



FACT SHEET

The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience a burden of disease two-and-a-half times that of other Australians. A large part of the burden of disease is due to chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, chronic respiratory disease and chronic kidney disease. This can be reduced by earlier identification, and management of risk factors and the disease itself.

The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package aims to achieve this by providing support to the health sector and better access to health care by Indigenous Australians.

Great work is being done by many dedicated people around Australia. The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package will support and build on this work. As well as additional resources for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, the package will build a strong focus on Indigenous health in general practice and across the primary health care system.

What the Australian Government is doing

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) committed up to \$1.6 billion over four years to close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation.

Under this partnership, the Australian Government committed \$805.5 million over four years to tackle chronic disease among Indigenous Australians.

The partnership adopts a genuine, national approach with all level of governments working together with health and medical professionals, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package provides:

- significant new funding for preventative health focusing on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities;
- support and funding for more coordinated and patient-focused primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in both Aboriginal Community Controlled health services and mainstream general practice; and
- an expanded Indigenous health workforce.

The package will:

- promote and support good health by involving local communities and delivering healthy lifestyle programs;
- support accredited Indigenous health services and general practices by providing financial incentives to deliver better health care for Indigenous Australians with chronic disease;
- remove barriers so that patients can better access essential follow-up services such as allied health, specialist care and Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) medicines; and
- build the capacity of the primary health care system to care for patients by growing the number and skills of the Indigenous health workforce.

How this will work

The initiatives under the package focus on improving the capacity of all primary health care services to better manage chronic disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These initiatives will be delivered through a range of Indigenous and non-Indigenous health services, including Aboriginal Community Controlled health services, state and territory government Indigenous-specific health services, general practice and other government and non-government organisations that provide primary health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package has three main elements.

1. Tackling chronic disease risk factors

Many of the chronic diseases affecting Indigenous Australians have common risk factors. Modifying risk behaviour and decreasing the prevalence of these risk factors can prevent or delay the onset of chronic disease and improve outcomes for those who are already unwell.

Measures in this priority area will tackle chronic disease risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition and lack of exercise, and deliver community education initiatives to reduce the prevalence of these risk factors in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations. It will provide Indigenous tobacco campaign activities, a new tobacco action workforce, a health promotion workforce, healthy lifestyle programs and improved access to smoking cessation services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

2. Improve chronic disease management and follow-up care

The Medicare Benefits Schedule currently provides for routine health checks and chronic disease management items. However, the use of these by health service providers and the uptake by Indigenous Australians is limited. This measure will deliver a comprehensive approach to chronic disease management that seeks to encourage greater uptake of health checks and the provision of follow-up care in a coordinated, accessible and systematic manner.

Incentives will be provided through the Practice Incentives Program to encourage general practices to improve the coordination of health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including best practice management of patients with chronic disease. Greater support will also be provided for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to actively participate in their own health care, in addition to improved access to affordable medicines and multidisciplinary and specialist follow-up care for Indigenous Australians with a chronic disease.

3. Workforce expansion and support

The capacity of the primary care workforce in Indigenous and mainstream health services will be expanded to increase the uptake of health services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Measures include communication and marketing activity to attract more Indigenous people to work in health and more people to work in Indigenous health; additional workforce including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Outreach Workers, health professionals and practice managers; and additional nursing scholarships, registrar training posts and nurse clinical placements.

Indigenous-specific clinical practice and decision support guidelines will also be developed to assist health professionals in tackling the key conditions that contribute to the gap in life expectancy.

Conclusion

The Indigenous Chronic Disease Package is an important contribution to the Australian Government's wider response to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage.

It will help improve the basic health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and play an important role in building stronger, healthier communities.

You can find more detailed information about the package, by visiting our website:

www.health.gov.au/tackling-chronic-disease