The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP
Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Indigenous Health
Member for Hasluck

MEDIA RELEASE

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Programs paving way for healthy future in Broken Hill and the Far West

Community based chronic disease initiatives are making significant improvements in the health of indigenous people across the Far West of New South Wales.

Releasing a 10-year evaluation of the Maari Ma Aboriginal Corporation’s Chronic Disease Strategy today, Indigenous Health Minister Ken Wyatt AM said the results showed programs were helping empower locals to lead healthier lives.

“Some of the programs are not only closing the gap in health outcomes; they have also put the health results of certain local groups ahead of the average Australian results,” the Minister said.

“People in Maari Ma’s diabetes program now have blood sugar control significantly better than the national average, while those with diabetes or heart problems also have much better blood pressure and cholesterol control than the national average.

“What we are seeing in Broken Hill and the Far West are what I call ‘jewels in the crown’ of improving Aboriginal health.”

The study shows that the corporation’s Healthy Start, Keeping Well and Health Service Support programs are reducing the impact of chronic conditions like diabetes and heart, kidney and lung disease, and greatly improving preventive health care.

“The number of people having annual health checks has doubled almost every year, the number of health checks for children under 15 has quadrupled, while there have also been reductions in smoking and drinking rates during pregnancy,” said the Minister.

“What is so impressive is the comprehensive nature of these programs. They look beyond the traditional notion of ‘health’, to a more holistic approach encompassing education, lifestyle and employment.

“Maari Ma also has a rock-solid commitment to local decision-making and employment, with Aboriginal people now making up well over half of the staff.”
The programs have increased the number of specialist clinics operating across the region from under 100 to almost 1000 a year.

Indigenous childhood tooth decay has dropped in almost every centre across the region, and there is now a dental service for adults.

Minister Wyatt also launched the Western New South Wales Primary Health Network’s Cultural Safety framework in Broken Hill today.

“This provides a practical pathway for health services and staff to embrace culture and country, through personal and professional development,” he said.

“This is an important foundation for better health, to help ensure local people feel comfortable enough to confide in their doctors and access care.

“But most importantly, it helps all of us understand and appreciate the strength and traditions of Aboriginal society and culture, the values and the knowledge, and how these can contribute to better health today and tomorrow.”

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