



*This year marks a decade since the Close the Gap Campaign began. The campaign is working towards a major goal – to close the gap in health and life expectancy outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.*

*As the tenth annual Close the Gap Day approaches on 17 March, now is a great time to pledge your support and host an event to raise awareness about how we can achieve health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

### **Some quick statistics...**

- Last year over **150,000** people participated in **1,596** events to celebrate [National Close the Gap Day](#). This year, the campaign is aiming for **250,000** people to get involved and [sign the pledge](#).
- The life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is approximately **10 years lower** than for the rest of the Australian population<sup>1</sup>.
- The [National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#) (NACCHO) and their [state-based affiliates](#) support over **150** Aboriginal Community Controlled health services across Australia<sup>2</sup>.
- **One in three** deaths among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 35 is due to suicide – twice the rate of other Australians.<sup>3</sup>

### **Did you know...?**

- The [Close the Gap](#) Campaign, launched in 2006, is an independent coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream peak health and advocacy organisations, advocating for health equality by 2030. The Government's '[Closing the Gap](#)' strategy, launched in 2008, refers to a series of government policies and programs, including specific health targets, which are aimed at reducing disadvantage amongst

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/indigenous-observatory/reports/health-and-welfare-2015/life-expectancy-and-mortality/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.naccho.org.au/about-us/naccho-members/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/WorkArea/DownloadAsset.aspx?id=60129551290>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across six key areas, including health, education, employment and early childhood.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to suffer from cardiovascular disease, diabetes and kidney disease, and are more likely to die from these conditions compared to non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>4</sup>
- In 2000, the Pintupi Luritja people from the Western Desert communities of Kiwirrkurra raised over \$1 million to set up a dialysis service in Kintore. [Western Desert Dialysis](https://www.westerndesertdialysis.com/our-story) now provides haemodialysis in 9 locations and via a mobile unit, the Purple Truck. This has allowed people to stay on Country to look after and be looked after by their families<sup>5</sup>.
- [Trachoma](#), a major cause of preventable blindness, continues to affect many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in parts of NT, SA and WA. Australia is the only developed nation in which trachoma is still epidemic.<sup>6</sup>

### The role of community-based health services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have significantly worse health outcomes compared to the rest of the Australian population. Many of the most successful programs working to improve health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are led by the communities themselves. This ensures that services are culturally safe and cultural ties remain strong. Importantly, community-based health approaches also allow for a holistic approach; not only supporting the physical needs of patients, but also helping overcome any social barriers to achieving good health. Despite their front-line work to achieve health equality, many local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services are under-resourced and don't get the recognition they deserve.

The [Institute for Urban Indigenous Health](#) (IUIH) provides support for a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community based health services in South East Queensland, helping improve the health of approximately 65,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in the region. In addition to providing primary health care, IUIH also run a number of preventative health and chronic disease management programs. IUIH is just one of 25 Community Controlled Health Services in Queensland, which are collectively represented by the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC)<sup>7</sup>.



Find out more about IUIH by watching this [short clip](#).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4727.0.55.003>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.westerndesertdialysis.com/our-story>

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/review\\_nationaltrachomadata~trachoma\\_surveillance~Trachoma\\_Indigenoupop](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/review_nationaltrachomadata~trachoma_surveillance~Trachoma_Indigenoupop)

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.qaihc.com.au/about/membership/>

## Meet... The Yiriman Project



Good health isn't just about the absence of physical disease. It is also about maintaining good social and emotional wellbeing. Dispossession, intergeneration trauma and poor mental health can lead to substance and alcohol abuse, self-harm, suicide, family violence and poor health outcomes. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are significantly more likely to experience psychological distress than other Australians.<sup>8</sup> The [Yiriman Project](#) in Western Australia is helping to address this, with Elders

accompanying children and young adults on trips back to Country. Young people are immersed in the stories and knowledge of their culture, developing a renewed sense of belonging and cultural identity.<sup>9</sup> Young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who participate in cultural activities are more likely to feel happy, with stronger cultural identity and relationships with land, family, kin and community.<sup>10</sup>

### Take action...

- [Sign the pledge](#) and join over 220,000 other Australians calling on all Australian Governments to take action to close the gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Host an event for Close the Gap Day (17 March 2016) and [register](#) it on the National Close the Gap Day [website](#).
- [Read](#) more of the great work being done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations.
- Research Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations near you and how you can support them, or have a look at the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in your area: [Australian Capital Territory](#), [Queensland](#), [Northern Territory](#), [Western Australia](#), [Victoria](#), [Tasmania](#), [New South Wales](#), [South Australia](#).

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#### Photo credits

Banner photo: National Close the Gap Day 2016. Image courtesy of Oxfam

Photo 1: Participants of the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH) 'Work it Out' program. Image by Wayne Quilliam

Photo 2: Building stories in young people – a trip back to country. Image courtesy of Yiriman Project

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.pc.gov.au/research/ongoing/overcoming-indigenous-disadvantage/key-indicators-2014/key-indicators-2014-report.pdf>

<sup>9</sup> "We know they healthy cos they on country with old people": demonstrating the value of the Yiriman Project. Retrieved from [http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=a91d3581-42ce-4e10-881c-ef04b236e119&subId=205836&ei=QL6UVYSbCITm8gWu16qwBg&usg=AFQjCNFPZ3EJXOnxqvTmGyPbZWq\\_ixmeYA&bvm=bv.96952980,d.dGc](http://www.aph.gov.au/DocumentStore.ashx?id=a91d3581-42ce-4e10-881c-ef04b236e119&subId=205836&ei=QL6UVYSbCITm8gWu16qwBg&usg=AFQjCNFPZ3EJXOnxqvTmGyPbZWq_ixmeYA&bvm=bv.96952980,d.dGc)

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.aihw.gov.au/uploadedFiles/ClosingTheGap/Content/Publications/2013/ctgc-rs19.pdf>