



MEDIA RELEASE

Minister for Health and Ageing

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New research shows Indigenous health improving

Research published today in the Medical Journal of Australia appears to confirm that the health of Indigenous Australians is improving.

The research examines death rates from chronic diseases among Indigenous people in the Northern Territory (which has the best data) between 1977 and 2001.

Previous research showed that, while Indigenous death rates were falling for most conditions, mortality from chronic diseases such as diabetes and circulatory disease was rising. The new research shows death rates for the most common chronic diseases easing or falling since the end of the 1980s. The results show modest improvements in life expectancy, heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

- Diabetes – annual 13.5 per cent increase in death rate from 1977-1989 slowed to a 3.2 per cent annual increase from 1990-2001.
- Ischaemic heart disease (the biggest killer) – the annual increase in the death rate cut from 5.7 per cent to 1.1 per cent.
- Chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (chronic bronchitis and emphysema) – the 3.5 per cent a year rise in death rate reversed in the 1990s to a 5.7 per cent annual drop.
- Stroke and rheumatic heart disease – death rates have improved slightly.

Life expectancy at birth in the Northern Territory has increased by 1.5 years from 1981-85 to 1996-2000.

The Government is committed to further lowering the toll of chronic disease on Indigenous people. The \$102.4 million Healthy for Life program, targeting chronic diseases and child and maternal health, should help to make a further difference.

Since 1996, the Commonwealth Government has increased investment in Indigenous health services from \$100 million to almost \$350 million a year.

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