



MEDIA RELEASE

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Smoking Ceremony Paves the Way for Stronger Partnerships on Closing the Gap

A traditional Kurna Smoking Ceremony paved the way for stronger partnerships on closing the gap at the launch of the Aboriginal Health Council of SA Inc.'s (AHCSA) new much larger premises on 25 March.

Speakers including the Hon. John Hill Minister for Health, AHCSA Chairperson Yvonne Buza and AHCSA CEO Mary Buckskin all spoke of improved partnerships between government and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations as being key to achieving outcomes to close the gap.

Minister Hill said, "Promoting better health in Aboriginal communities – at the highest levels - is important work. Health changes everything: how you grow, learn, work, play and age. We share a common long-term goal to have Aboriginal people living healthier lives and longer lives."

He went on to say that "Labor Governments have a history of seeking to address Aboriginal health inequities through a partnership with Aboriginal people and communities. This ideal has come closer with the growth of the Aboriginal Health Council.

"By working with the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector we can provide appropriate and accessible health services to a range of Aboriginal communities and better comprehensive primary health care."

Following a Kurna Welcome by Aunty Josie Agius, AHCSA Chairperson Yvonne Buza said, "We need to remember that every opportunity that presents itself is usually the product of hard work and dedication from our people who fought for our rights and independence a long time ago – making our job so much easier.

"We understand that there is much to do if we are really going to make any difference to our appalling health statistics and attempt to 'Close the Gap' – but what we are certain of is that we cannot do this alone. Our external partners have been supportive and we appreciate their contribution," she said.

Ms Buza emphasised the importance of AHCSA's regular visits around the state to Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Aboriginal Health Advisory Committees and Substance Misuse Services to gather information and work with communities to identify practical and appropriate solutions to obtain the best possible health outcomes.

Minister Hill has promised regular meetings with AHCSA so that the government is fully informed of critical issues. About this Yvonne Buza said, "The feeling is that we have your support – And that Aboriginal business is truly everybody's business."

As the SA affiliate of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), AHCSA is a key advocate for a National Partnership Agreement between the Commonwealth and NACCHO. Ms Buza said, "This means that we will be better placed to apply real direction to our external partners in making the right decisions – the decisions that make a difference for our people."

AHCSA CEO Mary Buckskin said the smoking ceremony was a symbolic gesture to reaffirm our identity and to promote the principles on which we are founded – Aboriginal Self Determination, Aboriginal Community Control and the strength of Aboriginal Culture and Aboriginal Communities.

The launch celebrated key milestones in the 28 year history of Aboriginal health governance in South Australia. First established in 1981 as the Aboriginal Health Organisation under the South Australian Health Commission, the organisation moved from government control to Aboriginal community control in 2001.

AHCSA has since gone from strength to strength culminating in the move to much larger premises at Unley. Staffing has quadrupled to support new programs and services aimed at closing the gap in Indigenous health equality.

AHCSA is South Australia's peak body for Aboriginal health. As an Aboriginal community controlled organisation, AHCSA is managed and governed by an Aboriginal Board comprising members from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, Substance Misuse Services and Aboriginal Health Advisory Committees who represent the interests of the communities through AHCSA at a state and national level.

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