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Big Boost to Indigenous Health in ACT Budget

The ACT Government is substantially increasing its efforts to improve the health of local indigenous people, the Minister for Health and Community Care, Michael Moore, said today.

"We know that the health status of indigenous communities is well below that of the rest of the population," Mr Moore said.

"This situation is not satisfactory, and the ACT Government is funding a number of measures aimed at achieving real and sustainable improvements in the health and quality of life of our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"In addition to funding specific initiatives, we will shortly be releasing a plan, developed in consultation with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for improving the health of our indigenous population.

"It would be naïve to expect the situation to turn around overnight, but I believe that we can make substantial progress in partnership with our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Mr Moore said.

Initiatives to achieve better health outcomes for indigenous people in the ACT are detailed below.

An additional indigenous health worker

An extra indigenous health worker will be engaged to help improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. The measure, confirmed today, was first announced in the draft ACT Budget for 2000-2001. The cost over four years is expected to be \$418,000.

"The additional indigenous health worker will provide much needed support on one of the priority issues identified in the plan," Mr Moore said.

The priorities identified in the draft Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Regional Health Plan are:

- Injury

- Alcohol, Tobacco and Other Drugs
- Diabetes Mellitus
- Cardiovascular and Circulatory Disease
- Maternal and Child Health
- Mental and Emotional Health, and Suicide
- Violence (including sexual assault)
- Preventable Diseases (Sexual Health, Hepatitis C, HIV, Pneumonia and Influenza, Child Immunisations)
- Indigenous Youth
- Stolen Generation
- Men's Health Services

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Regional Health plan will address background issues; priority health needs/issues; current service provision and future needs; health service gaps; goals and objectives; and responsibilities of the stakeholders.

Indigenous Youth Health

A broader holistic approach for young Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders who are experiencing multiple and complex health problems will be funded at \$480,000 over four years. The program aims to improve access of indigenous people to mainstream services, enhancing the sensitivity of mainstream services to cross cultural issues and improving linkages between indigenous and mainstream services.

This initiative is part of the Building Social Capital program.*

Well Babies Program

Indigenous people in the ACT will benefit from this initiative, which will promote the health and wellbeing of babies from the time of conception. The program will target folate deficiency, alcohol abstinence and smoking cessation with an emphasis on education and support services.

This initiative is part of the Building Social Capital program.*

Child and Youth Nutrition

Pilot programs will be conducted in schools to promote healthy nutrition amongst indigenous and at risk children and youth. The aim is to improve the health status of the children by promoting the benefits of a healthy breakfast through a number of activities.

This initiative is part of the Building Social Capital program.*

Other services

Among other services for the indigenous community, the ACT Department of Health and Community Care provides funding for indigenous health workers in a range of health areas as well as hospital community liaison.

The ACT Government supports the primary health care service Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service through the provision of accommodation. The Commonwealth Government funds the service.

The ACT recently held a local launch for the National Indigenous Flu and Pneumococcal Immunisation Campaign. People over 50, and those with diabetes or heart, lung, or kidney problems aged between 15 and 50, form the target group for this indigenous health campaign. Free vaccinations for indigenous people are available from ACT Community Care's SPOT mobile immunisation service, Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service and GPs.

The ACT also provides funding for a medical scholarship and a nursing scholarship managed by the University of Canberra.

Mr Moore said Health Ministers around Australia recognise that indigenous health requires a huge amount of effort.

The Minister has also welcomed an inquiry by the Legislative Assembly's Health and Community Care Committee into indigenous health in the ACT.

"We are all committed to improving indigenous health and I welcome the input of Assembly members on achieving this important goal," he said.

"My Department and my office will assist the Assembly committee in whatever way we can."

* These initiatives are further explained in a separate media release issued today.

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