



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums

Australian Government Department of Health Update

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums provide a formal way for members to engage, work together, plan and share information to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The members of each Forum include the signatories to each jurisdictional Partnership Framework Agreement:

- the Australian Government (represented by the Department of Health)
- the state or territory government (represented by the state or territory Department of Health)
- the Sector Support Organisations.

Arrangements for other guests to take part vary between the forums, and might include the Primary Health Networks and representatives of the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The eight Partnership Forums aim to meet 3 to 4 times per year. The *Australian Government Department of Health Update* provides partners with the latest information about the department's work on Indigenous health policies and programs. This includes:

- updates on projects that affect the sector or stakeholders
- tenders, evaluations and opportunities for consultation
- significant policy developments.

Feel free to share this update with your networks. For more information, email Commonwealth.Partnership.Forums@health.gov.au

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The Department of Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and the Elders both past and present as well as emerging leaders.

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New Updates

1. Budget Announcements

2020-21 Federal budget, and Primary Care Response Measures

The 2020–21 Budget delivers a record \$115.5 billion in 2020–21 and \$467 billion over the forward estimates to deliver the essential health services Australians need under the Long Term National Health Plan. The 2020–21 Budget funds the Government’s ongoing health response under the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan, extending initial key COVID-19 health initiatives. This includes Point of Care Testing, GP Respiratory Clinics’ and Medicare Benefits Schedule telehealth items.

The Budget also provides approximately \$4 billion in Indigenous health funding over the coming four years, including \$975.5 million in 2020–21. It builds on the government’s efforts to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to improve health outcomes.

Please see the [Prime Minister’s Media Release](#) and [Minister Hunt’s Media Release](#) for more information.

The Government has announced an additional \$5 million will be provided in 2020-21 to improve early identification of hearing and speech difficulties for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including through support to create quiet spaces to conduct hearing assessments in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS).

More detail will be provided following discussions with Hearing Australia and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO).

2. Refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan

The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan* (Health Plan) is being refreshed in partnership through the Health Plan Advisory Group. This work supersedes the revision of the existing *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-23*.

The refreshed Health Plan will retain a focus on addressing racism and inequity, with an enhanced emphasis on the social determinants, culture and prevention. It will bring the overarching policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in line with the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap. It will also provide an opportunity to align with broader whole-of-population health strategies under development.

The development of the Health Plan is being informed by the extensive consultation processes already undertaken, including the *My Life My Lead* consultations in 2017. Further targeted consultations will continue to occur over the coming months. This includes ongoing engagement with the Partnership Forums and an open online consultation process in early 2021.

The refreshed Health Plan is expected to be finalised in mid-2021.

3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19

The Australian Government set up the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](#) (the Taskforce) in early March 2020.

We co-chair the Taskforce with NACCHO.

Members

The Taskforce includes leaders from:

- NACCHO and their affiliates
- Aboriginal Health Services
- the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association
- the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The Taskforce also includes:

- state and territory public health representatives endorsed by the Communicable Diseases Network Australia
- Public Health Medical Officers and communicable disease experts.

Work of the Taskforce

The Taskforce:

- delivers high-level documents endorsed by the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC) or National Cabinet, including:
 - [guidance for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities](#)
 - essential input to the [COVID-19 national guidelines](#)
 - [early aero-medical evacuation of COVID-19 cases and contacts from remote communities](#)
- Guidance advice on the Australian Government's COVID-19 response
- ensuring the response considers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and needs
- Supporting stakeholders working together to prepare, respond and plan at the community, regional, jurisdictional and national levels
- Reporting every fortnight to the AHPPC on the activities in the [Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations](#).

Find out more about the work and role of [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19](#) on the Department's website.

As its first priority, the Taskforce developed the [Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Populations](#). To protect communities and save lives, the plan:

- focuses on clinical and public health actions and responses
- considers broader emphasis on communication issues and cultural and social determinants relevant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Communications

[Key communication messages](#) are translated into 15 local languages. The messages focus on:

- coronavirus awareness and prevention
- 'Stay COVID-free, do the three'
- mental health support

A stakeholder kit including posters and information brochures is also available.

4. GP-led respiratory clinics

The Australian Government is investing \$377.5 million over two years (2019-20 and 2020-21), to establish 150 [GP-led respiratory clinics](#) across Australia, including in rural and regional areas. This includes an additional \$170.8 million announced on 18 September 2020 which will extend operation of the GPRC Program until 31 March 2021.

