

## Performance Improving Indigenous health



“  
...involve Indigenous peoples  
in designing services that best  
suit their needs  
”

Queensland Health has adopted a comprehensive, system-wide approach to addressing the differences in health status between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

Under this approach, Queensland Health is striving to:

- actively promote the health needs of Indigenous peoples across government and in the general community
- inform Indigenous people of their rights to accessible and equitable health services
- ensure Indigenous people participate in the planning and delivery of health services
- increase the number of Indigenous people employed in the department
- ensure departmental staff participate in cultural awareness and reconciliation processes.

reconciliation

Improving the health of the State's Indigenous people remains one of Queensland Health's greatest challenges. Indigenous people have more health problems and die younger than other Queenslanders.

The greatest difference in the age-specific death rates between the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous populations is in the 40-59 year age group. Among this age group the mortality rate is five to seven times higher for the Indigenous population than for the non-Indigenous population. Much of this is attributed to the premature onset of chronic diseases such as heart disease, diabetes, chronic respiratory disease and to injury.

Queensland Health is one of nine member agencies of the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Alliance. The alliance was established to promote and foster cooperative working arrangements and partnerships at all levels. The alliance consists of:

- The Australian Medical Association, Queensland
- Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Forum
- Queensland Rural Medical Support Agency
- Queensland Divisions of General Practice
- Mt Isa Centre for Rural and Remote Health
- Rural Doctors Association, Queensland
- Royal Australian College of General Practitioners, Queensland
- Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing
- Queensland Health.

- Signed the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Agreement with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Forum (QAIHF), and the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing. The parties are now working together to improve the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to a level at least commensurate to that of the wider Australian community

- Established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health forums and Indigenous health action groups to undertake annual health planning and evaluation, coordinated care, project planning, health worker training and training in primary health care

- Conducted isolated practice training for Queensland Health Indigenous health workers in the Torres Strait Islands, Cairns and Cape York districts. This enabled Indigenous health workers to initiate and, in some instances supply medications, thus reducing a patient's waiting time for treatment

- Developed a strategic community alliance with Education Queensland and the Queensland Police Service to improve collaboration when working with specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The alliance focuses on leadership and professional development, orientation programs for health workers, Education Department staff, police officers and other staff in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

#### Key achievements

- Developed a Memorandum of Understanding between agencies in the health alliance with a common goal of improving primary health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It recognises that for health improvements to occur, there needs to be ownership of the process by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The alliance members are working together to provide support, advocacy and resources to initiatives aimed at reducing financial, structural and personal barriers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as contributing to attitudinal change to improve health outcomes

## Partnerships

### A partnership approach

The range of factors affecting the health of Indigenous peoples in Queensland is often outside the scope and function of any single agency. Queensland Health works in partnership with Indigenous communities and with other federal, State and local government agencies to improve health outcomes for Indigenous peoples.



## Equitable Towards more equitable health services

Queensland Health recognises that Indigenous peoples have a right to equitable access to the full range of health services regardless of geographical and socio-economic status. In partnership with Indigenous communities, Queensland Health plans to deliver health services appropriate to the needs of the communities. The department's main focus is on eliminating health inequalities

### Key achievements

- Allocated \$1 million through the Statewide Hearing Health Program to zones to implement detection, early intervention and management, and education programs relating to ear disease in Indigenous children. Eight Indigenous health workers, two audiologists, three speech pathologists and an ear, nose and throat registrar delivered programs
- Appointed a speech pathologist in Toowoomba to focus on the early detection of speech problems in Indigenous children. This clinician works closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander hearing health workers and audiologists

- Implemented the Enhanced Model of Primary Health Care Plan in Cairns, Cape York and Mt Isa districts. The model addresses issues of workforce development, early detection programs for chronic diseases using annual screening of people 15 years and older, and a growth and assessment action plan for children to ensure they have a good start in life. The 'well person's health check' also identified risk factors for disease and assisted with lifestyle strategies to reduce the risk of diseases such as diabetes
- Audited the effectiveness of the Indigenous cervical cancer prevention program in the Torres Strait. The audit revealed the program helped prevent between 10–25 women from developing cervical cancer since 1988. The rate of this cancer in the Torres and Northern Peninsula area is now lower than in other Indigenous communities
- Undertook a research project with Queensland University of Technology to develop a model of best practice for increasing cervical screening participation rates of Indigenous women in remote communities



