



The Royal Australasian
College of Physicians

Gains being made, but efforts must be sustained to close the gap in Indigenous health

Media Statement

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President of The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP) Professor Nicholas Talley said today's *Closing the Gap* report shows some improvements to Indigenous health outcomes, but the process requires a long-term commitment.

"Even though the Closing the Gap strategy has only been in place for a few years there are already signs it is working – and that should spur us on to redouble our long term efforts.

"We must recognise that a sustained focus and effort is needed to truly close the health gap," Professor Talley said while attending the Closing the Gap proceedings in Canberra today.

The RACP is calling for the Implementation Plan for the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan* to be a core focus for government in order to address the gaps in care for Indigenous Australians.

"The Implementation Plan is an opportunity to make sure we improve the access, quality and integration of health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Crucially, we must better connect and integrate services across the primary care, hospital and specialist sectors.

"It is vital that this is done in partnership with the Indigenous health sector and community leaders, and that the invaluable role of the Indigenous medical workforce is recognised," Professor Talley said.

Although some modest gains have been made to life expectancy, the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is still around ten yearsⁱ.

Gains have also been made in the slow but steady decline in smoking ratesⁱⁱ and in lowering the death rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, which has dropped by an average of 6.5 deaths per 100,000 per yearⁱⁱⁱ.

However, the death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children remains double that for non-Indigenous children.

Ends

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About The Royal Australasian College of Physicians (RACP): The RACP trains, educates and advocates on behalf of more than 14,600 physicians – often referred to as medical specialists – and 6,000 Trainee members across Australia and New Zealand. The College represents more than 32 medical specialties including paediatrics & child health, cardiology, respiratory medicine, neurology, oncology and public health medicine, occupational & environmental medicine, palliative medicine,

sexual health medicine, rehabilitation medicine and addiction medicine. Beyond the drive for medical excellence, the RACP is committed to developing health and social policies which bring vital improvements to the wellbeing of patients. www.racp.edu.au

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Fact Sheet: Life Expectancy Estimates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, 2013*, p 3. URL <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/mf/3302.0.55.003>.

ⁱⁱ 2002 and 2008 NATSISS results, and the 2012-2013 ABS Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (AATSIHS)

ⁱⁱⁱ COAG Reform Council, *Indigenous Reform 2012-13: Five years of Performance*, 2014