

16th Implementation Plan Advisory Group Meeting

11 March 2021

COMMUNIQUE

Summary

The sixteenth Implementation Plan Advisory Group (IPAG) meeting was held by videoconference on 11 March 2021. 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 (IHD) of the Australian Government Department of Health (DoH).

The main focus was the refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (Health Plan). DoH provided an update on the COVID-19 response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and the rollout of the COVID-19 vaccines; and the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) provided an update on the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#).

Mr Simon Patterson from the Indigenous Executive Policy Group presented policy options for traditional healers. Professor Tom Calma presented key findings from the mid-term evaluation of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking Program, and Associate Professor Ray Lovett and Dr Raglan Maddox presented recent findings on tobacco use, trauma and racism from the Mayi Kuwayu Study. Mr Ned Hardie-Boys presented findings from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Systems Evaluation.

Coronavirus (COVID-19)

Dr Lucas de Toca, First Assistant Secretary, COVID-19 Primary Care Response Team, DoH, noted that the primary focus of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group is now the vaccine rollout. As a priority population, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults can begin to receive vaccines as a part of phase 1b from 22 March 2021.

Mental Health – Traditional Healers Policy

Mr Patterson, Indigenous Executive Policy Group, provided a presentation on examining the role of Traditional Healers in the mental health system. This work was undertaken by the Indigenous Executive Policy Group and delivered to Mr Mark Roddam, First Assistant Secretary, Mental Health Division, DoH. The presentation indicated that there is evidence of success of traditional healing practices where traditional healers and modern medicine have

interacted in supporting better mental health and social and emotional wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This includes successful models based in South Australia, which are outlined in the [Hand-In-Hand Report on Aboriginal Traditional Medicine](#).

Mid-term Tackling Indigenous Smoking Evaluation

Professor Calma, National Coordinator, Tackling Indigenous Smoking Program, and Ms Anita Dwyer, Assistant Secretary, Health Plan, Early Years and Engagement Branch, DoH, noted the Tackling Indigenous Smoking mid-term report found an overall reduction in smoking for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Professor Calma noted that smoking rates remain higher in remote and very remote areas. Professor Calma also noted that some grant recipients have a focus on schools to prevent children from taking up smoking, and on creating smoke free work places, homes and community spaces. Timing for the release of the mid-term report is yet to be determined.

The Mayi Kuwayu Study - analysis of the impact of tobacco use, trauma and racism

Dr Maddox, Research School of Population Health, ANU, showed that over a third of Mayi Kuwayu Study participants lived in an area serviced by a Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) team. Behavioural changes towards smoking were evident by a reported reduction in people smoking in their home, increasing quit attempts by smokers, lower levels of dependence on cigarette smoking, and lower levels of consumption of cigarettes by smokers. It was noted that the evidence suggests that changes in pre-cursors to smoking cessation are occurring in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in areas that are serviced by the TIS program.

Associate Professor Lovett and Ms Makayla-May Brinckley, ANU Research School of Population Health, showed evidence that the high prevalence of discrimination experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people has wide-ranging links to wellbeing inequities. The Mayi Kuwayu Study confirms that trauma and racism negatively impacts on health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Systems Evaluation

The National Primary Health Care System Evaluation team provided an update on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Systems Evaluation being undertaken. Members noted the re-engagement with all potential site partners in October 2020, following a series of webinars on the rollout of participation agreement workshop. The next steps in the evaluation's main work streams are finalising participation agreements with site partners and commencing data gathering, continued engagement with state, territory and national governments, and collaboration on cross-cutting themes.

Members agreed to future update on the evaluation, once findings were available, however noted this information would not be available before finalisation of the refreshed Health Plan.

The National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Ms Andrea Kelly, Branch Manager, Health and Wellbeing Branch, NIAA, presented an update on next steps for the implementation of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Members noted the work being undertaken on progressing the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement, including:

- Joint Council will consider locations for up to six place-based partnerships at its July 2021 meeting.
- Joint Council has agreed to a strategic plan to guide investment from a joint funding pool to strengthen the community-controlled sector.
- Work is continuing to settle project locations for the first two data projects to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to access and use location-specific data on the Closing the Gap outcome areas.
- The Partnership Working Group is negotiating two new targets: community infrastructure and inland waters.

Members requested further information on the proposed community infrastructure target, noting the intersections with the 'healthy environments, sustainability and preparedness' section of the refreshed Health Plan.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan refresh

Ms Murray and Mr Matthews presented the latest working draft of the refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan. Mr Matthews noted the strategies and narrative had been further developed, and that consultation had been broadened. Members were invited to provide further feedback on the draft.

Members advised that the findings from the Mayi Kuwayu Study on racism should inform the Health Plan. Members also recommended further strengthening of the workforce section to acknowledge the important role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce organisations.

Members advised that further policy work is required to address access to specialist and tertiary services, noting that increases in the uptake of MBS 715 health checks has yet to translate into better access to follow-up care and treatment. Members recommended that there remain a dedicated section and strategy on the community controlled health sector, with further work required to refine the language.

Members are to provide feedback on the draft Health Plan by early April 2021.

Updates

Dr Fadwa Al-Yaman, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, presented an analysis of Implementation Plan Goals across Indigenous regions. Dr Al-Yaman will advise on health checks across Primary Health Network regions at a future meeting.

The next IPAG meeting will be an extra-ordinary meeting on 10 May 2021 and will focus on finalising the refreshed Health Plan.

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