



MEDIA RELEASE

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Partners Apunipima and Catholic Health Australia working to close the health gap in Cape York

Representatives from Catholic Health Australia (CHA), HESTA and James Cook University joined Apunipima Cape York Health Council in far north Queensland on a visit to the remote communities of Napranum and Aurukun. A health workshop followed which identified approaches by which the Catholic health and aged care sector can help close the health gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York.

With the support of HESTA, St Vincent's Health Australia, Mater Health Services, and Cabrini Health were in attendance for the three-day community visits and workshop. Site visits included the soon to be opened Apunipima primary health care centre in Napranum and newly opened centre in Aurukun.

"Apunipima's objective is to achieve health equity across all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York," said Paula Arnol, Apunipima's Acting Chief Executive Officer.

"The opening of new primary health care facilities in Aurukun and Napranum is a significant step towards our goal of providing equitable access to quality health care services in the Cape's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, but there are still serious challenges surrounding workforce – especially a shortage of clinical staff – together with logistics and the stretching of our limited funding to provide the levels of services required to close the health gap."

"Apunipima has been working with Catholic Health Australia and its members to determine ways the Catholic hospital and aged care sector can best support our work in Cape York. The visit and workshop has been a welcome step, and we look forward to learning from each other to improve health outcomes in Cape York," said Ms Arnol.

"While Apunipima and others are providing essential healthcare services on the frontlines, the health gaps for Aboriginal people in Cape York are simply unacceptable," said Suzanne Greenwood, CEO of Catholic Health Australia.

"Catholic hospital and aged care groups provide some of the best healthcare services in Australia and this workshop was a valuable opportunity for our people to show their commitment to community controlled health services in the region and a commitment to working in partnership with Apunipima to close the health gap in Cape York."

"The Catholic sector's partnership with Apunipima aims to provide assistance – wherever we can and in whatever capacity required – to Apunipima Cape York Health Council, an organisation generating significantly improved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes in communities which experience some of the highest levels of chronic illness in Australia," said Mrs Greenwood.

"As Catholic providers of health and aged care services, it is our mission to ensure that every Australian receives equitable access to quality healthcare, especially the most remote, marginalised and vulnerable."

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey said the visit represented a valuable opportunity to better understand the vital work of HESTA members at Apunipima.

"This was an opportunity to learn first-hand of the gaps in women's health, facilities for an ageing population and the feelings of insufficient funding to meet these gaps," said Ms Blakey.



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"We share Apunipima's aim to close the unacceptable health gap Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face. We look forward to working in partnership with organisations such as Catholic Health Australia to identify ways HESTA can make meaningful contributions."

"Apunipima is all about providing community led, community driven care," Ms Arnol said. "We are commencing Community Health planning in the near future and the findings from that process will support with guiding our partnership."

"We welcome the opportunity to work with the Catholic health and aged care sector as they share many of our values, particularly around advocacy and support of the disenfranchised and forgotten," said Ms Arnol.

"Our shared intention is to walk beside each other, and beside community, to improve health outcomes on Cape York and make sure that whether you are in Napranum or the North Shore of Sydney, your medical care is the same."

SNAPSHOT

- Apunipima Cape York Health Council is the largest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health organisation in Queensland, employing more than 150 staff and providing comprehensive primary health care services to eleven Cape York communities, and advocating on behalf of seventeen communities – some of the poorest and most remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Australia.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Cape York suffer disproportionately from the burden of chronic disease.
- Members of Catholic Health Australia are partnering with Apunipima Cape York Health Council in order to assist the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health organisation to close the health gap in Cape York.
- The health gap is closing in the Northern Territory, however funding allocation is not equitable. Health funding allocation there is between \$16,000 to \$17,000 per person [2014 Indigenous Expenditure Report, Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, December 2014.]. Anecdotally, in Cape York, the funding allocation stands at approximately \$3,000 per person for comprehensive primary healthcare.
- Apunipima Cape York Health Council receives approximately 8.5% of the \$200 million in health investment in Cape York.
- CHA will welcome members of Apunipima's Board of Directors and senior executive body including Public Health Medical Advisor, Dr Mark Wenitong, to its National Conference in Sydney, 29-31 August 2016. There, members of the Catholic sector and Apunipima will report on the progress of the partnership.

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