This funding includes \$8.3 million for NACCHO to support its Sector Support Organisations, member services and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. These services will help to:

- coordinate Australia's COVID-19 response
- improve culturally safe access to GP-led respiratory clinics and COVID-19 testing.

As at 29 October 2020, 147 GPRCs are open nationally (covering 99.1 per cent of the population). To date, GPRC's have undertaken more than 725,510 consultations and 642,066 tests for COVID-19.

The ACCHS are operating as GP-led respiratory clinics in:

- New South Wales
- Victoria
- Queensland
- the Northern Territory
- the Australian Capital Territory
- Western Australia.

ACCHS-run GPRCs constitute 15.6 per cent of all GPRCs at full rollout (23 of 147).

5. Remote community modelling of COVID outbreak scenarios

On 22 August 2020 scenario modelling of an outbreak in remote communities was published on the Department of Health website.

The modelling reinforces the importance of COVID-19 preparations and of engaging with remote communities about how they will respond and the support available to them. It also shows that a single confirmed case of COVID-19 in a remote community should be considered an outbreak. This will trigger a rapid response by local, state or territory and national governments.

The resources are available the [Department of Health website](#) and include:

- a factsheet to inform public health planning;
- a plain language summary of the research in the form of a PowerPoint presentation.

These resources were developed in consultation with the Taskforce and the modelling team to support community level discussion and planning.

The modelling was conducted for the Australian Government by the University of Melbourne and the Kirby Institute pandemic modelling team. The work was guided by the Taskforce and endorsed for release by the AHPPC.

6. National Guidance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban and regional settings

On 12 August 2020 the AHPPC endorsed the Communicable Diseases Network Australia ([CDNA National Guidance for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for COVID-19](#)). Further, AHPPC suggested similar guidance be considered for urban settings.

The Taskforce is developing a principles-based guidance document for ACCHS and public health units that focuses on both urban and regional settings.

Key considerations will include testing strategies, contact tracing capability, isolation and quarantine facilities and data and reporting.

This work will be informed by jurisdictional experiences of managing outbreaks in urban and regional settings (e.g. Melbourne and regional Victoria, Brisbane, Sydney).

7. COVID-19 support for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in urban settings

The Department has engaged the Institute of Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) to lead a nationwide program to provide culturally safe, entry level aged care support for vulnerable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders during the COVID-19 pandemic.

This time limited project commenced in April 2020. The \$10 million initiative supports socially isolated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in urban areas. IUIH partnered with ACCHS to provide the following services:

- targeted assistance with the effects of social isolation
- transport to medical appointments
- provision of meals and other necessary food items
- personal follow-up on health status, ranging from welfare checks to referrals for primary health care.

The initiative is in high demand. On completion, those who are identified as requiring ongoing aged care services will be assisted to access services through the existing aged care entry pathways.

8. The Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel (SDAP)

The SDAP provides free business advice and capacity building support to eligible aged care service providers. Upon application SDAP works alongside the provider to improve how the service delivers and administers culturally safe, quality aged care. Addressing challenges such as clinical care, finance and workforce planning, training needs, governance and regulation.

The Panel consists of experienced professionals contracted by the Department with demonstrated qualifications and expertise in the aged care system.

Aged care service providers who offer residential aged care, home care packages, Commonwealth Home Support Programme services and or National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care services in rural and remote areas are eligible for SDAP assistance.

Information on how to apply or further information on SDAP can be located on the Department of Health [website](#).

9. Aged care providers – emergency access to personal protective equipment (PPE)

Aged care providers, including National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care services, can also access emergency PPE from the National Medical Stockpile, where PPE cannot be sourced from usual suppliers, including during COVID-19 outbreaks.

For further information, email agedcareCOVIDPPE@health.gov.au

10. Mental health support during COVID-19

The Australian Government is funding a \$74 million package to support the mental health and wellbeing of Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As part of this package, The Department has been working with Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia to create culturally appropriate advice and resources on staying strong and mentally healthy for First Australians. These resources will be available in print, as podcasts, in Indigenous print media, online and on social media.

The Government is also investing \$48.1 million to support the National Mental Health and Wellbeing Pandemic Response Plan.

Approximately \$3.5 million of this funding will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It will focus on those in remote areas who have reduced access to mental health and wellbeing services.

