



Media Release

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COMPREHENSIVE, 10-YEAR PLAN NEEDED TO IMPROVE ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES NUTRITION

A comprehensive, 10-year national nutrition strategy is needed to help 'close the gap' in nutritional status experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the National Heart Foundation of Australia and Public Health Association said today at a national symposium focusing on food and nutrition as the way forward for Indigenous health.

The current 'National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Strategy and Action Plan¹ (NATSINSAP 2000-2010)' was signed off by Australia's health ministers in 2001 and will end this year, with funding of its sole national project officer ending in June.

"NATSINSAP was a clear and comprehensive strategy, but was underfunded and only partially implemented," Heart Foundation National CEO, Dr Lyn Roberts, said today.

"While we acknowledge the stated commitment of all governments to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities there is – as yet – no clear replacement for NATSINSAP. The need for a comprehensive replacement strategy is a no-brainer.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples are 1.2 times as likely to be overweight or obese and suffer three times as many coronary events such as heart attack, than non-Indigenous Australians," said Dr Roberts.

"Poor nutrition is a key risk factor for many chronic conditions, such as heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

"Nutrition programs and the nutrition workforce working in Aboriginal communities remain poorly funded.

¹ For more information on NATSINSAP, see <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-publth-strateg-food-nphp.htm>

“While there have been some much needed developments – for example, additional annual funding for 100 rural locum placements for allied health professionals such as dietitians, and a nutrition strategy for food security in remote Indigenous communities – a new and comprehensive plan is needed urgently.

CEO of the Public Health Association of Australia, Michael Moore, commended all governments in Australia for committing to improve food security in remote Indigenous communities and encouraged an enhanced commitment from all jurisdictions with regard to food and nutrition for Aboriginal people, “equitable health outcomes are only going to be achieved for Indigenous people when appropriate strategies for food and nutrition are funded and implemented.”

The Heart Foundation and Public Health Association are committed to reducing the health inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and call for a significant proportion of prevention dollars dedicated to:

1. A new national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nutrition Policy and Strategy, led by the Federal Government, in partnership with state governments and Community Controlled Organisations.
2. Increased funding for evidence based nutrition programs and initiatives implemented in Close the Gap, including those for pregnant women and children 0 – 2 years.
3. Adequate funding for implementation of the COAG National Strategy for Food Security in Remote Indigenous Communities.
4. Increased funding for 100 permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition positions per 100,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in urban, rural and remote settings.
5. Fund and implement sustainable strategies to ensure food security for remote, regional and urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
6. Commitment and funding to regular and ongoing research, monitoring and reporting of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander food and nutrition issues.

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