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Director's Communiqué

Inside this issue...

Director's welcome

I certainly didn't expect to be writing this introduction to my Communiqué from home. But... here we are in the midst of an unprecedented health and economic crisis; perhaps the biggest crisis we have collectively faced as a nation since the Second World War. COVID-19 has impacted everyone... and I mean everyone. Everyone has a personal story to tell of hardship and deprivation from losing a business, losing a job and tragically some of us have lost people we know. But equally, everyone has a story of collaboration, of support, of compassion, of empathy and of love for one another. These are the stories that sustain us and prepare us to emerge from this event, whenever it resolves, stronger and more determined to work together to support our communities.

I have implemented a home-based work option for HealthInfoNet staff. Some will transition to wholly home-based work, some to a mixture of home-based and campus-based work while a few staff have elected to remain on campus. Of course, if the campus closes or we are ordered into lockdown then all staff will transition as required. Our plan is comprehensive and detailed and I am confident that we can currently maintain our usual high standard of service. In practice, users should not notice any changes at all. We have the technology, administrative, human resources and staff, professional and social support networks in place to ensure a

seamless transition to home-based work. I have absolute confidence in my staff to work diligently and professionally to continue to support the people and communities we serve.

Of course, there may be intermittent failure in the internet and telephone systems over which we obviously have no control, however, we have plans in place for a full workload of 'offline' activities that can be undertaken by staff in that event. Once we are back online, we will update the resource as required to ensure that our information remains timely, accessible and relevant to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce at this time of crisis.

So, we are attempting to continue our 'business as usual', supporting our users and their communities. In this Communiqué, I outline some of what we have been up to in the time since my last Communiqué.

Our thoughts are with you all in the hope you stay safe, stay well and importantly stay connected.

Cheers,
Neil



Professor Neil Drew

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© Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet.

The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters of Australia and the Torres Strait. We respect all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—their customs and their beliefs. We also pay our respects to Elders past and present, with particular acknowledgement to the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation, the traditional owners of the lands where our offices are located.

HealthInfoNet's new Covid-19 website portal



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been identified by Indigenous leaders throughout the country as vulnerable to Covid-19. In early March as part of our ongoing commitment to provide up to date timely, accessible and relevant information to support our users and their community we added our Covid-19 Information and Resource Portal. Our primary purpose was to ensure that there are

authoritative links to up to date reliable and factual information to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. As you are probably aware, in March, the Federal government set up a national Indigenous advisory group to fast-track an emergency response plan for Aboriginal communities that are most vulnerable to any potential spread of Covid-19. NACCHO has

also played a leading role keeping the sector up to date in its Communiqués. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have resources or links to resources that may be of assistance. Our Covid-19 Portal is being curated by Michelle Elwell so please contact her on (08) 9370 6597 or email: m.elwell@ecu.edu.au.

COVID-19

New partner

INDIGITEK

I met with a wonderful group of individuals recently. They are a network of Indigenous people who are inspired by the intersection of culture and science, technology, engineering and mathematics. Indigitek is a community of likeminded Indigenous people with an interest in technology. They meet with others who are in the industry, share stories and explore the possibilities of where culture and technology connect. Indigitek is

a voluntary organisation and holds regular events showcasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scientists who are doing great things in culture and technology.

They are interested in creating pathways for Indigenous people who are interested in technology and related fields through education, employment and entrepreneurship opportunities. A priority is to engage with schools to encourage more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into careers in science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

HealthInfoNet Advisory Board member acknowledged by ECU



Congratulations to our Advisory Board member, Dr Janine Mohamed who was presented with the honorary title of Doctor of Nursing by ECU at a ceremony in February for her exemplary career as a nursing and midwifery leader, and for her advocacy for the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives to advance the health outcomes of Australia's first peoples. Janine has dedicated more than 20 years of her professional life working within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector. Janine has been a great supporter and friend of the HealthInfoNet for many years.

Our annual Overview of health status

In February, we launched our annual *Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status*. We strive to provide an accurate and informative summary of the current health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In doing so, we want to acknowledge the importance of adopting a strengths-based approach, and to recognise the increasingly important area of data sovereignty. To this end, we have reduced our reliance on comparative data in favour of exploring the broad context of the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and how this may impact their health journey.



