



Media Release

World Meeting Focuses on Indigenous Health

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A meeting in Adelaide next week has the improvement of the world's indigenous people's health and well-being firmly in its sights.

Invited leaders from indigenous communities in Canada, New Zealand, Latin America, Asia and Australia will join international specialists in indigenous and public health policy in a symposium on indigenous health issues on April 29 and 30.

The symposium will be hosted by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) and convened by Flinders University.

Professor Fran Baum, one of the organisers and Head of the Department of Public Health at Flinders, said the aim of the symposium is to ensure that indigenous health issues will be fully considered by the World Health Organisation's Commission on Social Determinants of Health (CSDH). Professor Baum is one of two CSDH Commissioners attending the meeting.

"This is a meeting with a real focus and a specific purpose," Professor Baum said.

"It will be a very intense two days for the participants. After discussion of the papers, we aim to derive key messages and areas for action, which will be written as a clear set of recommendations into a report for presentation to the International Commission in Vancouver in June."

Head of the CRAH, Mr Mick Gooda, said he welcomed an international focus on the social issues that affect the health of Aboriginal Australians, such as employment, education, housing and exposure to racism.

"The Aboriginal health sector is confronted with the difficulty that no matter how we improve health services provided to our people, we have little control of government agendas on these social determinants," he said.

"As long as our people are unable to access education, jobs and services taken for granted by other Australians our health outcomes will not be improved."

After considering a background paper on the social determinants of health specifically affecting indigenous populations prepared by the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, the 70 participants will hear 15 case studies, covering a broad range of practical issues.

The five Australian case studies will include an analysis of the factors contributing to the death of a Central Australian Aboriginal woman, an examination of alternatives for power and water supply to a remote community and a presentation on the Close the Gap campaign, the plan to equalise health status between indigenous and non-indigenous population in the next 25 years.

The meeting has received financial support from the Commonwealth and State governments through the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and South Australian Department of Health, as well as from the Canadian National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, the New Zealand Government and the World Health Organisation.

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