



Chair's Update August 2010

From the NACCHO Chair Mr Justin Mohamed

This is a brief update for members about recent important events:

- The Federal Election
- Our sector's meeting about 'Medicare Locals' and health reform, and
- The 'Close The Gap - Making it Happen' workshop

The Federal Election August 21

Since Prime Minister Julia Gillard called the Federal Election for August 21 Aboriginal health has not rated a mention by the major parties. We do not know if Aboriginal health policy is bipartisan or bypassed.

You can search the major parties platforms on their websites [Australian Labor Party](#), [The Liberals](#), [The Nationals](#) and [The Greens](#).

So far, Labor is standing on its Aboriginal health record in government since 2007. Opposition leader Tony Abbott has announced a larger mental health package than the government's but it relies on cuts to programs like E-Health.

What NACCHO wants:

- We want to work with a new government in a **genuine partnership** where we are at the table making the decisions about the health of our people. **Aboriginal people taking control of their destiny** is the most important element in closing the gap.
- We want any new government to **recommit to the principle of Aboriginal community control in our health services** and that initiatives in Aboriginal Primary Health Care should be specifically targeted through Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services as the most effective way to close the gap.
- We want **more Aboriginal community controlled health services** to be able to extend culturally appropriate services to communities without them.

'Medicare Locals' and health reform

Before the election, the NACCHO Board invited Members and Affiliates to join them at a meeting in Brisbane in June to discuss our Sector's position on the Federal Government's primary health care reforms.

In May, the Government announced 'Medicare Locals' would be its preferred local primary health care organisations without defining their relationship to our Sector. Meanwhile the Government dropped the Aboriginal Health Authority recommended by its National Health and Hospital Reform Commission.

The one-day workshop showed just how well we, our Sector's Members and Affiliates can work together. The main points of NACCHO's position developed at the workshop are below:



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Our Sector aims to have 'Indigenous Australian Primary Health Care Organisations' in urban, regional and remote regions coordinating primary health care services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and covering issues such as regional planning and development, quality improvement, regulation compliance, performance management and identification of areas of "market failure" and addressing service access gaps.

Like the Australian General Practice Network, NACCHO should be resourced to develop and implement a transition strategy to the new structures. This would involve identifying key issues between the Sector, the government and mainstream Medicare Locals, and the boundaries of the new Primary Health Care Organisations.

NACCHO representation on the committee overseeing the implementation of the mainstream Medicare Locals is essential to ensure our Sector's interests are respected.

All levels of our Sector will work to strengthen networks and relationships so we are actively engaged in the health reform process.

At the time of writing, it was unclear what reforms to primary health care the Liberal and National Coalition would commit to if it wins government on August 21.



The 'Close The Gap - Making it Happen' workshop

Members of the Board and our Sector attended the 'Close the Gap - Making it Happen' workshop in June at Old Parliament House, Canberra along with members of the Close the Gap coalition and health experts from across Australia's non-government and government sectors.

The Steering Committee chair, Mick Gooda said. "Delegates agreed that the Statement of Intent expressed the essential philosophy of the campaign. This included that 'Indigenous' Community Controlled Health Services and their peak bodies had to be central to the design and delivery of services for our people."

"Only a Prime Minister can bring the whole of government focus to Closing the Gap that is necessary to make progress in all areas, including Indigenous health," Mr Gooda said.

The workshop finished the day after Julia Gillard became Prime Minister and Mr Gooda noted "The Close the Gap Campaign looks forward to working with the new Prime Minister to meet the government's commitments to the Indigenous Health Equality Statement of Intent signed by the Government and Opposition in 2008."

NACCHO Chair Justin Mohamed said, "The endorsement of the importance of Aboriginal Community Control of our health services and health planning was a welcome outcome which we hope to see also endorsed by whoever is in government after the election."

"We also hope that Tony Abbott, as either Prime Minister or Opposition Leader, will change his mind and sign the Indigenous Health Equality Statement of Intent" Mr Mohamed said. (<http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2008/s2194919.htm>)

