



Cooperative Research Centre for  
Aboriginal Health

# Media Release

## International Journal Questions Aboriginal Health Record

November 2 2007

Australia's record in improving the health of Aboriginal people has again been criticised this time by the world's leading medical journal in a special report published today.

The report in today's edition of the prestigious British journal *The Lancet*, however, also argues that "the pessimism about Aboriginal health (is) unfounded" and calls for an increase in Aboriginal health workers and a commitment to what is described as "a symbolic infrastructure" including signing the UN Treaty on the rights of Indigenous peoples and a prime ministerial apology.

The *Lancet* special report by journalist Margaret Harris Cheng extensively quotes a range of Australian health experts, all of whom are critical of Australian Government responses to the on-going gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health.

The report refers to a recent report published by the University of Queensland, *The burden of disease and injury in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders*, and quotes the report's forward, "On current rates, one third of young Indigenous men aged 15 will be dead before age 60 compared to 8% in the Australian population."

In a shocking reflection on the life gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians *The Lancet* report says that Aboriginal cancer rates (8% of the Aboriginal disease burden) are far lower than the rate for other Australians (19%) because Aboriginal people die young from other causes.

Despite the continuing huge disparity in life expectancy and disease burdens *The Lancet* report quotes Aboriginal health experts warning against undue pessimism.

Professor Ian Anderson, Professor of Indigenous Health at Melbourne University and CRC for Aboriginal Health Research Director, is quoted in the report arguing against the "myth that nothing ever improves."

"In fact Indigenous life expectancy has improved by between 10 – 12 years," says Professor Anderson. "Indigenous health will, however, benefit from a commitment to health system reform underpinned by values such as quality and equity," he said. "To improve outcomes for Indigenous Australians we

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need a policy commitment to the provision of effective quality health care services on the basis of need.

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"We must also address the other social factors that impact on poor health – such as economic participation, education, housing and employment."

The Lancet quotes from two separate research projects which point to reductions in Indigenous mortality and increases in life expectancy.

CRCAH CEO Mick Gooda said the Lancet special report highlighted the need for investment to massively increase the Aboriginal health workforce and to build on the successes in reducing Aboriginal mortality.

"There is mounting research evidence that Aboriginal empowerment, including increased Aboriginal health expertise and control of health services, actually increases positive health outcomes.

"With an election imminent it is essential that both major parties commit to maintaining the delivery of primary health care and building the capacity of Aboriginal people themselves to deliver effective services," he said. "Now is not the time to change course in Aboriginal health policy but to increase investment in training Aboriginal health practitioners."

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**To read The Lancet special report:**

[http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/section?issue\\_key=S0140-6736\(07\)X6046-X&section=Special+Report](http://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/section?issue_key=S0140-6736(07)X6046-X&section=Special+Report)

**To read Ian Anderson comments on Indigenous health in the federal election:**

[http://uninews.unimelb.edu.au/unarticleid\\_4732.html](http://uninews.unimelb.edu.au/unarticleid_4732.html)

**For more information on the CRCAH:**

[www.crcah.org.au](http://www.crcah.org.au)