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MEDIA RELEASE

Indigenous Doctors decry health system's complacency and racism, following 'Betty's Story' report.

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) is deeply saddened and appalled to hear about the treatment of Ms Yvette "Betty" Booth by health officials at Doomadgee Hospital's emergency department, which led to her untimely death at the age of 18 from rheumatic heart disease (RHD).

"We extend our deepest and most heartfelt condolences to Ms Booth's family for their loss and ongoing trauma," Dr Tanya Schramm, President of AIDA said.

The findings from the 'Betty's Story' Report into Ms Booth's death adhere to a pattern of discrimination towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, with Ms Booth visiting the emergency department 12 times with severe symptoms, only to be sent away without the proper treatment.

"This report reveals that Ms Booth's treatment was woefully inadequate," Dr Schramm said.

"Moreover, it is proof of the lethal consequences of racism in the health care system. We are seeing yet another community in mourning because of a death that was entirely avoidable."

We must eliminate racism to stop the needless deaths of our people," Dr Schramm said.

AIDA continues to advocate for comprehensive cultural safety training across all agencies within the health system. Cultural safety training encourages practitioners, nurses and administrative staff to examine their unconscious biases, including racism, and build in strategies ensuring the highest level of health care is provided to every patient.

AIDA calls for attention to turn to the elimination of racism from the medical system in Australia, particularly emergency areas. By supporting all levels of medical staff to undertake cultural safety training, unconscious bias can be mitigated and lives will be saved.

Furthermore, AIDA calls for better training in recognition of RHD and better systems to track patients with the condition. According to RHD Australia, more than 5,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are currently living with rheumatic heart disease or acute rheumatic fever (ARF), and while some non-Indigenous Australians are susceptible to the disease, it is one that predominantly plagues Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"RHD in 2022 is a national shame, it is a disease of poverty and overcrowding," Dr Schramm said.

"The 2020 Australian guideline for prevention, diagnosis and management of acute rheumatic fever and rheumatic heart disease clearly outlines the social, cultural and environmental determinants of health that lead to the prevalence of this disease within our communities."

Overcrowded housing leading to shared environmental exposures is a significant issue in the spread of RHD. This can be addressed by providing safe and secure, appropriate, and health-conscious housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Dr Schramm said.

ENDS

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