more programs to First Nations control over the course of this government.

[PAUSE]

COVID-19 response

- Turning to the work of this Conference now, I wanted to recognise how much has changed over the last three years.
- In the time since you were last able to hold your conference, we have all experienced significant upheaval and challenges, both within our communities and our nation.
- I know this has been particularly difficult for our First Nations communities who already face numerous issues around access and availability of services.
- The pandemic made an already challenging time much harder for many in your communities.
- We have a sector that remains fatigued from our collective efforts during the pandemic, and I thank all those who undoubtedly made many sacrifices to care for others in your communities during this time and who preserved through the many obstacles and daily challenges that arose.
- We are thankful to have made the transition to a new phase.
- And although COVID-19 has not disappeared, we still need to ensure we're as protected as possible.

- I'd like to take this opportunity to congratulate and thank the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector for your leadership and steerage in the response to COVID. You represent a sound model for the First Nations community and demonstrate what can be achieved through collective collaboration.
- We've never had to act so fast and so thoroughly to protect our most vulnerable people from a public health threat.
- The effective partnership and relationship developed between the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector and government sets a solid precedent and building block for our future approach to health reform and policy.
- While there were restrictions and both logistical and cultural challenges, the sector was able to build a protective response from the ground up.
- On last month's figures, nationally 82 per cent of eligible individuals identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander had received two doses of COVID-19 vaccine.
- This is an enormous achievement that should be celebrated.

Election commitments

- As stated earlier, although the COVID threat is not entirely over we can reflect on past learnings, focus on areas to improve on and look to the future.
- I'm proud of our Government's commitment to implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full which is long overdue.
- This commitment is a clear sign of our intent to work with you, to bring our commitment to Uluru to life and to see that our nation can answer the ongoing and patient call for respect, truth and unity.

- We also announced several election pledges that further support our commitment to reconciliation and better embed Indigenous perspectives, experiences, and interests into our policies in respectful ways:
 - We know workforce has been a critical issue and one which has been neglected for several years; in turn we have committed to funding 500 new First Nations traineeships to inject new skills into the workplace, support employers and allow additional opportunities across the First Nations community.
 - This will be delivered through the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector, demonstrating the power of co-designed models.
 - Many First Nations people must travel long distances for dialysis, taking them away from family and country; often without support for transport. We want to change that.
 - The Albanese Government has therefore committed to fund 30 new four chair renal dialysis units and water infrastructure.
 - Our Government knows that Rheumatic heart disease still disproportionately impacts on First Nations people.
 - This is why we will double current funding provided to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations to fight the battle against rheumatic heart disease in high prevalence sites through education, services and frontline support.
 - We will do this in partnership with the NACCHO and the sector, and I commend Pat for her leadership and stewardship of this issue.
 - We will also provide new capital infrastructure for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector across the nation that is in addition to current investment under the Indigenous Australians Health Programme.

- This in turn will deliver 17 new or upgraded facilities across Australia, lifting capacity to provide quality and responsive healthcare to an increased number of First Nations people.

Health reform

- The Albanese Government is committed to work in genuine partnership with First Nations people and communities to improve health services and health outcomes as part of the broader reconciliation journey.
- This includes delivering on our commitments under the Closing the Gap Agreement to ensure First Nations voices are informing and leading the decisions that impact their health and wellbeing.
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Workforce Plans provide the future direction for First Nations health through examining areas and where focus needs to be given for workforce planning, resourcing, attraction and retention.
- It's essential we work in true partnership to deliver on these commitments and listen to each other to ensure the placement of First Nations peoples and voices at the centre of healthcare service design and delivery.

Conclusion

- We now have the opportunity to enhance the delivery of quality health services for First Nations people.
- We know the community-controlled health sector is crucial to ensuring we understand and can address the barriers to culturally safe and appropriate mainstream health services.
- I look forward to listening to and working with you to deliver on our commitments and wish you the best for your conference.
- Thank you.

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