Backing greater control for and by Indigenous people

The Public Health Association of Australia has welcomed today’s announcement by the federal ALP of new money to improve the health outcomes of First Australians.

“This is significant because it invests in community control,” said Summer May Finlay, Vice President Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health with PHAA.

Labor has unveiled a $115 million plan (presumably to be spent over four years) with key elements for suicide prevention, improved sexual health, reduced rheumatic heart disease and vision loss, and more healthy eating by extending the successful Queensland Deadly Choices Campaign nationally.

There is a commitment to increase leadership and governance roles for Aboriginal people through re-establishment of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equality Council, and in mainstream health organisations such as Primary Health Networks.

“This supports self-determination by empowering Indigenous health leaders to take the actions needed in their communities to improve the health and lifespans of people in their own and unique communities,” Ms Finlay said.

It builds on the recent agreement by the Coalition Government and the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) to enter into a formal joint-partnership with Indigenous people on Closing the Gap discussions to address gross health inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

“It would be good to think both sides of politics understood and actioned stronger collaboration, whoever wins the May 18 poll.”

“Implementation is always harder than making pledges,” Ms Finlay added.

Labor’s package includes $33 million for rheumatic heart disease prevention. The Coalition Government announced a similar amount in February exclusively for the development of a vaccine to combat the devastating disease.

“While there’s a difference emphasis, both approaches are needed.” said Terry Slevin, PHAA CEO.

“Research into vaccines is a long-term solution. Preventive health programs are more likely to deliver more immediate benefits.”

The Coalition’s $15 million for Aboriginal Youth Suicide announced in the budget should also be acknowledged, while the ALP has committed $29.6 million in this vital field.

ENDS

For further information/comment:
Terry Slevin, CEO of the Public Health Association Australia 0419 901 599 tslevin@phaa.net.au
Toni Hassan (Media Support): 0426 207 726