The Government is also investing \$31.9 million to establish 15 new mental health clinics in Victoria. To enhance digital and phone services for specific groups that are experiencing significant challenges during the additional COVID-19 restrictions. The HeadtoHelp clinics opened to the public on 14 September 2020 with more information available at HeadtoHelp.org.au. The Department has also provided additional funding to the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service to enhance the Yarning SafeNStrong support line. Yarning SafeNStrong is a 24/7 confidential crisis line supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Victorians. Further information available at: vahs.org.au.

11. Digital Mental Health Framework

The Australian Government is leading the development of a National Digital Mental Health Framework under the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. The Framework will provide an integrated and strategic approach to digital mental health service delivery within the broader context of Australia's mental health system. This includes defining optimal delivery of digital mental health services to:

- improve service access
- reduce duplication of effort and investment
- embed these services in the broader mental health service system.

The Department has engaged PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) to undertake this project. PwC will be consulting with stakeholders, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations, to inform this work. A Digital Mental Health Framework Advisory Group, which will include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation, will be established to inform the development of the Framework.

We encourage you to share your views on the role of digital mental health in Australia. There will be several mechanisms to engage, including information available at the PwC website:

www.pwc.com.au/health/digital-health-framework.html,

All queries to DigitalMentalHealthFramework@au.pwc.com.

12. Perinatal Mental Health and Wellbeing Program

Grants will soon be available, as part of the \$43.9 million Perinatal Mental Health and Wellbeing Program. This initiative will make sure new parents can access support when they need it.

The grants will fund:

- perinatal mental health support services
- perinatal loss and bereavement peer support services
- perinatal mental health promotion and training initiatives.

The program will also deliver awareness training and education to ensure culturally appropriate, inclusive and safe support, including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

We expect the open competitive grant opportunity to open in the coming months. You can sign up for updates on [GrantConnect](#)

13. Renewal of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (Gayaa Dhuwi) will renew the 2013 *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy* (NATSISPS). This is being done in consultation with stakeholders and community members.

A number of targeted roundtables were hosted over late September and October 2020. They have also produced a Discussion Paper and are keen to hear from individuals and organisations who work, or have an interest, in Indigenous suicide prevention.

Gayaa Dhuwi invited submissions against the questions in the Discussion Paper, or in relation to any other element of NATSISPS renewal. The deadline for submission was 31 October 2020.

Please send submissions by 31 October 2020 to: submissions@gayaadhuwi.org.au. Please include your or your organisation's name and contact details with your submission.

- Please find the 2013 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy [here](#)
- Please find the Discussion Paper [here](#)

14. Medicare telehealth services

In March 2020, The Australian Government introduced temporary Medicare Benefit Schedule (MBS) telehealth items in response to COVID-19. These Telehealth items help reduce the risk of community transmission of COVID-19 and provide protection for patients and health care providers.

On 20 July 2020, amendments to the COVID-19 telehealth items to support continuity of care were announced. For GP telehealth services, patients now need to have an existing relationship with their GP provider or practice. This means patients need to have had at least one face-to-face service with the GP or at the practice in the preceding 12 months to receive a rebate for their telehealth service.

Limited exemptions to this requirement include:

- People in COVID-19 impacted areas including those in quarantine
- those experiencing homelessness
- infants aged under 12 months
- patients receiving an urgent after-hours (unsociable hours) service
- patients of medical practitioners at an ACCHS.

On 18 September 2020, the Government announced a six month extension of the national COVID-19 health response. Following advice from the Australian Health Protection Principal Committee, the COVID-19 telehealth items have been extended until 31 March 2021.

Patients will continue to be able to receive telehealth services from eligible practitioners such as:

- GPs
- non-specialist medical practitioners
- nurse practitioners and midwives
- allied health practitioners
- consultant physicians and specialists including psychiatrists, anaesthetists, and dental specialists.

This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments employing telehealth as well as nurse and Aboriginal Health Worker telehealth services on-behalf-of GPs.

As part of the extension there will be changes to bulk billing arrangements. Effective from 1 October 2020, GPs will no longer have to bulk bill their telehealth services. It will be a matter for GPs to decide whether to bulk bill patients for telehealth consultations and the level of their fees if they charge a co-payment.

Bulk billing incentives will return to pre-COVID-19 arrangements, providers can claim an incentive payment for bulk billed services to Commonwealth concession card holders and patients under 16 years of age. The temporary doubling of the bulk billing incentive payment since 30 March 2020 ceased on 1 October 2020.

Specialists and allied health providers can continue to bulk bill at their discretion.

