

## **National strategic approach for an enhanced response to the disproportionately high rates of STI and BBV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

*This Strategic Approach was prepared by the enhanced national response Governance Group of Australian Health Protection Principal Committee and endorsed by the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council*

*on  
8 December 2017*

### **Strategic approach objectives**

Indigenous people are disproportionately represented in notifications of sexually transmissible infections (STI) and blood borne viruses (BBV). Most immediately concerning is the outbreak of infectious syphilis affecting predominately young (15-29 year old) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (hereafter Indigenous) people in communities across northern and central Australia<sup>1</sup>.

Under the leadership of Australian Health Protection Principal Committee (AHPPC), key stakeholders will drive a nationally co-ordinated and enhanced response to control the syphilis outbreak.

It is acknowledged that significant work has been done individually by State and Territory Health services, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, primary health care and other community organisations to address the syphilis outbreak. The enhanced response provides an opportunity to draw on their successes, identify remaining barriers, and collectively develop sustainable solutions (recognising the different needs within jurisdictions).

While much of the focus has been on syphilis, the epidemiology for other STI and BBV are similarly concerning. The enhanced response also provides an opportunity to address the disproportionate rates of other STI and BBV.

Therefore, the primary, secondary and tertiary objectives of the Strategic Approach are to:

1. Control the current syphilis outbreak in northern and central Australia (primary);
2. Undertake opportunistic control efforts for other STI and BBV (secondary);
3. Consider the long-term sustainable response to STI and BBV issues in Indigenous people, in-line with the National BBV and STI Strategies for 2018-2022 (tertiary), with the ultimate goal of reducing rates of STI and BBV to a sustainably low level.

### **Action Plan**

Supporting this Strategic Approach is an Action Plan that outlines activities that are or will be undertaken to respond to the syphilis outbreak under four main priority areas. Embedded in each priority area are activities that aim to build a stable and skilled health workforce, which will be critical to the success of this Strategic Approach.

While this Action Plan has been developed with the primary objective of responding to the syphilis outbreak, in meeting this Strategic Approach's objectives, it is expected that the Action Plan will evolve over time as the priorities for managing Indigenous BBV and STI change.

### **Governance**

AHPPC is supported in achieving the objectives of this Strategic Approach by the Commonwealth Departments of Health and Prime Minister and Cabinet, jurisdictional Health Departments, relevant AHPPC sub-committees and working groups, and key non-Government agencies.

<sup>1</sup>Affected areas as at October 2017 include: **Queensland** (Hospital and Health Service areas -Cairns and Hinterland, Torres and Cape, North West and Townsville); **Northern Territory** (all districts); **Western Australia** (Kimberly region), and; **South Australia** (Western, Eyre and Far North regions).