

MEDIA RELEASE – 15 October 2020

Review finds Lowitja Institute is ready to grow

Lowitja Institute has delivered a significant positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, through research, knowledge translation and by supporting Indigenous health researchers, according to an independent review.

Deloitte Access Economics has undertaken a retrospective review — *Lowitja Institute: Social Impact Assessment* — to assess the economic and social impact of Lowitja Institute and its earlier iterations as a Cooperative Research Centre (CRC).

Lowitja Institute CEO Dr Janine Mohamed said the results of the review show the critical importance of changing the narrative in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, which the Lowitja Institute has done since its first days.

“Although we currently have access only to a very small slice of available funding for research impacting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we have laid a strong foundation for the future and are ready and willing to grow,” she said.

“We receive so many outstanding applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities that we have to turn away because of lack of funding,” she said. “We will be looking to grow that work and to attract funding that is commensurate with demand.”

Dr Mohamed said the report highlights how important it is to shape Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policy decision-making by contributing a strong, evidence-based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice to the public discourse on health issues.

“100 per cent of the projects we funded over the last five years featured Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers and staff and 68 per cent were led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers,” she said.

“That compares with less than 10 per cent of NHMRC projects that investigated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues being led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers between 2010 and 2016.”

“It’s essential we take every opportunity to preserve and grow our Indigenous knowledges and to build our workforce — both so important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.”

The review found that over the past decade Lowitja Institute and its earlier CRC iterations:

- provided \$26.5 million in support to 148 health research projects
- produced 70 peer-reviewed articles and more than 130 research outputs
- awarded 28 Masters and Doctoral scholarships and co-funded a further 11 scholarships.

Importantly, the study found that many of Lowitja Institute's contributions, such as empowering the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice in academia, cannot be quantified with the available data.

It found that Lowitja Institute projects have "generated new ways of thinking and addressed knowledge gaps through genuine inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' perspectives, inquiry and agency".

The report also found the impact of projects extended beyond healthcare and influenced approaches to service provision in education, housing, and justice.

Dr Mohamed said the Deloitte review also highlighted important gaps and opportunities for Lowitja Institute in the years and decades ahead.

"It found that Lowitja Institute's work is estimated to represent just 0.1 per cent of the total spending on health research in Australia, and only 5.4 per cent of the total spending on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific health research," she said.

"Despite this, it's exciting that the contribution of our more recent research projects is expected to grow over time, generating a significant volume of new knowledge that is inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives."

"We are pleased to see that we've contributed to building the capacity and authority of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce and Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing," Dr Mohamed said.

To arrange an interview with Dr Janine Mohamed, please phone Marie McInerney on 0418 273 698.