

5 March 2020

MEDIA RELEASE

AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS DOCTORS RESPOND TO COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Australia is facing a potential COVID-19 pandemic.

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) fully reinforces the public health messages that the Chief Medical Officer has issued, as outlined at the Department of Health website, <https://www.health.gov.au/health-topics/novel-coronavirus-2019-ncov>. The Departmental website includes fact sheets, reports and resources. A link to the Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (the COVID-19 Plan) is at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/australian-health-sector-emergency-response-plan-for-novel-coronavirus-covid-19>. The website is updated daily.

Anyone, including health professionals, service providers and individuals can subscribe to the page to remain informed and updated with the latest information. Urgent enquiries can be directed to the Department's National Incident Room via email at health.ops@health.gov.au.

There has been recent press regarding COVID-19 as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples across Australia. AIDA is currently working with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation (NACCHO), and the Department of Health on the detail of the response to the disease as it relates to Indigenous Australians.

Aboriginal Peoples were four times more likely to be admitted to hospital with the 2009 pandemic (H1N1) of influenza than non-Aboriginal people.¹ This was a costly lesson that must be heeded.

AIDA has long promoted the significance of the social determinants of health as an important measure in improving the health of our communities. The challenges of mitigating the impact of any pandemic will be influenced by the current burden of chronic diseases endured by our Peoples, inadequate housing and environmental health infrastructure, and the lack of access to culturally appropriate healthcare faced by many of our communities.

All governments and health departments must continue to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations, communities and stakeholders to ensure that our Peoples and communities are consulted appropriately, and receive equitable access to services at this critical time.

It is imperative for health professionals to ensure culturally safe health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples at all times. The importance of early detection in mitigating a pandemic however, makes these efforts critical.

AIDA will keep its membership and stakeholders informed as developments progress regarding COVID-19 as it relates to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

END MESSAGE

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Please note that AIDA will not be making any additional comments on the topic of COVID-19, or accepting requests for quotes or interviews until further notice.

¹ N S W Public Health Bull. 2010 Jan-Feb;21(1-2):26-9. doi: 10.1071/NB09040. *Responding to pandemic (H1N1) 2009 influenza in Aboriginal communities in NSW through collaboration between NSW Health and the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector.* Rudge S1, Massey PD. <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/20374691> accessed 3 March 2020.