

NATIONAL INDIGENOUS HEALTH EQUALITY COUNCIL

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

10 March 2010

Government on Track to Close the Gap on Infant Mortality

Research that helps map the progress of improving Indigenous child mortality and health and sets targets was launched today by an expert Indigenous health advisory body.

The National Indigenous Health Equality Council (NIHEC) has completed two reports: the *Child Mortality Targets: Recommendations and Analysis* and *National Target Setting Instrument*.

NIHEC was appointed by the Prime Minister in 2008, to advise the Federal Government on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The *Child Mortality Targets: Recommendations and Analysis* report provides direction and context for progress towards the Council of Australian Governments' aim to halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five years, within a decade.

Indigenous children are at a greater risk of dying during the first year of life and are prone to ill health in childhood.

The National Indigenous Health Equality Council's Chairman Professor Ian Anderson said the child mortality report shows Indigenous child death rates have been improving.

"In infant mortality results have been particularly good, and the gap may halve by 2018 if current trends continue.

"In antenatal care and child mortality there have been improvements overall, however work is still required to reduce smoking during pregnancy and low birth weight rates," Professor Anderson said.

In 2007 the Rudd Government committed \$90.3 million to provide better access to maternal and child health services.

Minister for Indigenous Health Warren Snowdon said while there is still a way to go to bridge the gap, the report revealed some positive signs.

"I am encouraged by positive trends in Indigenous child mortality rates, and progress in key areas, such as the increase in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers accessing antenatal care services at least once during pregnancy."

The second report, the *National Target Setting Instrument* provides a best practice guide for policy makers on how targets should be set in Indigenous health, in two parts.

- o An overall framework for targets, including the role of targets in policy and a guide to effective target setting; and

- o A series of exemplary analyses to assess how we are tracking against key target areas with key drivers, trends and projections.

Professor Ian Anderson highlighted the importance of improving the quality of Indigenous data.

“It has to be a priority. We need to be able to accurately measure and monitor targets to help close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage,” Professor Anderson said.

Minister Snowdon said the reports were a step forward for Indigenous health and thanked the NIHEC members, including the chair, Professor Ian Anderson, for their hard work.

“We can only make steady and significant advances if we can measure our progress in a consistent and sustained way,” Mr Snowdon said.

“These findings will help all health care organisations to analyse their performance for Indigenous clients, and to set priorities and goals for improved outcomes for babies and children.”

“In turn, they will provide the basis for aggregate data and projections to targets which can be used by the States, Territories and the Australian Government to ensure that we meet the Close the Gap targets to which we are committed.”

Media contact: Alice Plate (Mr Snowdon’s Office) 0400 045 999
Kay McNiece (NIHEC) 0412 132 585