INDIGENOUS HEALTH CARE  
IN THE SPOTLIGHT AT CONGRESS LOWITJA 2014

Innovative ways to improve health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples dominated discussions at the biennial Congress Lowitja 2014 – Many Mobs, One Vision: Creating a Healthy Future.

Leading lights from Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities gathered in Melbourne to attend the congress, which celebrates diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities sharing a common goal for a healthy future.

Part of a week-long program run by the Lowitja Institute in Melbourne, Congress Lowitja 2014 attracted around 250 participants, including the institute’s patron, former Australian of the Year Dr Lowitja O’Donoghue AC, CBE, DSG, and its chairperson, powerful advocate for disadvantaged people, Ms Pat Anderson.

Delegates to the Congress, which informs research strategies, programs and projects to contribute to healthier families and children, included representatives from Aboriginal communities, government departments, policy makers and researchers.

“Lowitja Congress 2014 has been a great opportunity for people from around Australia to meet and learn about the progress of their work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, particularly in research and the implementation of research to close the gap in Indigenous health,” leading academic Professor Marcia Langton said in her closing address.

In his keynote speech, the chair of the Prime Minister’s Indigenous Advisory Council, Warren Mundine, said in order to improve Aboriginal health it was first necessary to solve Aboriginal poverty through economic development, increased social stability, education, employment and increasing incomes. Mr Mundine expressed concern that Aboriginal funding was consumed by bureaucracy and red tape, and said good data was required to inform good decisions.

Australia’s national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, the Lowitja Institute is the only research organisation in Australia solely focused on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Named in honour of Dr O’Donoghue, the institute brings together world-leading researchers, policy makers and experts in cutting-edge service delivery, enabling collaborative health research to make a real difference to people’s lives. The board has a majority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander membership and comprises highly skilled and experienced professionals from health, education, indigenous and community sectors.

Other highlights from the Congress Lowitja 2014 program included a presentation by Ms Anderson about a Lowitja Institute initiative that aims to investigate the variety of views on what Indigenous health and the Indigenous health sector would look like in 2030.

Young Orator Shannan Dodson delivered a powerful speech on recognition, identity and agency, raising awareness of Recognise, an initiative that campaigns to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian Constitution.

In his address, Australian Race Discrimination Commissioner Dr Tim Soutphommasane noted that racism is a fundamental driver of poor health, injuring not only the individual but the health of our civic life.

-continues-
Across the two-day program, delegates discussed innovative ways to tackle high-priority issues such as developing the Indigenous health and health research workforce; an increased focus on early childhood development; dealing with fetal alcohol spectrum disorder; and kidney health.

Delegates also enjoyed cultural activities, including performances by Deborah Cheetham and Koori Youth Will Shake Spears and James Henry and the Skin Choir.

Congress Lowitja 2014 followed the Lowitja Institute’s 2nd National Conference on Continuous Quality Improvement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care.


For additional information go to http://www.lowitja.org.au/congress-2014 or call (03) 8341 5555.

-ends-

For media interviews please contact:
Greta Donaldson at Greta Donaldson Publicity (03) 9696 3234, 0427 658 638, greta@gdpublicity.com.au