



## Strengthening Primary Care – stronger Indigenous health

The Australian Government is working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve their health outcomes and deliver on commitments under the new Closing the Gap National Agreement.

This Budget includes \$4 billion in Indigenous health funding over the coming four years, including \$975 million in 20-21.

### Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through COVID-19

- In March 2020, the Australian Government established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander COVID-19 Advisory Group, co-chaired by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and the Department of Health. This genuine partnership between all levels of government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health experts has been widely acknowledged as a key factor in the low rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander COVID-19 infections to date.
- This has been backed up by decisive action to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities. To support local community planning and preparedness, \$5 million was provided to 56 regional and remote organisations, supporting more than 121 remote communities.
- In addition, the Australian Government is keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people safe by providing \$9.8 million to deliver free COVID-19 testing at the point-of-care in 86 remote locations, and \$52.8 million to support early evacuations, aeromedical retrievals, as well as mobile respiratory clinics.
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are enabling unprecedented access to culturally safe assessment and testing across urban and regional areas, by operating 23 of the up to 150 General Practitioner-led Respiratory Clinics. As part of that \$377.5 million package, additional support worth \$8.3 million is also being provided through the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation for community controlled organisations to respond flexibly to COVID-19.

### **New funding model for primary health care services.**

- The Australian Government has worked in partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled health sector to develop a new funding model for primary health care services. From 1 July 2020, more than \$90 million over three years in additional funding will be provided for community controlled health organisations, with three year funding agreements and annual indexation, under the Indigenous Australians' Health Program.

### **Expanding services**

- A further \$33 million over 3 years from 2020–21 is being provided through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme to expand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services by investing in regions of high need or high population growth, or where there are service gaps.
- Almost \$35 million has recently been provided to fund 42 projects and research to tackle issues such as ending avoidable deafness and avoidable blindness and helping eradicate chronic kidney disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes investment of \$14.4 million from the first grant round of the Indigenous Health Research Fund.
- This Budget provides \$5 million in 2020–21 to improve early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.
- It also includes an expansion of the Closing the Gap Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) Co-Pay Program. This will make it easier for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access PBS medications by reducing restrictions on patient registration and who can issue scripts. This will especially benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when moving between primary health care settings and/or geographic locations.

### **Why is this important?**

The Australian Government is committed to improving the health and wellbeing of all Australians.

The new Closing the Gap National Agreement sets out a clear framework to improve outcomes, including health, based on genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a 10-year-lower life expectancy and 2.3 times the burden of disease compared to non-Indigenous Australians.

### **Who will benefit?**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people around Australia will benefit from better access to health care and improved health outcomes. Preparations and interventions developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health experts are keeping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities safe from COVID-19.