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Lowitja
INSTITUTE
Australia's National Institute
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Health Research

*Incorporating the Cooperative Research Centre
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health*

MEDIA RELEASE

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National Indigenous health research institute opens inaugural Congress

Australia's National Research Institute for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health, the Lowitja Institute opened its inaugural two-day **Congress Lowitja** at the Aboriginal Health College, Little Bay in Sydney today.

The Institute, named in honour of respected champion of Aboriginal rights and former Australian of the Year, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue, is Australia's only Aboriginal-run health research body and is also the host organisation for the recently launched Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (CRCATSIH). Ms O'Donoghue officially opened the Congress.

Congress Lowitja has brought together professionals from the Indigenous and non-Indigenous health sector, policymakers from both State and Federal Governments, health and social researchers, and representatives from community groups and philanthropic bodies.

Chairperson of the Lowitja Institute, Ms Pat Anderson, told delegates to the first Congress that the Lowitja Institute approaches the development of research priorities in a totally different manner to traditional research bodies.

"The **users** of our funded research, such as community controlled health services, play a key role in setting the research priorities. There is **no point** doing health research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people unless it involves Indigenous stakeholders at every step along the way and where their priorities are the ones that matter most," Ms Anderson told the Congress.

Ms Anderson said that the Lowitja Institute was the next natural progression after 13 years of achievement by the CRC for Aboriginal Health and its predecessor the CRC for Aboriginal and Tropical Health. She outlined those achievements and stated that one of the most important outcomes was the expansion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

"We have nurtured relationships between researchers and community organisations and created an atmosphere of trust where previously suspicion reigned. We have also helped train a new generation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers and health workers, who over the coming years will undoubtedly assume positions of leadership and influence in their fields, and in unprecedented numbers," Ms Anderson stated.

The Lowitja Institute's Director of Research is University of Melbourne Professor of Indigenous Health, Dr Ian Anderson. In Dr Anderson's address to the Congress, he advised delegates that research **does** make a difference to health outcomes and improved life expectancy.

"We have also learnt that if we are to continue to make a difference, we need to have robust partnerships – with Indigenous Australian communities, service providers and policymakers – in order to build a research



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agenda that is focused on the gaps in knowledge that are critical to improved outcomes in Indigenous health,” Dr Anderson said.

As well as hearing presentations showcasing the successes and legacy of the former CRC for Aboriginal Health, the delegates will also discuss over the next two days the CRCATSIH's research agenda and provide feedback on research projects within the three new program areas, being:

- Healthy Start, Healthy Life.
- Healthy Communities and Settings.
- Enabling Policy and Systems.

Outcomes from **Congress Lowitja** will help guide the CRCATSIH's research agenda to priority areas identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, community organisations and other stakeholders. Congress Lowitja will be held every two years to ensure the research agenda remains responsive to new priorities as they emerge.

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For more information about the Lowitja Institute and the CRCATSIH, please visit www.lowitja.org.au.

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