



## **NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUALITY COUNCIL**

### **Inaugural Meeting**

**25 and 26 August 2008**

### **COMMUNIQUÉ**

The newly established National Indigenous Health Equality Council (NIHEC) held its inaugural meeting in Canberra this week. This, the first formal gathering of this group of experts with experience in a variety of fields related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, represented a strong component of the Australian Government's commitment to work in partnership with Indigenous communities and organisations to "close the gap" in a range of areas where Indigenous Australians experience disadvantage.

Led by the Chair, Professor Ian Anderson, members affirmed their dedication to the broad-ranging terms of reference for NIHEC. In pursuing its mandate, NIHEC is committed to the "closing the gap" agenda, based on principles of respect for Indigenous leadership and culture, as well as a scientific approach to evidence-based policy and program intervention.

NIHEC applauds and is encouraged by the Australian Governments' commitment to sustainable and considered integration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and well being measures in the deliberation and output of the current Council of Australian Governments (CoAG) agenda.

In its initial discussions, NIHEC agreed as one of its priorities to further efforts around workforce issues. This is an acknowledgement of the multi-faceted approach required to improve pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into participating in the health workforce. Further, consideration under the Work Plan will be given to progressing initiatives that would see more doctors, nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers and others on the ground providing culturally sensitive health care for Indigenous people in urban, rural and remote settings.

NIHEC agreed to review targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health set by a variety of organisations, including the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission and CoAG, to provide advice to the Minister on possible gaps in existing targets and any omissions. This project is intended to promote accountability and simplify reporting processes. In conjunction with this work, the NIHEC will make recommendations aimed at improving national reportable health data to assist in the collection of solid baseline data from which to measure outcomes.

Key to this work will be improving and streamlining processes for better identifying the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status of patients, allowing for more accurate data collection and improved service delivery.

Members of NIHEC were enthusiastic about moving forward and identifying areas where gains can be made in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.



The next meeting of NIHEC is scheduled for 9 – 10 December 2008, in Alice Springs, Northern Territory.