- Developed culturally appropriate strategies through a pilot Indigenous Tobacco Control Project to address smoking among Indigenous people. The strategies completed included an events support strategy and brief intervention program for Indigenous Health Workers and primary health care teams
- Introduced an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health outreach service with male Indigenous and sexual health workers conducting fortnightly clinics in Gayndah, Eidsvold and Mundubbera
- Provided a specialist diabetes physician for outreach services to Cape York communities to treat patients identified with diabetes as a result of the adult health check
- Commenced a project to contain diabetes and end stage renal failure in Cherbourg using strategies to improve the self-management of diabetes
- Developed manuals, training materials and systems to support the Growth Assessment and Action in Early Childhood Program for Indigenous children. This program uses systematic methods to assess child growth and respond to growth problems by involving families, communities and service providers
- Introduced positive parenting programs appropriate for Indigenous families in Logan,

### Outcomes from Indigenous Tobacco Control Project

Individuals surveyed after supported events could recall and accepted the anti-tobacco message promoted. Events were held in over 40 communities, most of them rural and remote.

The brief intervention program for health workers in three trial sites resulted in staff attempting to quit smoking and increased the awareness of quit smoking approaches. There is evidence that direct changes occurred in clinical practice resulting from the interventions at all three sites.

Inala and Ipswich

- Twenty-seven Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers are now located in hospitals to assist in explaining consumer rights to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Implemented coordinated drug and alcohol strategies in partnership with Indigenous communities to reduce alcohol use and related crime and violence. These included:
  - employment of Indigenous Community Development Officers in Aurukun and Weipa
  - work with the Apunipima Cape York Health Council community to develop an alcohol plan, deliver training to health workers and deliver services
  - support for a 'Grog Working Party' and a Foetal Alcohol Syndrome Research project in the Cairns District
- Commenced work in response to the Cape York Justice Strategy with the development of a new rehabilitation hub in the Northern Peninsula area

## Employees

### Increasing Indigenous employees

Queensland Health is committed to increasing the number of Indigenous people in its workforce. Indigenous health workers bring knowledge, experience and an understanding of the health needs of their people to the health system.

Queensland Health has implemented a number of strategies to achieve an employment target of two per cent for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

#### Key achievements

- Sponsored four cadets in social work (one), podiatry (two) and psychology (one) through the National Indigenous Cadetship Project
- Piloted the Tidda Bala mentoring program in six districts. The program focuses on the use of mentors to enhance career progression and the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff within Queensland Health

Table 3  
Indigenous employees by stream  
November 2001

Employment stream	% Indigenous staff
Administration	2.70%
Professional	0.86%
Technical	4.08%
Operational	4.38%
Medical and dental	0.30%
Nursing	1.05%
Other	1.10%

- Assisted 46 Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander trainees under the State Government's *Breaking the Unemployment Cycle*. The trainees were placed in a range of programs including primary health care, office administration, health care support, warehousing, information technology and commercial catering

## Reconciliation

### Cultural awareness and reconciliation

Queensland Health has made cultural awareness training a high priority for its employees. An understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the implications for planning and health service delivery are central to improving Indigenous health.

The department's Cultural Awareness Program is complemented by the Reconciliation Learning Circle Program which aims to increase understanding and commitment to the reconciliation process.

#### Key achievements

- More than 3500 employees received cultural awareness training in 2001-02 bringing the total number of staff trained to 7350
- Over 500 participants graduated from 48 Reconciliation Learning Circles groups
- Two hundred and twenty-four employees completed facilitator training so they can deliver Reconciliation Learning Circles training modules
- The Reconciliation Learning Circles Program received a bronze award in the 2001 Staff Excellence Awards