The Australian Government continues to work with health experts to monitor the use and impact of the telehealth measures. Options for refining the measures and the future of telehealth will be considered based on health requirements, AHPPC advice and stakeholder feedback.

To find out more, read the telehealth factsheets in the [Medicare Benefits Schedule factsheets listing](#)

15. Seventh Community Pharmacy Agreement (7CPA)

The 7CPA is an agreement between the Commonwealth of Australia, the Pharmacy Guild of Australia and the Pharmaceutical Society of Australia. It supports consumer access to Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) subsidised medicines through community pharmacies across Australia.

The 7CPA commenced 1 July 2020 and will be in place until 30 June 2025.

The 7CPA has an overall funding envelope of \$18.35 billion, including \$1.2 billion for professional pharmacy programs.

Under the 7CPA the Government will implement reforms to improve access to medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by expanding the number of people eligible for the Closing the Gap PBS Co-payment program. This program reduces the cost of PBS medicines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To help people take the right dose of medicine at the right time, a new Indigenous Dose Administration Aids (IDAA) program will be implemented under the 7CPA. It is planned that the IDAA program will be uncapped with no additional charge to patients.

16. Emerging Priorities Round 2

The Emerging Priorities round 2 grant opportunity under the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) opened on 26 October 2020. This grant opportunity supports evidence based, innovative projects targeting improved health outcomes specifically and primarily for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Proposals are expected to use co-design approaches and/or show clear evidence of community engagement and support.

All information regarding this grant opportunity can be found on the whole-of-government [GrantConnect](#) page. If you have further queries after looking at the documentation, then submit questions to Grant.ATM@health.gov.au so responses can be provided in writing by 7 December 2020 (when the round closes).

17. Health and Workforce Indigenous Scholarship Programs

The Commonwealth Indigenous scholarship programs aim to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation in health workforce and improve access to culturally appropriate health services.

Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme

The scheme provides financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students studying health related disciplines in a university, TAFE, or Registered Training Organisation. Research courses and postgraduate study will not be supported.

Scholarship places are available to students in the following health disciplines:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and practitioners
- Allied Health (except Pharmacy)
- Dental and/or Oral Health (except dental assistants)
- Direct entry Midwifery

- Medicine and Nursing (registered and enrolled).

Applications opened 1 October 2020 and close on 8 November 2020 for studies in 2021. Further information is available at the Australian College of Nursing website:
<https://www.acn.edu.au/scholarships/indigenous-health-scholarships>

Indigenous Health Scholarships

Australian Rotary Health administer these scholarships on behalf of the Department. A one off grant valued at \$5,000 is provided to assist students with their day to day expenses and provide mentoring support while they undertake a course in a wide range of health related professions.

Further information is available at the Australian Rotary Health website:
<https://australianrotaryhealth.org.au/programs/indigenous-health-scholarships/>

Nursing Scholarships

The Australian College of Nursing offers nursing scholarship opportunities for study in 2021 for the following nursing streams:

- Nursing and Midwifery scholarships aim to grow the health workforce, promote access to tertiary education and improve the professional knowledge of the nursing and midwifery professions.
- Aged Care Nursing Scholarships seek to increase the knowledge and skills of nurses working in aged care facilities in Australia and support the aged care sector. Scholarships may fund training, workforce development and specialist workforce activities, including courses related to leadership and management.
- Undergraduate and postgraduate scholarships are available for eligible courses including:
 - Diploma of Nursing
 - Certificate IV in Aged Care
 - Advanced Diploma in Nursing
 - Graduate Certificate
 - Graduate Diploma and Masters.
- Depending on the course undertaken up to \$15,000 is available per year for full time study with preference given to applicants who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

Applications closed on 25 October 2020, however further information is available at
<https://www.acn.edu.au/scholarships#nursing-midwifery-aged>

18. National Pancreatic Cancer Roadmap

Cancer Australia is inviting public comment on the National Pancreatic Cancer Roadmap. The National Pancreatic Cancer Roadmap will identify key priority action areas over the next five years to improve outcomes for people with pancreatic cancer. It will consider all aspects of the cancer pathway, including prevention, early detection, diagnosis, treatment, supportive and palliative care.

Consultation will focus on engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Cancer Australia is seeking submissions from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations on the development of the Roadmap and key issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with pancreatic cancer.

The [Consultation Hub](#) will be open until 30 November 2020.

For more information on this initiative, visit [National Pancreatic Cancer Roadmap](#).

