

Media Release

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Indigenous health is making tracks

Indigenous Australians continue to suffer the worst health of any population subgroup in Australia. This disturbing fact is a common theme running through the papers addressing Indigenous health at the 7th National Rural Health Conference, which will be held at the Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart, from 1-4 March, 2003.

A resounding message from speakers on Indigenous health at the Conference is that improvement is dependent on strengthening the capacity of the Indigenous workforce. At present only 0.3% of the total Registered Nurse workforce in NSW is Aboriginal. A paper will be presented on the NSW Rural and Remote Aboriginal Nursing Strategy, which aims to encourage Aboriginal school leavers and community members to enter nursing through rural and remote promotional activities.

'The Aboriginal Health Workers in South Australia: Future Pathways' report highlights the need for more Aboriginal Health Workers and health professionals, whose special skills need to be developed, recognised and rewarded. The Department of Human Services, South Australia, has launched several recruitment initiatives directed at rural Indigenous youth, in a drive to improve the current health status of Aboriginal communities.

The benefits of having Aboriginal Health Workers within remote communities is acknowledged by speakers from a broad range of healthcare services, including maternal and child health, women's health, male health and palliative care.

Cultural insensitivity and lack of social support are two issues that lead to hospitals being seen as 'risky places' for many indigenous Australians. Andrew Taylor, of the Palliative Care Council of South Australia, speaks plainly when he says, "If that old person wants to be outside next to a fire with their dogs, then don't insist that they stay inside in a 'comfortable' bed."

A draft of the first 'National Framework For Improving the Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Males' will be presented by chairperson, Mick Adams. The Framework has been developed by a working party, with representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and commonwealth and state/territory health departments.

"It is the end result of years of decline in Indigenous Male health and the subsequent 'grass roots' movement of men who are trying to claim back their right to decent standards of health and well-being," says Mick Adams, chairperson of the Reference Committee Working Party.

Andrew Taylor will speak at 11:15am on Monday March 3 in the Sullivans Room and Mick Adams will speak at 9:45am on Sunday March 2 in the Meehans Room.

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7th National Rural Health Conference, 1 – 4 March 2003, Hotel Grand Chancellor, Hobart
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