

**Australian Medical Association Limited**  
**ABN 37 008 426 793**

42 Macquarie Street, Barton ACT 2600: PO Box 6090, Kingston ACT 2604  
 Telephone: (02) 6270 5400 Facsimile (02) 6270 5499  
 Website : <http://www.ama.com.au/>



**‘21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY GOVERNMENT’ MUST DELIVER 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY  
 HEALTH SERVICES TO INDIGENOUS AUSTRALIANS**  
*AMA Position Statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2015*

The AMA today released the updated *AMA Position Statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2015*, which was last revised in 2005.

The updated Position Statement emphasises social determinants of health, and their importance in reducing health inequality.

AMA President, Professor Brian Owler, said today that the AMA is calling on the Federal Government to make improved Indigenous health a whole-of-Government priority.

“New Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull has declared he is leading a 21<sup>st</sup> Century Government,” Professor Owler said.

“A 21<sup>st</sup> century Government must bring the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people up to 21<sup>st</sup> century levels.

“It is tragic that, as a wealthy nation, we still struggle to provide adequate health care to three per cent of our population.

“Now is the time to develop a whole-of-Government approach to close the health inequalities that exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“All current and future policies addressing education, employment, poverty, housing, taxation, transport, the environment and social security should be assessed according to their impact on health and equity.

“Equal health outcomes will not be achieved until economic, education, and social disadvantages have been eliminated.”

Professor Owler said that the cuts of \$596.2 million from the Health Flexible Funds over the next four years are detrimental to reducing the health inequalities of this nation.

“The cuts affect targeted programs that close the gap in health outcomes for Indigenous Australians, manage vital responses to communicable diseases; and deliver substance abuse treatment services around the country.

“While the Government has admirably set targets for reducing health inequalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, genuine collaborative action is needed to deliver meaningful change.

“The AMA remains committed to improving the health outcomes for Indigenous people by working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups to advocate for greater Government investment and cohesive coordinated strategies.

“And we stand ready to work with the Turnbull Government to bring Indigenous health services and health outcomes into the 21<sup>st</sup> century,” Professor Owler said.

**Key recommendations of the updated AMA Position Statement include:**

- calling on the Government to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to set standards of both provision and access across the whole range of government services, and use these to agree on necessary funding;
- supporting the Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation and the work towards a successful referendum to recognise the first Australians in our Constitution, acknowledging our shared history and the value of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage;
- advocating the recognition that ownership and control of land by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of the important keys to improving the life choices and life expectancy of individuals and communities;
- advocating that all government-funded and private health services be required to ensure that they are able to provide culturally responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- calling on the Government to correct the under-funding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services; and
- calling on the Government to provide additional fully funded training to address the total shortfall of health professionals providing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**Background:**

- There is still a life expectancy gap of around ten years between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians.
- Indigenous males born in Australia in 2010-2012 could expect to live to 69.1 years – 10.6 years less than the 79.7 years expected for non-Indigenous males.
- Indigenous females born in Australia in 2010-2012 could expect to live for 73.7 years – 9.5 years less than the expectation of 83.1 years for non-Indigenous females.
- The leading causes of death among Indigenous people in 2012 were cardiovascular disease (25 per cent), neoplasms (almost entirely cancers) (20 per cent), and injury (15 per cent).
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience high levels of treatable and preventable conditions, such as preventable blindness. According to the University of Melbourne's 2015 report, *The Value of Indigenous Sight*, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults experience six times the rate of blindness than non-Indigenous people, and 94 per cent of vision loss among Indigenous people is preventable.
- Smoking rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reducing – between 2002 and 2013, there was a decline in the number of cigarettes smoked daily.
- The 2012-2013 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey found that 44 per cent of Indigenous people aged 15 years and over reported that they were current smokers. This represents a significant reduction from levels reported in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey in 2008 (47 per cent), and 2002 (51 per cent).
- The 2012-2013 Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey found that the social and emotional wellbeing of many Indigenous people was compromised: 30 per cent of respondents aged 18 years or over reported high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- In 2012-13, after age-adjustment, Indigenous people were 2.7 times as likely as non-Indigenous people to feel high or very high levels of psychological distress.
- In 2012, the death rate for suicide for Indigenous people was two times the rate reported for non-Indigenous people.

The AMA will release its 2015 Report Card on Indigenous Health later in the year.

The *AMA Position Statement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2015* is at <https://ama.com.au/position-statement/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-revised-2015>

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CONTACT:      John Flannery                      02 6270 5477 / 0419 494 761

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