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Cautious steps to improve Indigenous health

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) welcomed Thursday's release of the Federal Government's emergency response plan to improve the welfare of Aboriginal children but have urged the government to take cautionary steps to avoid a repeat of the Stolen Generation.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said he welcomed the plan and is keen to work with government to address these tragic issues but extreme care must be taken when implementing strategies.

"The Federal Government has good intentions to improve Aboriginal health but what must be carefully considered are the steps taken to make these positive changes. History has shown us that good intentions don't always achieve the best outcomes as proven by the Stolen Generation.

"I am supportive of the government's ideas and AGPN and the Divisions Network on the ground in the NT are willing to do all they can to not only curb child abuse but more broadly improve poor Indigenous health," Dr Hobbs said.

Some of the challenges the government's plan faces include the shortage of medical staff in the Territory, a lack of medical professionals across Australia that haven't been trained in cultural awareness, the issues surrounding ongoing care for patients and more generally public health issues.

AGPN CEO Kate Carnell said AGPN and the Divisions Network across Australia would work with the Government to do as much as they could to help solve problems in Aboriginal communities without seeing history repeated.

"The Network will work closely with the Federal Government to culturally train and recruit GPs, nurses and allied health professionals, particularly for short-term placements.

"For the long-term, strategies must be implemented to retain and attract a strong workforce to these communities to handle the ongoing care that will be required.

"Child health checks can be expected to identify a range of health and abuse-related problems that will require a comprehensive multidisciplinary response. It is critical that services are supported to work with at risk Aboriginal people with appropriately trained staff, follow up services such as rape and drug and alcohol counselling to provide and deliver quality care.

"More broadly public health issues such as fresh water, rubbish disposal and animal health in Aboriginal communities must also be addressed to break the poor health cycle.

"Despite these challenges we are confident solutions can be found in consultation with Aboriginal communities, health service providers and government's to reduce child abuse and improve Indigenous health," Ms Carnell said.

For more information please phone AGPN CEO Kate Carnell on 0415 662 266