

MEDIA RELEASE

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Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service commits to Close the Gap

Public healthcare facilities across the Darling Downs and South Burnett today formalised their commitment to closing the gap and working towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation.

Acting Chief Executive of the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service (DDHHS) Dr Peter Gillies was joined by all members of the executive team to sign a pledge to continue working to improve the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the health service's 20 public hospitals and six nursing homes.

The pledge was witnessed by senior staff from four local Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs), Carbal, Goolburri and Goondir medical centres and Cherbourg Regional Aboriginal and Islander Community Controlled Health Service (CRAICCHS), to show the ongoing partnerships between the healthcare providers in the region.

"We have hosted a special Closing the Gap event at Mt Lofty Heights nursing home today to show our ongoing support to making a real difference in improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples," Dr Gillies said.

"While we have been working in a number of key areas such as reducing the impact of chronic disease, maternal and child health, public health and mental health, we acknowledge there is more work to be done.

"Across our region there are more than 11,000 residents who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

"State figures show alarming rates of health gaps - the difference between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander burden of disease estimates and those for the general population.

"I am pleased we will be collaborating more closely with the Aboriginal Medical Services to close the gap to improve the health and quality of life of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"We have made significant progress in training our staff in how to provide care in culturally appropriate and sensitive ways, with seven in 10 employees having completed our cultural practice program."

Dr Gillies said national agreements in 2008 had committed to achieving six targets for closing the gap in health, education and employment outcomes. The two health-specific targets are:

- to close the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy within a generation (by 2033) and
- to halve the gap in mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under

five within a decade (2018).

Queensland Health Closing the Gap figures reveal the six leading drivers of the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders, which together explain 70% of the health gap are:

- Cardiovascular disease – an estimated 21% of the health gap
- Diabetes – an estimated 15% of the health gap
- Mental health – an estimated 11% of the health gap
- Chronic respiratory disease – an estimated 10% of the health gap
- Intentional injuries – an estimated 7% of the health gap
- Cancers – an estimated 6% of the health gap.

The pledge signing was hailed as an important initiative by local leaders in Aboriginal health.

“Carbal welcomes the pledge from DDHHS as it provides a further opportunity to raise wider community awareness of the importance of community health equality and reaffirms a commitment from all health providers to prioritise our ongoing work towards closing the health and life expectancy gap by 2030,” Carbal CEO Brian Hewitt said.

Goondir CEO Floyd Leedie also supported the pledge.

“On top of Government policy, having as many key individuals or organisations committing to the challenges faced to close the gap is definitely a step in the right direction.

“The DDHHS commitment to close the gap by providing this pledge not only demonstrates good will and good intent, but also instils belief and trust in mob that people do actually care,” Mr Leedie said.

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