19. A Guide to implementing the Optimal Care Pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with cancer (the Guide)

To drive national adoption of the *Optimal Care Pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with cancer* (OCP) in the health sector, Cancer Australia has developed *A guide to implementing the Optimal Care Pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with cancer* (the Guide). The Guide identifies priority actions at a system level, practical strategies to help health services plan for improvement, and guidance for health professionals to consider in relation to their own practice. The Guide was endorsed by the National Cancer Expert Reference Group in June 2020 and released on 31 July 2020.

The Guide is available as an interactive pdf via the [Cancer Australia website](#)

Routine Updates

20. Indigenous Health Roadmaps

Australian health ministers have committed to improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by:

- ending rheumatic heart disease
- ending avoidable blindness and deafness
- preventing and managing kidney disease.

Roadmaps for ear and hearing health, eye health, renal health and rheumatic heart disease are being developed with expert advice and in consultation with Indigenous health stakeholders. The roadmaps will guide actions by Australian governments and key stakeholders.

A working group has been established to progress the roadmaps. The working group have now met a number of times in 2020 to continue this work.

21. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy

The fifth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander BBV and STI (BBV and STI) Strategy 2018–22 guides actions to tackle the higher rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. The Department has committed to a diverse implementation approach which supports culturally safe and responsive services. It is proposed that funding to implement the Strategy will be distributed through a combination of: direct approaches; targeted grant processes; and, a competitive grant process. We anticipate grant opportunities will be advertised in late 2020.

The Department has consulted with the BBV and STI Standing Committee of the AHPPC and other key stakeholders to identify priorities and suitable approaches for implementation activities.

22. Syphilis Enhanced Response

The Australian Government has committed \$21.2 million over four years (2017-18 to 2020-21) to fund an augmented health workforce and Point-of-Care Testing in targeted ACCHS within the affected outbreak regions.

We are currently working to extend the use of Point-of-Care Testing and relevant training to an additional ten ACCHS located in outbreak regions. As per previous stages, sites are being identified in consultation with NACCHO and relevant state/territory health directorates.

Full details can be located at the Departments website at: Syphilis Enhanced Response.

23. Australian Nurse–Family Partnership Program (ANFPP) update

On 1 July 2020, the Molly Wardaguga Research Centre at Charles Darwin University assumed responsibilities for the ANFPP National Support Service.

The ANFPP supports women who are pregnant with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander child to help them become the best mum possible. The National Support Service provides development and education to the ANFPP workforce.

An Approach to Market for a supplier to undertake an evaluation of the ANFPP program closed on 9 October 2020.

Find out more about the ANFPP.

24. National Health Reform Agreement

Following agreement by all Australian governments, the 2020–25 National Health Reform Agreement (NHRA) commenced on 1 July 2020. This NHRA commits governments to work in partnership to improve health outcomes for Australians and ensure the sustainability of the Australian health system. It:

- continues to provide increased funding for public hospitals
- sets a new pathway for long-term reform of our health system
- supports all governments commitment to the Closing the Gap agenda to improve the lives of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians
- aligns with key Closing the Gap priority reform areas.

25. Parent-evaluated Listening and Understanding Measure (PLUM) and Hearing and Talking Scale (HATS)

The PLUM and HATS are evidence-based questionnaires that reveal early signs of hearing difficulty and hindered language development, and provide the foundation for early intervention.

A new campaign to promote the PLUM and HATS, Hear. Listen. Yarn: New listening and talking checks for bubs, has been launched by Hearing Australia.

The PLUM and HATS were co-developed in collaboration with Aboriginal health and early education services. These free tools were developed for health and childcare workers to use. Extra information is available for parents and families, including tips on listening and yarning skills for children aged 0-5 years.

The PLUM and HATS website is at plumandhats.nal.gov.au/. A recent article about the campaign can be found on the Indigenous.Gov website: <https://www.indigenous.gov.au/news-and-media/announcements/hear-listen-yarn-new-listening-and-talking-checks-bubs>.

26. Expansion of the Hearing Assessment Program – Early Ears (HAP-EE)

The HAP-EE, initially focused on children in regional and remote areas. It will now deliver annual hearing assessments for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the years before commencing school.

Hearing Australia has begun talking to sector support organisations and ACCHSs in metro areas about this expansion. These conversations will continue over the next few months.

27. Hearing for Learning – Menzies School of Health Research

The Australian Government is contributing \$3 million towards the Hearing for Learning initiative. This initiative aims to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who experience ear and hearing issues in the Northern Territory.

