



NEWS RELEASE

Australian Divisions of General Practice Ltd.



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Call for early intervention in Aboriginal child and adolescent mental health

The Australian Divisions of General Practice (ADGP) and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) today welcomed the results of a landmark report on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal children.

ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters said the Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey was a crucial step in drawing attention to an often ignored but critically important area of Aboriginal health and well-being.

"Twenty-four per cent of Aboriginal children are at high risk of developing emotional and behavioural difficulties. This is a stark figure when we compare it to the equivalent figure of 15 per cent in the general population" Dr Walters said.

NACCHO Acting chair Dr Naomi Mayers said, "The investment by government, non-government and corporate sectors in the survey is a measure of the priority the community gives to promoting the health and well being of Aboriginal children."

"The results highlight the high incidence of emotional distress in Aboriginal children and the profound risk this poses to the development of chronic disease and more severe mental health problems in adulthood. It is vital that we take steps to prevent and intervene much earlier in the development of mental health risks in Aboriginal children."

Dr Walters also said early intervention was crucial. "By the time Aboriginal people reached adulthood it is often too late. Childhood and early adolescence is when risk behaviours such as substance misuse become entrenched, and also when the potential to intervene early is greatest.

"Identifying problems early is the best way to work towards better health outcomes. One of the ways to do this is to introduce a well-person's health check for Aboriginal children to encourage a preventative approach to health care. This would complement the recent introduction of a broadly supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health check for adults, which has a similar focus."

"In addition, we need early childhood development programs to promote resilience in Aboriginal children and culturally appropriate, locally tailored primary mental health services delivered by GPs, allied health workers and Aboriginal community-controlled health services in line with the current Senate Inquiry into Mental Health."

ADGP and NACCHO have a partnership arrangement in place, cemented by a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which recognises the key roles of Divisions of General Practice and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in improving the health of Aboriginal communities and commits both to work together to achieve this.

The Annual Divisions of General Practice Forum will consider the survey findings and develop a primary health care response.

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For more information contact: Mark Elliott, ADGP Senior Policy Adviser, on 02 6228 0843.
For additional comment / interviews contact ADGP Chair Dr Rob Walters on 0418 127 123.

ADGP is the national peak body representing 120 Divisions of General Practice and state-based bodies. Over 94 per cent of GPs are members of Division.

NACCHO is the national peak body in Aboriginal health, representing over 120 Aboriginal community controlled health services throughout Australia.