

14th Implementation Plan Advisory Group Meeting

15 September 2020

COMMUNIQUE

The fourteenth Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG) meeting was held by teleconference on 15 September 2020. The meeting was strategically focussed on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data and research to inform the development of the refresh of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (Health Plan). Updates were also provided on the COVID-19 response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations, the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the National Preventive Health Strategy and the outcomes of the cultural determinants workshop hosted by the Lowitja Institute (Lowitja).

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

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dr Lucas de Toca, A/g First Assistant Secretary of the COVID-19 Primary Care Response in the Australian Government Department of Health, provided an update on the COVID-19 situation. Dr de Toca noted that, in total, there had been just over 140 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people test positive to COVID-19, representing approximately 0.5 per cent of total cases. Dr de Toca noted that, while there is a lack of nationally consistent data on testing rates, indications are that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are being tested at an equivalent or higher rate than the broader population.

The work of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group on COVID-19 (Advisory Group) was broadly praised by IPAG members, with members noting that the Advisory Group demonstrates how a partnership body can operate effectively across jurisdictions. Members agreed that this experience should be captured as a case study in the Health Plan, from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective.

Members discussed best practice for responding to outbreaks in communities. Dr de Toca further noted that the Advisory Group had supervised the development of online training modules for the remote Indigenous context, which includes surveillance strategies.

Cultural determinants workshop

Members noted that, on 14 September 2020, Lowitja facilitated a workshop for senior Commonwealth Government officials on embedding cultural determinants in policy. Members noted that the workshop had been productive and that key outcomes and learnings will be translated into a paper, which Lowitja will present to IPAG at the next meeting in December 2020.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan refresh

IPAG members discussed progress in developing the refreshed Health Plan and endorsed the draft outline to form the basis for drafting. Members were advised that Dr Summer May Finlay has been engaged as a drafter to move this forward. It was further noted that the work of Lowitja on cultural determinants knowledge translation will be fundamental to guide the development of the Health Plan.

Members discussed the importance of achieving cross-jurisdictional buy-in for the Health Plan, and noted that work is underway to progress this conversation with states and territories.

Members endorsed the stakeholder engagement plan, noting that the online release of a consultation draft in early 2021 will be open to the public. Members also endorsed the updated Terms of Reference for the time-limited working group overseeing the development of the Health Plan, which is chaired by Ms Murray.

Data and research

Members received updates on a number of data and research activities and issues:

- the development of a culture Framework by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, presented by Mr Craig Ritchie;
- investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, including through the Indigenous Health Research Fund, presented by Professor Alex Brown;
- the Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study, presented by Mr Tony Grubb from the Australian Bureau of Statistics; and
- work underway on data infrastructure and sovereignty, presented by NIAA.

Members noted that the policy direction for the Health Plan is broadly aligned with the focus of key priorities and activities underway. To guide the development of the Health Plan, members noted the following considerations:

- data collection and research investment across mainstream sectors is a key gap, particularly with respect to accountability;
- opportunities to improve data collection with respect to workforce needs further exploration, and the approach to address workforce gaps must be visionary to capture emerging fields; and
- governance structures are needed to enable partnership and drive action, particularly with respect to workforce.

Updates

Ms Maya Stuart-Fox from the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) presented an update on next steps for the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Members noted that the Australian Government has contributed \$46.5 million for sector strengthening, with the Commonwealth Implementation Plan to be delivered in the first half of 2021.

Ms Tracey Andrews presented on the development of the National Preventive Health Strategy (the Strategy). Ms Andrews noted that a Consultation Paper has been publically released, with

responses due by 28 September 2020. Ms Andrews noted that a draft version of the Strategy is expected to be released later in 2020 for consultation, with the Strategy due to be finalised in March 2021. Members noted the importance of alignment between the National Preventive Health Strategy and the Health Plan, including around the life course approach. Members also noted the importance of a strong focus on early childhood development.

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

Members noted progress made against the deliverables that are outlined in the current Implementation Plan. As at 15 September 2020:

- 82 of the Implementation Plan deliverables due in 2018 have been met, with ongoing work continuing further progress against these deliverables;
- work remains underway to progress the remaining 24 deliverables for 2018;
- a small number (5) of the 2023 deliverables are 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, which will inform further analysis of progress. This update will include a disaggregation of health check rates performed through community controlled services for available age ranges.

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