

13th Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG) Meeting

16 June 2020

COMMUNIQUE

The Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG) held its thirteenth meeting by teleconference on 16 June 2020 to discuss high priority issues, including the COVID-19 response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations; and the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023* (Health Plan) and its Implementation Plan. This shortened meeting followed the decision to postpone the 2 April 2020 meeting, due to members' competing and emerging priorities in response to COVID-19.

The meeting was co-chaired by Ms Donna Murray, Chair of the National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF), and Mr Gavin Matthews, First Assistant Secretary, Indigenous Health Division, Australian Government Department of Health. Ms Murray has been elected as the Chair of the NHLF.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

The Australian Government Department of Health provided an update to IPAG members on the work being undertaken in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 (Advisory Group) is providing expertise and leadership during the COVID-19 pandemic and is co-chaired by the Department of Health and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). Membership comprises Public Health Medical Officers; leaders from NACCHO and the state affiliates; Aboriginal health services; state and territory government representatives; the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association and the National Indigenous Australian's Agency (NIAA). The Advisory Group has been working closely with the Communicable Diseases Network of Australia to gain epidemiological data and prepare technical guidance on managing the COVID-19 response in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The expertise and leadership of the Advisory Groups' membership has delivered the Interim National Guidance for Remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities for COVID-19, essential input to the Communicable Diseases Network Australia National Guidelines for Public Health Units (COVID-19 SoNG), and the *COVID-19 Management Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations* (Management Plan). The Department of Health is tracking progress against the Management Plan and reporting this regularly to the Advisory Group.

IPAG members noted that phase four of the Management Plan is 'stand down and evaluation', which will include a review of processes and policies, in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; as well as updating protocols and plans in line with lessons observed. It was further noted that the current Management Plan will form the basis of a communicable disease response plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This response plan will aim to incorporate the lessons learnt from the COVID-19 response, as well as the actions and governance achieved by the Advisory Group during the COVID-19 pandemic.

IPAG members highly commended the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector for its outstanding work coordinating the COVID-19 response at the local level. Members also praised the

work of the Advisory Group for its leadership role, achieving coordinated, sustained effort across governments and in partnership with the sector. Members noted that the learnings from the COVID-19 response should inform the development of the next Health Plan.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and its Implementation Plan

IPAG members discussed the proposed approach to refresh the Health Plan. IPAG members agreed, in-principle, that the extensive work undertaken in the development of the next Implementation Plan should instead be used to refresh the overarching Health Plan, with the aim of providing a single, overarching policy framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Members also agreed that the Health Plan will contain a strong and comprehensive focus on prevention, with a holistic, person-centred approach. Members noted that the Health Plan will emphasise the importance of cultural determinants in directly influencing outcomes across the social determinants. The development of the Health Plan will continue to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led through the Working Group.

Lowitja provided an update on the further knowledge translation that work they are undertaking on the cultural determinants. IPAG members expressed ongoing support for this work, which will culturally inform the drafting of the refreshed Health Plan, as well as broader policy.

IPAG members were updated on the consultation feedback received on the Implementation Plan framework that was discussed at the preceding IPAG meeting. The feedback received was generally supportive, particularly having culture at the centre of the framework and the increased emphasis on the cultural determinants and social determinants of health. Members noted that this feedback will be taken into account in developing the refreshed Health Plan.

Progress against the *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023*

In reviewing progress against the *Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023* (Implementation Plan), IPAG members discussed the influence that social determinants have on health outcomes, including in the context of COVID-19 preparedness. Key issues that were discussed include the intersection between housing and health, rheumatic heart disease and further reducing smoking rates in rural and remote areas. Members noted that these issues will remain key considerations for the refresh of the Health Plan, as well as the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Members noted progress made against the deliverables that are outlined in the current Implementation Plan. As at 16 June 2019:

- 80 of the Implementation Plan deliverables due in 2018 have been met, with ongoing work to progress the remaining 26;
- work is progressing well on the Implementation Plan deliverables with a 2023 milestone, with a small number (5) already complete; and
- there are 12 Implementation Plan goals on track, with six not on track and two unable to be reported on.

Members noted that the next update to the Implementation Plan goals will be at the end of 2020. This will inform further analysis of progress against the goals, including effort needed to accelerate improvements.

Updates

IPAG Members received updates at the meeting on progress with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap from the National Indigenous Australians' Agency and the development of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Plan* from the Department of Health. Further updates on these important pieces of work will be provided at future meetings.

For further information, please contact the IPAG.Secretariat@health.gov.au