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MEDIA RELEASE

For immediate release



Closing the gap – a step forward for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) has demonstrated its dedication to closing the gap for Indigenous Peoples by announcing a new faculty representing the health issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The launch of the RACGP National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health follows data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), which in 2009 found life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 67.2 years for men and 72.9 years for women. This is about ten years less than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This gap was highlighted in the Close the Gap campaign's *Shadow Report* released earlier this month.

RACGP President Dr Chris Mitchell said the college recognises that improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of Australia's highest health priorities.

"General practice is vital to improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities throughout Australia.

Dr Brad Murphy, Chair of the new faculty and remote area solo GP in central Queensland, said that by establishing the new national faculty, the RACGP continues its long-term commitment to leading the way in addressing the challenges in improving health care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"The RACGP is committed to raising GP awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs and their cultural context, and to advocating for culturally appropriate health delivery systems, which improve health outcomes.

Dr Murphy, an Aboriginal man from the Kamilaroi people of northwest NSW, said the college also strongly supports the vital role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and people working in partnership with general practice to deliver comprehensive health care.

"Our aim is to ensure every health care provider involved in the general practice setting has the resources and support to get the best outcomes for their patients," he said.

The new faculty aims to:

- encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and registrars to choose the speciality of general practice
- support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars to go through the Fellowship exams and to become high quality GPs

- provide support and resources for medical students, registrars, GPs, allied health and administrative personnel involved in providing health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- work together with key partners to advocate for programs and services that benefit the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The RACGP has already undertaken a number of steps to close the gap, including:

- working with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) to develop training programs and continuous education modules in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- developing strategic partnerships with other key stakeholders such as the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA)
- providing RACGP registrars with training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators
- encouraging recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registrars to the RACGP and encouraging all GPs to expand their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture
- supporting initiatives such as the RACGP fellowship exam, curriculum development and the RACGP Aboriginal Health Unit
- ensuring appropriate RACGP representation on key national policy and program advisory groups.

“This is an exciting time for the college and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Australia. We look forward to continuing our work in this important area of health with the addition of our new faculty,” concluded Dr Mitchell.

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About the RACGP

The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) sets and maintains the standards for quality clinical practice, education and training, and research in Australian general practice, and represents Australia's urban and rural general practitioners. Visit www.racgp.org.au.