



02 April 2009

Closing the gap needs to focus on Indigenous men's health

The health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous men will open, not close, unless the Government makes them a priority according to the Australian General Practice Network (AGPN) chair, Dr Emil Djakic.

"Indigenous Australian men die almost 20 years earlier than non-Indigenous men and general practice needs specific programs to target this marginalised health population which sits within an already disadvantaged group," said Dr Djakic.

Dr Djakic, a Tasmanian GP, says ability to access health care is a key issue for the health system to overcome to properly tackle the high rates of chronic illness in Indigenous populations.

"Not only is life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 17 years less than the average for all Australian men, the gap between Indigenous men and women is also considerable – about six years. Without specific programs to target Indigenous men's health the gap will open, not close," he said.

AGPN is calling for lifestyle modification programs, like those for preventing diabetes, to be created with a specific focus on Indigenous men. A similar program exists for type 2 diabetes prevention. It also wants to see service coordinators – who can liaise with patients and health care providers – to assist the Indigenous community to access services, Dr Djakic said.

"One of the biggest issues for medical professionals is identifying the Indigenous populations they serve, a coordinator would facilitate that process and would mean Indigenous people have access to care items that were set up to meet their needs. Dr Djakic points to a number of innovative outreach programs being run by divisions of general practice around the country that could be rolled out nationally.

"Some divisions run street doctor programs so GPs are readily available to the population, many already have community-based workers doing service coordination work and offering community support. There are numerous, excellent programs at a local level and we need to build on these," he said.

For media interviews, and information about divisions of general practice with Indigenous health programs, please phone AGPN Communications Manager Frith Rayner on 02 6228 0819 or 0402 267 190