



THE HON SUSSAN LEY MP

Minister for Health
Minister for Sport

MEDIA RELEASE

31 August 2015

Australian-first national approach to Indigenous cancer care

An Australian-first national approach to addressing the Indigenous cancer gap establishes seven new national priorities to reduce the increasing cancer mortality rates in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

Minister for Health Sussan Ley today announced the priorities in Broken Hill following 'concerning' recent statistics that reveal that since 1998 cancer mortality for Indigenous Australians rose 16 per cent, while for non-Indigenous Australians the rate fell 10 per cent. The announcement also follows the Minister's recent trip with the Prime Minister to the Torres Strait and Cape York Peninsula.

Ms Ley said that despite having a lower incidence rate, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are 30 per cent more likely to die from cancer than non-Indigenous Australians.

Ms Ley also announced \$350,000 to continue the Abbott Government's strong commitment to raising awareness and reducing rates of lung cancer in Indigenous communities

"These new statistics and the trend they paint are very concerning and I'm determined that we work together with our health professionals and the Indigenous community to provide better health outcomes," Ms Ley said.

"While Australians generally have among the best cancer survival rates in the world, disappointingly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to experience significant disparities in cancer outcomes when compared with non-Indigenous Australians."

Ms Ley said this was the first time in Australia that Government had come together with Indigenous communities, health professionals, service providers, cancer control organisations and researchers to establish an agreed nationally-coordinated approach to tackling Indigenous cancer.

"The most important thing about this consultative approach is that everyone is on the same page about how to affect real change to improve the lives of

Indigenous people diagnosed with cancer and it begins with a consistent approach across the country.

“Indigenous Australians are three and a half times more likely to die from cervical cancer, three times more likely to die from liver cancer and almost twice as likely to die from lung cancer than non-Indigenous Australians and that’s just not acceptable.”

In addition to launching the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework*, Ms Ley announced \$350,000 to a programme that would raise awareness about lung cancer and improve access to timely diagnosis and treatment in the Indigenous community.

“The *Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with lung cancer and their communities* programme demonstrated successful engagement with Indigenous communities, with 90 per cent of participants reporting an increase in knowledge of evidence-based information about lung cancer.

“The programme will deliver 30 additional community workshops across the country for Indigenous Australians and will just as importantly work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals to enhance their skill in providing culturally sensitive lung cancer care in line with the seven national priorities.”

Cancer Australia Chief Executive Officer, Professor Helen Zorbas said the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework* development was informed by a systematic review of the available evidence and extensive national consultations, with contributions from over 500 individuals, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people affected by cancer, health professionals working with Indigenous people and experts in Indigenous cancer control.

“This extensive engagement and the extraordinary collaborative spirit and commitment expressed during the development of the Framework provides the opportunity to harness the efforts and goodwill, which exist across sectors, to take forward the national priorities for improving Indigenous cancer outcomes,” Professor Zorbas said.

“The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Framework* was developed to identify evidence-based priorities for the many communities, organisations and governments whose combined efforts are required to address the disparities and improve cancer outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

“This response aims to address the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a higher incidence of cancers that are preventable, are less likely to participate in screening programs and are more likely than other Australians to be diagnosed with cancer that has progressed to an advanced stage.”

The seven identified priority areas which, based on the evidence, will have the greatest impact in addressing the disparities and improving cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are:

- improving knowledge and attitudes about cancer;
- focusing prevention activities;
- increasing participation in screening and immunisation;
- ensuring early diagnosis;
- delivering optimal and culturally appropriate treatment and care;
- involving, informing and supporting families and carers;
- strengthening the capacity of cancer-related services to meet the needs of Indigenous people.

The Framework was developed by Cancer Australia in partnership with Menzies School of Health Research, led by Associate Professor Gail Garvey, and overseen by a Project Steering Group chaired by Professor Jacinta Elston.

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Framework* can be downloaded from the Cancer Australia Website.

ENDS

Minister Ley's Media Contact: James Murphy – 0478 333 974

Cancer Australia Media Contact: Amy Cook – 0438 209 833