



A shared agenda: Leadership Group established to help close “the cancer gap”

Today, National Close the Gap Day, Cancer Australia announces the recent establishment of its Leadership Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Control to drive a shared agenda to improve cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Chaired by Professor Jacinta Elston, Associate Dean, Education and Strategy, Generalist Medical Training program, James Cook University, the Leadership Group brings together experts, from both Indigenous and non-Indigenous backgrounds, across the fields of research, health and policy.

“Reflecting its mandate to drive a shared agenda in Indigenous cancer control, the Leadership Group will champion cross-sector collaboration across the seven nationally-agreed evidence-based priorities outlined in Cancer Australia’s *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Framework*, and leverage opportunities to improve cancer outcomes at system, service and community levels,” said Dr Helen Zorbas, CEO of Cancer Australia.

Minister for Indigenous Health Ken Wyatt welcomed the initiative as a key step to addressing the ever increasing cancer rates in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Minister Wyatt wished to applaud Cancer Australia for the development of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Framework* to lead improvements in cancer outcomes specifically in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Framework identifies seven identified priority areas which, based on the evidence, will have the greatest impact in addressing the disparities and improving cancer outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These are:

- improving knowledge and attitudes about cancer
- focusing prevention activities
- increasing participation in screening and immunisation
- ensuring early diagnosis
- delivering optimal and culturally appropriate treatment and care
- involving, informing and supporting families and carers
- strengthening the capacity of cancer-related services to meet the needs of Indigenous people.

“The latest national data shows a widening gap in cancer mortality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians,” said Dr Zorbas. “This is an issue of increasing concern.”

“One of the Leadership Group’s first objectives will be the development of a reporting plan, informed by reliable data and evidence, to measure progress against the national cancer priorities outlined in the Framework,” Dr Zorbas said.

[National Close the Gap Day \(NCTGD\)](#) is a national day of action to pledge support for achieving Indigenous health equality by 2030.

Cancer Australia was established by the Australian Government in 2006 to benefit all Australians affected by cancer, and their families and carers. Cancer Australia aims to reduce the impact of cancer, address disparities and improve outcomes for people affected by cancer by leading and coordinating national, evidence-based interventions across the continuum of care.



Leadership Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Control

Members' Biographies

1. Professor Jacinta Elston (Chair)

- Associate Dean, Education and Strategy, Generalist Medical Training, James Cook University

Professor Jacinta Elston is an Aboriginal woman from Townsville who has worked in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in higher education for more than two decades. In her current role, she is Associate Dean, Education and Strategy for the Generalist Medical Training program, in the College of Medicine and Dentistry at James Cook University. Professor Elston is also the Co-Director of the Anton Breinl Centre for Health Systems Strengthening at James Cook University. She is a former member of the Cancer Australia Advisory Council and has served as a member on the NHMRC Research Committee. Professor Elston holds a Master of Public Health & Tropical Medicine.

2. Professor Gail Garvey

- Senior Principal Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research

Professor Garvey plays a leadership role in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cancer research nationally and has been instrumental in bringing together key cancer researchers, clinicians, cancer services, government departments, community organisations and Indigenous consumers to identify and address research priorities. She has a strong track record of building Indigenous research capacity and translating research into policy and practice by involving the relevant stakeholders throughout research activities to achieve maximum impact.

3. Dr Kali Hayward

- President, Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA)
- General Practitioner, Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australian Inc.

Dr Hayward is the President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA), a GP Supervisor and Medical and Cultural Educator. AIDA is a not-for-profit professional association which aims to reach population parity of Indigenous doctors, and to inform and support a culturally safe health care system.

4. Professor Tom Calma AO

- National Coordinator, Tackling Indigenous Smoking
- Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia
- Chancellor, University of Canberra
- Founder and inaugural Chair of the Close the Gap Campaign

Professor Calma has been involved in Indigenous affairs at a local, community, state, national and international level and has worked in the public sector for over 40 years. He is currently on a number of boards and committees focusing on rural and remote Australia, health, education, justice reinvestment, research, reconciliation and economic development. Dr Calma was the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner at the Australian Human Rights Commission from 2004 to 2010. He also served as Race Discrimination Commissioner from 2004 until 2009.



5. Ms Tanya McGregor

- Chair, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Standing Committee (NATSIHSC)
- Director, Aboriginal Health Strategy, Department for Health and Ageing, South Australia

Ms McGregor is proud Yawuru woman who has lived and worked most of her life on the lands of the Larrakia people in the Northern Territory and now works and lives on Kurna land in South Australia as the Director, Aboriginal Health Strategy at SA Health. Tanya has extensive executive level experience in Government roles in Aboriginal health and human resources, with a keen interest in Aboriginal workforce. Tanya is currently the Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Standing Committee (NATSIHSC), the lead committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health within the governance and advisory structure of the Australian Health Minister's Advisory Council. NATSIHSC brings together senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health officials from all State and Territory Governments and the Australian Government to lead strategic cultural advice on policy as it relates to Aboriginal health.

6. Ms Louise De Busch

- Interim Chair, Cancer Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee
- Aboriginal Projects Officer, Cancer Council WA

Ms De Busch works with Aboriginal health organisations and the Aboriginal community in Western Australia on cancer related projects. The Cancer Council's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee provides policy advice to Cancer Council Australia to guide its advocacy efforts to improve supportive care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, their families and carers.

7. Professor Phillip Carson

- General Surgeon, Royal Darwin Hospital
- Associate Professor, Flinders Northern Territory Medical Program
- Chair, External Affairs, Royal Australasian College of Surgeons

Associate Professor Carson's current clinical areas of interest include breast surgery, oncoplastic and oncological surgery, thoracic surgery, endocrine surgery, and surgical infection. He has research interests in breast anatomy, infectious disease and the delivery of specialist services across barriers of distance and culture. He has a long term passion in promoting high quality, appropriate specialist services to all people living outside major cities.



8. Ms Bronwyn Vincent

- Senior Policy Officer, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
Ms Vincent has been working in government and non-for-profit organisations for more than fifteen years, helping to design policy solutions that have a positive impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) is the national peak body representing over 140 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) across the country. NACCHO advocates to government for evidence-supported, community-developed, culturally respectful responses and solutions to improving health and wellbeing outcomes through ACCHSs.

9. Dr Lisa Whop

- Representing the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA)
- Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research

Dr Whop is an epidemiologist in the field of cervical cancer prevention for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. Her PhD project was the first population-based study in Australia to investigate Indigenous women's participation in cervical screening and she has produced several landmark papers reporting on state-wide information on cervical screening participation, abnormalities and outcomes for Queensland Indigenous women. Her broader research focus is disparities in health and health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Dr Whop is representing the Clinical Oncology Society of Australia (COSA) which consists of over 1,000 individual members who are doctors, nurses, allied health professionals and scientists working in cancer care throughout Australia.

10. Mr Richard Weston

- Chief Executive Officer, Healing Foundation

Richard is a descendant of the Meriam people of the Torres Strait and is the CEO of the Healing Foundation. He is a member of the Commonwealth Government's Independent Advisory Council on Redress for survivors of institutional child sexual abuse and sits on the board of Families Australia. Richard is a member of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander forums and committees. Prior to being CEO of the Healing Foundation Richard was CEO of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service and CEO of Maari Ma Health in far west NSW based in Broken Hill. Under his leadership, Maari Ma won several health awards, including five NSW awards and a national award.