

MEDIA RELEASE – 2 February 2024

Urgent call on the Australian Government to commit to a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health

Lowitja Institute and leading climate and health organisations call on the Australian Government to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership by funding a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Coalition on Climate and Health.

The call is further supported by a range of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and climate and health bodies.

‘Climate change is having significant impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ health and wellbeing. Urgent action is required – our peoples contribute the least to climate change, yet suffer the most,’ Lowitja Institute Chair Selwyn Button said.

‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are intimately connected to Country. Our knowledge and cultural practices hold solutions to the climate crisis. We need a governance mechanism that empowers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership that forces government departments to listen and to work with us on this.’

In November 2023, Lowitja Institute released a [position paper](#) and [business case](#) for the establishment of this Coalition after extensive yarning sessions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country about the impacts of climate change on the health and wellbeing communities.

These outline the key priorities and concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and a blueprint for a Coalition as a vital mechanism to strengthen and create opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the space, and for diverse voices to be heard.

‘Funding a Coalition empowered to work alongside government would enable bold action on climate change and health – action led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ deep knowledge of Country and holistic understanding of health,’ Mr Button said.

On 16 November 2023, Lowitja Institute leadership and other key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives participated in a roundtable at Parliament House to share stories from communities and concerns with government representatives. These included Assistant Minister for Health and Aged Care Ged

Kearney, Assistant Minister for Climate Change and Energy Jenny McAllister, Senator Dorinda Cox, Senator Jana Stewart, and the Ambassador for Global Health, Dr Lucas de Toca PSM. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives advocated at this roundtable for the establishment of the Coalition.

Following this, in December 2023 Lowitja Institute representatives including CEO Adjunct Professor Janine Mohamed and Deputy CEO Paul Stewart, travelled to Dubai to advocate at COP28 and call for the establishment of a Coalition. Adjunct Professor Mohamed spoke at two side-events – one at the Monash University Pavilion and the other at the Australian Pavilion.

'At COP28 we connected with incredible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, and Indigenous leaders from across the world working to ensure that cultural practices are at the heart of the climate response,' Mr Button said.

'Our health and the health of Country are one and the same. This is why our leadership in this space is so vital.'

'We invite the Australian Government to join us in being ambitious when it comes to tackling the immense challenges we face. A Coalition like this, if empowered to work with and across government departments, could truly make a difference to our collective futures.'

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For more information or to arrange an interview with a Lowitja Institute representative, please contact Jo Cackett on 0474 727 506, or the Communications team at communications@lowitja.org.au

ABOUT LOWITJA INSTITUTE

Lowitja Institute is Australia's only national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health research institute, named in honour of its patron, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG. It is working for the health and wellbeing of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by facilitating high-impact quality research, tools, resources and knowledge exchange, and supporting a new generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

Established in January 2010, the Lowitja Institute operates on key principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, a broader understanding of health that incorporates wellbeing, and the need for the work to have a clear and positive impact.

The history of the Lowitja Institute dates back to 1997 when the first Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health was established. Since then, the Institute and the CRC organisations have led a substantial reform agenda in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research by working with communities, researchers and policymakers, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people setting the agenda and driving the outcomes.