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Authors' response to "Australian first in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoner health care in the Australian Capital Territory"

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We thank the authors for their comments on our article. We acknowledge their report and the leadership of Winnunga Nimmityjah Health and Wellbeing Service as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) providing comprehensive primary healthcare for prisoners at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT). This is vital for other jurisdictions to model, drawing on the skills and strengths of local ACCHOs, and taking into account diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, locations and prisons.

It is encouraging that funding has been committed by the ACT Government. We note, however, the regrettable circumstances which in part stimulated the funding of Winnunga Nimmityjah's work at the AMC – the independent inquiry into the treatment in custody of an Aboriginal prisoner, regarding a death.¹ Deaths in custody should never be a prerequisite to progressing models of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners.

Sustainable funding for ACCHOs in all Australian prisons is required. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to this – to receiving equivalent care in prisons as in the community.² Consideration should be given to the use of specific Medicare items for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in prison and prior to release as an appropriate funding mechanism for ACCHOs. The Public Health Association of Australia identifies the 'Health Assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

people' (item 715) and psychological services (item 80110) for prisoners with less-severe needs as two examples that could address the health needs of prisoners ensuring they receive equivalent healthcare to those in the community.³ This could be addressed by a ministerial exemption of prisoners' exclusions to these items (under Section 19(2) *Health Insurance Act 1973*)⁴ and could help ensure ACCHOs' ongoing leadership in shaping and delivering culturally safe, effective healthcare.

References

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