Good morning, it’s a pleasure to be here.

Before I begin, I’d like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land on which we meet today – the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation – and pay my respects to their Elders, past, present and future.

I extend that respect to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people here today.

I’d like to thank Darryl Wright for his kind introduction, and Uncle Ray Davidson for the Welcome to Country.

I’d also like to acknowledge:

- Professor Sally Redman [Sax Institute]
- Sandra Bailey [former CEO, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council NSW]
- Dr Kerry Chant PSM [Chief Health Officer and Deputy Secretary of Population and Public Health, NSW Department of Health]
- Tallulah Lett [Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation]
- Professors Emily Banks and Jonathan Craig [SEARCH Chief Investigators]
- Darren Carr [CEO, Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation, Wagga Wagga]
- Raylene Gordon [CEO Awabakal Limited, Wickham]
- Ladies and gentlemen.

I want to thank the Sax Institute and the SEARCH collaborators for inviting me to take part in this special 10th anniversary forum.

But most of all, I want to thank the 1600 children and their families, including many who are here today - for without your enthusiasm, none of this would have been possible.
What you and the SEARCH team are achieving has already changed lives, and promises a better future for countless Australians.

When the Study of Environment on Aboriginal Resilience and Child Health — or SEARCH, as it became known — began in 2007, there was little research knowledge out there about the health of Aboriginal people living in urban areas.

SEARCH represented a new way forward — by putting Aboriginal people at the centre of the research process — and has helped paved the way for crucial indigenous-led health care today.

It was built on a partnership approach that relied on Aboriginal community priorities — rather than the researchers' priorities — to set the agenda.

It sought not just to better understand the health of Aboriginal children and describe the issues they face, but to make a real and immediate difference to young lives.

Together, scientists and families have built Australia’s largest source of ongoing information on urban Aboriginal child health.

And because of them, those of us who make policy, or design and deliver programs and services can now access knowledge that just wasn't available before.

This is particularly the case in areas such as social and emotional wellbeing, ear and speech health, overweight and obesity and housing conditions and their impact on health.

I applaud the way SEARCH tracks young people into their teenage years. I, too, am determined that our focus intensifies, to support and guide our children’s health, from the womb right thought to adulthood and their working lives.

Baseline SEARCH data revealed that about half of participating children aged 7 or under had a speech or language impairment, and about one-third had middle ear disease.

Working in with families, this has allowed targeted treatment through programs such as the acclaimed HEALS service, with outstanding results.

Today’s forum will focus not only on what SEARCH has discovered, but on what it promises.

You have an opportunity to identify challenges in the research being undertaken and, together, work towards a brighter future for our kids.

I’d like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the achievements we have shared in recent years.

The Council of Australian Governments agreed to health targets, with the intention of Closing the Gap between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians.
These targets are intended to reduce disadvantage among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes.

The Turnbull Government understands that good health supports children to go to school, enabling them to grow into adults leading productive working lives, who naturally build strong and resilient communities.

Equally, we recognise that good education, housing and strong families are fundamental to health and wellbeing.

The 2017 Closing the Gap Report shows some positive trends in the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- Indigenous child mortality between 1998 and 2015 reduced by one-third.
- Kidney disease deaths almost halved from 2006 to 2015.
- Respiratory disease deaths also fell by one-quarter between 1998 and 2015.
- Blindness and vision impairment among Indigenous Australians decreased from six times to three times the non-Indigenous rate between 2008 and 2016.
- The prevalence of trachoma in Indigenous children has dropped by almost two-thirds, and we are aiming to eradicate this disease by 2020.
- And the number of Aboriginal women drinking during their pregnancies has halved, while smoking rates across indigenous communities have been cut by almost 10 per cent.

The Government is also making some significant inroads into improving the health of Indigenous children through our child and family health programs, supported by an additional $94 million in the 2014-15 Budget.

The Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program is aimed at vulnerable communities and also includes support to help parents develop and fulfil a “life vision” - by planning future pregnancies, completing their education and finding work.

By June next year, it will be operating at 13 sites around Australia.

Our New Directions: Mothers and Babies Services program is also central to better futures for children and their families, through primary health services, and will cover 136 sites nationally by July next year.

Finally, I would like to mention a more recent commitment the Government has made to deliver the Connected Beginnings Program, in line with the recommendations of the Forrest Review.

This program aims to support Indigenous children in identified areas of high need to be healthy and ready for school.

As part of this, Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Services are being funded over the next three years to support outreach child health services on school grounds.
These are wide-ranging, heartening achievements, but we know much more needs to be done to attain health equality for all Australians by 2031.

That is why SEARCH is so important.

It is one of the many “jewels in the crown” I see, from the Pitjanjatjarra lands, to Pyrmont here in Sydney - shining examples of life-changing indigenous care and research, that translates into happier, healthier children on the streets and in schools, homes and playgrounds.

Walking and working with Aboriginal families is the only way to lock in the significant gains we have made, and to accelerate our future progress, with innovative approaches that also address the social and cultural factors influencing health.

May SEARCH yield many more discoveries in its next 10 years. Thank you.