



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

Tony Abbott MHR

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Improvements in Indigenous mortality rate

The Commonwealth Government is pleased to see modest but significant improvements in the health status of Indigenous people as revealed in the 2005 edition of *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*.

While their overall health status remains much poorer than that of non-Indigenous Australians, there are signs of improvement in the report released today by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, such as sharp declines in Indigenous mortality in Western Australia between 1991 and 2002.

Continuing a longstanding trend, infant mortality also significantly declined in Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory over the same period. Mortality from circulatory disease has shown a significant improvement.

Continued improvements in indicators such as life expectancy will come from concerted, whole of government action in partnership with Indigenous communities.

Government policies aim to empower individuals, families and communities. This report shows there has been considerable improvement in school enrolments and retention rates, employment participation, home ownership and health status.

In the last Federal Budget the government has committed \$170 million to new Indigenous health measures over the next four years. The money will be used to build more Aboriginal health services in remote areas and programs targeting mothers, children and better treatment for people with chronic diseases.

This takes the total funds that the Federal Government spends through its Indigenous-specific health program to \$350 million a year, an increase of 150 per cent in real terms since 1996. Since then, spending on Indigenous measures has increased by more than 40 per cent to nearly \$3 billion, or more than \$5000 for every Indigenous man, woman and child and spending on Aboriginal people under general programs has also increased.

For more information call Mr Abbott's office on ph 02 6277 7220.