



VACCHO Media Release

Change the focus to Close the Gap

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Whoever Australia decides to back on 18 May, they need to remember that when it comes to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities “it’s not just a northern or remote problem”.

The fact is that the majority of Aboriginal peoples live in urban and regional Australia, not remote areas, Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO) Acting CEO Trevor Pearce says.

“Governments need to take this fact into account”, he said. “The only images that the vast majority of Australians are permitted to see of Indigenous Australia is often remote. When in fact, the majority of us live in cities and regional country towns.

“Just like the rest of Australia, we hug the eastern seaboard.”

Based on the 2016 ABS 74 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in Queensland, NSW, ACT, Victoria and Tasmania.

“The focus on remote areas means there is reduced funding and opportunities available for the 74 per cent of First Nations peoples who live in urban and regional Australia, Mr Pearce said.

“As part of our Federal Election Platform we are seeking a national review of current funding models that have geographically-based funding limitations. “These models fail to account for the complex range of health and wellbeing issues experienced by Aboriginal peoples living in urban and regional locations.

“What is of most concern is that the chronic conditions affecting Aboriginal people in Melbourne, Mount Druitt and Maningrida are very similar. How can this be? The fact is that many Aboriginal peoples living in urban and regional areas have the same poor health and wellbeing issues as communities living in remote areas, sometimes even worse. There is a misrepresentation that we have infrastructure and services coming out of our ears, when in truth we still experience high rates of chronic health issues. The health gap exists in urban areas, just as much as it does in rural and remote areas. Mr Pearce said.

“Homelessness and rates of children (kids) in out-of-home care is highest in Victoria. Yet the gap around rheumatic heart disease is almost closed here.

“The impact of colonisation manifests in different ways across the country, but it can be seen everywhere. Our rights have to be upheld, and systemic inequality has to be addressed. “This isn’t about reducing funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in remote areas. Funding must meet need, everywhere, full stop.” “We need the Federal Government to stop using Indigenous disadvantage in remote communities to prop up a misguided view that they are addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health problems.”

Under the Indigenous Advancement Strategy (IAS) the vast majority of Victoria is excluded from the Remote Australia Strategies program, due to the State’s geographical make-up. Without the opportunity to tender for all five IAS funding programs, “Aboriginal peoples in Victoria are automatically disadvantaged, Mr Pearce said.

“The reality is we will never Close the Gap if we focus on 26 per cent of Aboriginal peoples.”

Mr Pearce said addressing the workforce shortages and infrastructure issues faced by Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs), an *Infrastructure and Workforce Plan* was needed.

“Significant transformation of a sector requires a carefully planned and considered approach, we need to get this right,” Mr Pearce said.

Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Inc.

VACCHO is the peak body for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people living in Victoria.

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“ACCOs provide comprehensive, culturally-responsive and holistic support, but we depend on sustainable investment into our infrastructure and workforce. Short-term, proscriptive funding cycles inhibit long-term gains needed to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing across Australia.

“We call on all parties to recognise the important role played by ACCOs in Closing the Gap and to ensure that whoever forms the next Federal Government ensures they are funded effectively to achieve good outcomes for all Aboriginal peoples, regardless of where they live.”

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