The first graduates have now completed a Certificate II in Aboriginal Primary Health Care. To learn more about their success, see <http://thewire.org.au/story/the-health-initiative-placing-tiwi-ears-in-tiwi-hands/>.

More information about Hearing for Learning can be located at the Menzies's website: https://www.menzies.edu.au/page/Research/Centres_initiatives_and_projects/Hearing_for_Learning_Initiative/

28. Care for Kids' Ears resources

The Care for Kids' Ears resources include health promotion tools that can be utilised by parents, carers, teachers and health professionals. These tools provide education about the importance of ear and hearing health, and how to keep ears healthy.

The resources are available to order free of charge (including free delivery) at the Department of Health website, with plenty of stock available: <http://www.careforkidsears.health.gov.au/internet/cfke/publishing.nsf/Content/Home>.

29. National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031

In September 2020, the Project Reference Group (PRG) renamed the Workforce Plan to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031 (National Workforce Plan).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2016-2023 (Strategic Framework) was refreshed as part of developing the National Workforce Plan. The refresh ensures it remains relevant and aligns with current priorities, direction and timeframes. The National Workforce Plan combines the refreshed Strategic Framework and an implementation plan into one integrated document.

The National Workforce Plan will closely align with the new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, and will support the four priority reform areas and 16 targets outlined in the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The PRG are currently preparing a draft National Workforce Plan for national online consultation in late 2020. It is expected that the National Workforce Plan will then be finalised and progressed for government endorsement in early 2021.

To find out more, email NATSIWorkforcePlan@health.gov.au

30. Primary health care funding update

All successful organisations have executed a grant agreement for the delivery of primary health care services, with activities commencing on 1 July 2020.

The department is currently in the process of applying indexation to these grant agreements for the 2020-21 financial year.

The indexation will be included to future payments, by increasing the milestone payments in proportion to the indexation amount. A back-payment milestone will be included to cover the indexation amount due for milestones that have already been released in the 2020-21 financial year. The Community Grants Hub will notify organisations once the indexation has been applied.

Primary Health Care Service Expansion Funding.

The Australian Government announced an opportunity for eligible services to apply for grants under the IAHP, for Primary Health Care Service Expansion Funding. \$33 million will be available over three years (2020-21 to 2022-23).

This opportunity targets ACCHSs and other non-government providers currently funded under the IAHP. This will enable expansion of their current footprint and target areas of unmet need to improve health outcomes in communities who need it most. This is part of the Government's commitment to support local communities to set their own priorities and tailor services to their unique circumstances.

The grant round was advertised on GrantConnect for 8 weeks and closed on 7 October 2020.

31. Data collection and the Health Data Portal

Data reporting optional in 2020

The COVID-19 pandemic has created extra pressure for health services. Based on advice from the Indigenous health sector and other experts, data reporting in 2020 is not mandatory, but strongly encouraged. In July-August 2020 health services submitted their National Key Performance Indicators (nKPIs), Online Services Report (OSR), and Health Care Provider number data through the Health Data Portal (HDP). The Department is pleased to advise that 91% of reports were submitted by 250 reporting Indigenous health services.

The Department has worked with Indigenous health services and the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector over the past three years to design, develop and implement the HDP for nKPI, OSR and HCP data reporting.

The success of the non-mandatory reporting round reflects the value of this data to the sector and feedback from a recent survey reflects this. The HDP enables services to view themselves against local, state and national outcomes, or against services that are of similar size or workforce structure. This data can inform continuous quality improvement and is often shared internally with staff, management and Boards.

Changes to the Health Data Portal

The Department are continuing to enhance the HDP to ensure that it is quicker and easier for health services to access data. Improvements include:

- upgraded OSR including validation rules; and
- improved Qlik interactive reports that allow services to view indicator data results over time and compare them with the average results of similar organisations.

To stay up to date, subscribe to our monthly newsletter by emailing Indigenousreporting@health.gov.au.

32. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services Data Advisory Group (HS DAG)

The HS DAG met on 14 September 2020 via teleconference to discuss the:

- nKPI and OSR Implementation Roadmap
- Data Quality Assessment and Support Project update
- HS DAG Working Group update
- Activity Work Plans and nKPI target setting
- OSR Deep Dive update.

Read the meeting communiques for data collection outcomes and the work of the group at the following link:

<https://www1.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Services-Data-Advisory-Group>.