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Cancer experts come together to prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research

Leading cancer experts, oncologists and cancer survivors will come together at a national roundtable in Brisbane today to ramp up the fight against cancer among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Cancer is the second leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Compared with other Australians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people diagnosed with cancer are much more likely to die as a result (death rates are up to 45% higher).

The National Roundtable on Priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Research will bring together representatives of the national, State and Territory cancer initiatives, major cancer-treating hospitals, cancer survivors and representatives from the Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector in an effort to maximise the impact of current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer research.

The roundtable will be hosted by the Lowitja Institute, Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research and has been made possible with support from the Queensland Institute of Medical Research. It will be facilitated by National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) Chair Professor Michael Good (AO) and Queensland Institute of Medical Research (QIMR) Associate Professor Gail Garvey.

Lowitja Institute Chief Executive, Dr Kerry Arabena, says the roundtable provides an opportunity to tackle a major health concern for Australia's First Peoples. "Cancer is a debilitating illness that has profoundly impacted on the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and we are so pleased to be hosting Australia's best minds for the development of strategies to address these issues," said Dr Arabena.

Professor Ross Bailie, the leader of Lowitja Institute's research program in Queensland, said that there is a great deal of support for the focus of this meeting. "The response we have had to this initiative from the main players in the Australian cancer research and treatment fields shows there is a critical mass of support for the kind of collaborative research effort we want to build." said Professor Bailie.

Associate Professor Gail Garvey, Head of the Indigenous Health Research Program at QIMR, said "Navigating through the health care system can be fraught with uncertainty and fear for any cancer patient. This problem can be exacerbated for an Indigenous person due to social and cultural differences in perception of health, illness and healthcare. This meeting will identify how we can show where changes are necessary to reduce cancer disparities."

The roundtable follows the release of a major report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer. It was carried out by the Cancer Council of South Australia on commission from Cancer Australia.

The roundtable will commence at 9 am today at the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, West End, Brisbane.

Associate Professor Gail Garvey (QIMR) and Professor Ross Baillie are available for interview by arrangement.

For more information about the Lowitja Institute and the Queensland Institute of Medical Research go to www.lowitja.org.au and www.qimr.edu.au

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