

COMMUNIQUE

First Meeting of the Indigenous Health Research Fund Expert Advisory Panel

On 27 February 2019, the Australian Government committed \$160 million over ten years from 2019-20 to 2028-29 to the Indigenous Health Research Fund (IHRF) under the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) aimed at improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The IHRF includes a commitment of \$35 million (2019-20 to 2020-21) to support the development of a vaccine to eliminate rheumatic heart disease in Australia. This funding has been provided to the University of Western Australia.

The Expert Advisory Panel (the Panel) appointed by the Australian Government will guide the remaining \$125 million investment, which will be distributed through a competitive process. The EAP met in Canberra on 14–15 October 2019 in for the first time.

The Panel, chaired by Professor Alex Brown from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute and Dr Misty Jenkins from the Walter and Eliza Hall Institute of Medical Research, is comprised of leading experts in Indigenous health research. The Panel's key role will be to provide advice to Government on the strategic priorities for the IHRF. The Panel will also explore opportunities for co-investment and partnerships in testing research questions of interest to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and monitor the progress of the IHRF.

The meeting acknowledged the ongoing efforts of Indigenous leaders from the research sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who had identified the imperative for, and shaped the concept of, the IHRF. The IHRF offers a once in a lifetime opportunity to drive an Indigenous-led, transformational research agenda which could achieve sustainable health outcome improvements and create a legacy of knowledge transfer into practice. The vision of the Panel is that the IHRF must mobilise health and medical research for the prevention of disease and promotion of health and social equity, and that other areas under the MRFF will support, and invest in, improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The meeting discussed the need for a new approach to Indigenous research, moving from short term fragmented efforts, to longer term collaborative research, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and addressing the significant challenges and barriers to achieving good health and improved social outcomes. This includes challenges such as preventing and reducing the impact of chronic and infectious conditions, and building culturally safe health systems. The Panel agreed with the need to fund research to explore system-wide cross-cutting challenges, as well as

giving priority to specific focus areas where an informed research and knowledge base is needed.

The Panel agreed the importance of working in partnership with key stakeholders to support Indigenous health research efforts and to explore opportunities for co-investment in areas of shared concern. Partners could include Advisory Panels from other MRFF research missions, state governments, philanthropic organisations, and private sector organisations, who share a vision for a coordinated national effort to address the inequity in health and social outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The Panel will provide advice to the Minister for Health on priorities for the first round of funding under the IHRF. The Panel also agreed to develop a Roadmap and Implementation Plan for the ten-year initiative, and to consult with Indigenous organisations, communities and the broader research community on the approach to implementation across the life of the IHRF.