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Child Health Checks- what's actually involved

The Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) and the General Practice and Primary Health Care Northern Territory (GPPHCNT) today urged for calm over the health checks for Indigenous children.

AGPN Chair Dr Tony Hobbs said these types of health checks are already being conducted on a regularly basis as part of an annual health assessment offered to Aboriginal children. There will be no compulsory forensic sexual health check as part of this initial examination.

"It disturbs me greatly that a great deal of scaremongering is being conducted. GPs and other health professionals will not force parents or children to undergo invasive examinations as part of the initial check.

"Health professionals have a range of tools they use to determine if a child has been physically, emotionally or sexually abused.

"I stress that in Indigenous communities this to will be the case. These special circumstances also highlight the need for professionals to undergo cultural awareness training before entering communities and examining patients," Dr Hobbs said.

Aboriginal communities operate in a very different way to the rest of Australia. Traditional medical training may not prepare health professionals adequately well enough to improve health outcomes in Aboriginal communities. To effectively treat and engage with Aboriginal communities, health professionals need to be aware of:

- culturally appropriate communication and use of language
- kinship and relationships to the land
- the complexity of relationships within Aboriginal communities (including tribal and marriage customs)
- the role and influence of community leaders
- different cultural meanings prescribed to symbols and items, and particularly taboo subjects (for example, suicide is taboo in Aboriginal communities and a significant barrier to help-seeking)
- how to empower Aboriginal communities to draw on their own resources, increase community capacity and maintain their cultural identity.

For detailed information on the health checks that will be used see the attached document.

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