



NATIONAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY CONTROLLED HEALTH ORGANISATION (NACCHO)

Media Statement on the Voice 21 September 2023

Australian Constitutional Reform important for the improvement of health outcomes for Indigenous Australians

Pat Turner CEO of NACCHO states, “A Voice and recognition of Indigenous Australians is critical if there is going to be long term sustainable improvements to health outcomes for our peoples. Currently, programs and policies are at the whim of whoever the Minister is and the senior executives of Government Departments.”

“During COVID we were fortunate that our voices were listened to by the then Minister and Dr Brendan Murphy, Secretary of the Department of Health. There were no deaths of our peoples from COVID in the first 18 months and vaccinations and antivirals were allocated taking into account the level of burden of disease is 2.3 times that of other Australians.

“More recently, Minister Butler has supported our submission to address cancer in our communities. While the mortality rates have been declining for non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for at least two decades, there has been an uptrend in cancer mortality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”

The situation is far worse in regional, remote and very remote areas. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are less likely to be diagnosed with localised disease and are less likely to receive treatment than other Australians. The discrepancy in five-year survival rate between major cities and remote areas is particularly stark for certain cancers, including lung cancer (12 per cent compared with 6 per cent) and head and neck cancer (47 per cent compared with 31 per cent).

Pat Turner goes on to say, “The state of Indigenous health in this country is appalling and is the main reason governments have not listened to our advice and have not taken action on the statistics before them and certainly have not provided the funds required. Our study shows there is a conservative \$4.4 billion gap in health funding between what is spent on non-Indigenous Australians. That’s \$5,000 for each Aboriginal person per year.”

“Having worked in Government as a senior executive for decades I strongly believe having a Voice written into the Australian Constitution together with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is the best way to improve living conditions and health outcomes for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

Donnella Mills, Chair of NACCHO, “The NACCHO board agrees with the Voice and Recognition being written into the Australian Constitution and I am proud to have been part of developing the Uluru Statement. There is no doubt Australia is a divided country. In Cairns where I live and other places nationally there are hundreds of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have Rheumatic Fever and Rheumatic Heart Disease, and we are 55 times more likely to die of the disease as youth than other Australians. We have had two deaths from tuberculosis in the last year, babies dying from congenital syphilis and trachoma. These are diseases of poverty and diseases seen in Third World countries and haven’t existed in the non-Indigenous Australian population in decades. They are diseases that result from overcrowded and poor housing, lack of clean water and limited health care funding.”

“Most of our people were rounded up and placed in artificial environments and mixing the different language groups with their movements restricted with Acts of Parliament. Look at Palm Island as an example or Mapoon. It is now time to make us equal through Recognition and a Voice to Parliament and the Executive in the Australian Constitution.

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NACCHO is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across the country on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO is the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, with over 3,500 out of the 6,000 staff working in ACCHOs being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background.

