

Second National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Researcher Gathering

Alice Springs, NT: 23-25 February, 2009

Final Report

1. INTRODUCTION

On the 23rd February 2009, sixty men gathered in Alice Springs for the Second National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Researcher Gathering. More than 90 percent of the group were Indigenous. Over two days different groups of men from around Australia: health providers, men's groups/sheds coordinators and researchers gathered to discuss the underlying concerns about the current critical status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health.

The Centre for Remote Health hosted the Gathering and the delegates represented a range of jurisdictions including Australian research institutions, peak Indigenous bodies, NGO's, social service providers, government departments and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. The aim was to develop a more coordinated and sustainable network for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males while also increasing their capacity development and identifying research priorities.

This gathering was made possible through financial support from FaHCSIA, OATSIH and Andrology Australia, with some additional support from the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH). There were also significant in-kind contributions from participants and their employing organisations and institutions.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE SECOND MEETING:

From the first gathering in February 2008 there was a strong sense that a coordinated research and capacity development approach, defined and led by Indigenous men themselves, offered opportunities to enhance the well-being of Indigenous communities across the country. At the first gathering participants identified the development of a research network for Indigenous males engaged in service delivery and research as a key target. The network's primary role was seen as supporting Indigenous men and their research activities, with the principle task of contributing to the evidence base via structured and sustainable research activities. The network was also seen as a structured way of engaging with policy, providing credible and professional advice on which decisions could be made that have a better chance of delivering

positive outcomes. In addition, it was seen as an important way of communicating current activities, lessons learned and informing future action.

The focus for the second Gathering was to progress the following aims:

1. To increase the accountability and responsiveness of mainstream services and research programs to the needs of Indigenous men and communities.
2. To increase the available funding to support community-based action to reduce the ill-health and problems of social and emotional well-being of Indigenous males.
3. To develop supportive pathways to research for Indigenous males.
4. To increase the number and extend the longevity of junior and senior Indigenous researchers within mainstream institutions.

An extra day was included in the program for this 2009 gathering, at the request of delegates who attended the 2008 gathering. The 2009 program included a number of key speakers and also shorter presentations from delegates. All speakers were Indigenous, presenting on a range of topics related to their research interests and the provision of health services.

3. MAJOR FINDINGS FROM THE SECOND GATHERING:

A key element within the gathering was the bringing together of diverse groups of Indigenous men: health providers, men's groups/sheds coordinators and postgraduate researchers. What united the discussions and deliberations was an underlying concern about the current critical status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health and wellbeing. As some men seek to improve the health of other Indigenous men through providing health and other services, others seek to improve the knowledge base for this and related work as well as focusing on a range of other issues affecting their families and communities. As health providers seek the advice and skill of researchers in order to better evaluate and sustain their programs and services, so researchers need those who provide services with the Indigenous community to remind them of the critical needs that continue to affect Indigenous men, their families and communities. The group identified the particular need for health providers and researchers to work together and in far more collaborative ways than in the past. Although robust evaluation of programs needs to occur in order to build the evidence base on best practice, it is critical to ensure research agendas are driven at a grass roots level where Indigenous people are experts in identifying priority areas that affect their men, their families and their communities. Similarly, the care and mentoring of those who provide health services, as well as those who undertake various interests of research, cannot be separated from the urgency to increase the

capacity, health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, their families and communities.

4. GOVERNANCE AND GUIDANCE:

The first gathering proposed an interim two-tiered governance arrangement to progress the aims of the network. This structure included the creation of an Interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men's Research Council, supported by a representative Steering Committee. It was decided at the 2009 gathering to discontinue with the two-tiered governance arrangement and to convene a single representative body: The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Researcher Committee. The Committee will be responsible for:

- ensuring the progress and development of the network,
- articulating directly with health and social policy development processes,
- providing government and community-level advocacy and awareness for male health initiatives,
- providing direct advice and mentorship to junior researchers,
- offering leadership and credibility to community priorities in research and helping to articulate an Indigenous driven priority research agenda in men's health.

In addition, the Committee will provide guidance and accountability for the cultural integrity of the network's activities.

From the 2009 Gathering four new members have joined the Steering Committee. The Steering Committee's principle role remains the same: coordinating the internal communications of the network, exploring long-term funding and support for this network, and planning and implementing regular network gatherings.

5. MOVING FORWARD

This, the Second National Meeting, brought together twice the number of men who first gathered in Alice Springs in 2008. It continued to identify important networks and initiatives involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. It also recognised a growing group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male leaders across the nation who are striving to improve the health care being offered to Indigenous men as well as a knowledge base of this health care and many other issues related to the wellbeing of their families and communities.

Steering Committee:

Alex Brown, Jack Bulman, Michael Wright, Scott Winch, Peter Pinnington, Jason Sandy, Craig Williams and Alf Bamblett (snr), Kevin Rowley & Brian McCoy
28th June, 2009