



For Immediate Release

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HEALTH GAP FUELLED BY LANGUAGE BARRIERS

Language barriers in Indigenous communities are being blamed for poor health among Indigenous men and boys, following a new report revealing life expectancy gaps between Aboriginal people and the rest of the community.

The Australian Medical Association's annual report revealed an Indigenous boy born in the last few years is expected to die 12 years younger than a non-Indigenous boy born in the same period.

Richard Trudgen, CEO of the not for profit Indigenous organisation, Aboriginal Resource and Development Services Inc (ARDS) said the findings were inexcusable and could be improved by culturally appropriate health education.

"What we have is Indigenous patients seeking medical help, with little or no understanding of their illness or what is required to treat it," Mr Trudgen stated.

"We're dealing with massive language and cultural barriers resulting in Indigenous patients refusing or unable to take their medication or have follow-up treatment."

Mr Trudgen believes this creates a medical underclass who suffer increasing health problems in a medical system which does not appear to be helping them.

"Without suitable education using the language of the people and culturally relevant concepts, this situation is unlikely to change," Mr Trudgen said.

"In a sense, Aboriginal communities need to do a 300 year catch up on how germs exist and what causes disease and sickness."

Mr Trudgen said this was particularly urgent for Indigenous men who frequently ignore symptoms for extended periods of time.

Aboriginal Community Educator Dr Alyssa Vass said efforts were being made at some health clinics to ensure men felt comfortable and in control of their own health care.

"There is a definite lack of understanding among Aboriginal communities about what illnesses or symptoms demand timely diagnosis and treatment," Dr Vass said.

"However, it seems that many Indigenous men are becoming willingly engaged in the health process if they feel that their culture is not being threatened."

Richard Trudgen called on everyone to take part in cross-cultural training like the "*Bridging the Gap*" seminars held annually around Australia.

The “*Bridging the Gap*” seminars are based on a model successfully used by the Yolŋu people in north-east Arnhem Land.

“We are seeing many sick people in Yolŋu communities following through with their treatment” Mr Trudgen concluded.

“We’re communicating with them in their own language – so there is no confusion or fear about the medical process.”

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