New review of CVD

The most recent indicators of the cardiovascular health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are documented one of our latest publications, the *Review of cardiovascular health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2019*. The review shows that cardiovascular disease (CVD) is the leading cause of avoidable death, and death overall for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, chronic heart disease death rates have declined in recent years. Other good news is that fewer young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are smoking, reducing their risk for cardiovascular disease.

Lead author Lea Merone, from Apunipima Cape

York Health Council, James Cook University, said, 'Access to good quality affordable food, secure housing, holistic care in health services and genuine partnership with communities for policy, planning and service delivery, are needed to improve the CVD health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'. The review explains that in the short-term, management of CVD can be greatly improved for people who face issues regarding medical treatment and rehabilitation, particularly for those who live in rural and remote areas.

Other resources accompany the review including a video of key facts and an infographic fact sheet.



Workforce group can now yarn online

Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) workers are now connected with their own private TIS Yarning Facebook group. This important workforce group can now share ideas and network with each other across the country. The Yarning Facebook group went 'live' on 17 March. The feedback so far is very positive. Ninti One manages the National Best Practice Unit of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking program, which aims to reduce smoking as the most preventable cause of ill health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and have contracted us to provide the tobacco portal on our website.



"It's great to see what others are doing and sharing ideas"

"Definitely like this group knowing what other groups are up to"

"This page is a great idea and I look forward to connecting with everyone"

"Thanks for sharing your ideas and keeping morale up within our TIS family."

Resources to support those affected by the bushfires



Like all Australians and indeed people from all around the world we were devastated by the impact of bushfires on people and communities throughout our beloved country earlier this year. I was gratified that our portal dedicated to environmental health provided many resources to support those fighting and recovering from the bushfires. We featured this on our home page and via our social media channels during January and February.

Environmental Health

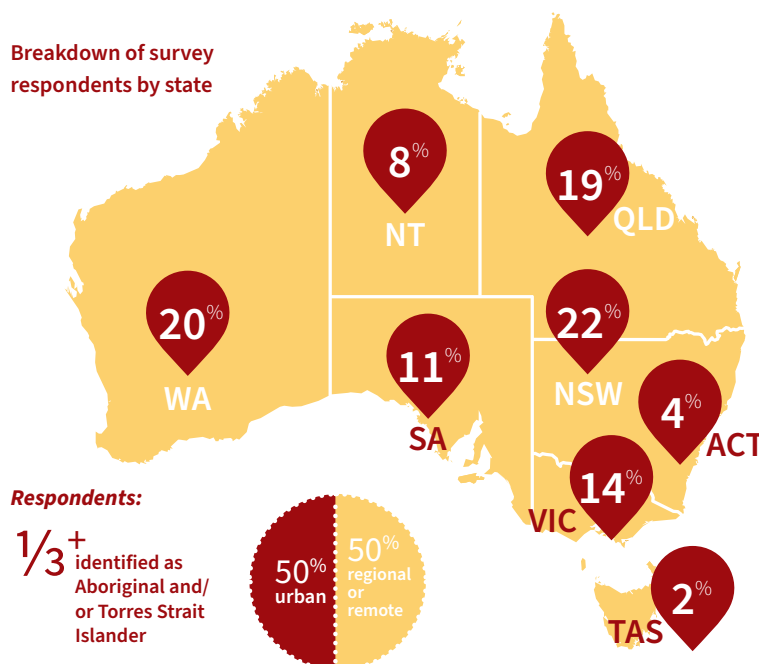
HealthInfoNet user survey



Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

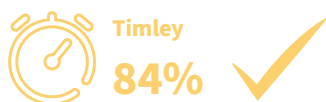
In November, 2019 we conducted a user survey of both the HealthInfoNet and the AOD Knowledge Centre. Here is a brief snapshot of the results which have been extremely gratifying. We also received important feedback that will enable to further improve our service to users throughout the country. We will publish a comprehensive report by June 2020.

Breakdown of survey respondents by state

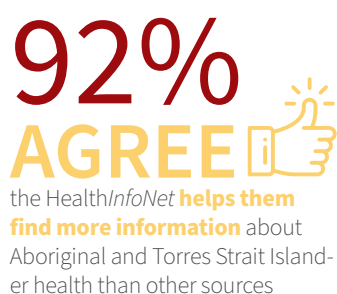


Key results

USERS IN THE WORKFORCE AGREE HEALTHINFONET IS A



SOURCE OF INFORMATION ABOUT ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH



79% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and **89%** of non-Indigenous users in the workforce feel that the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet helps them to apply their health knowledge in a way that is more **culturally safe**.