Alzheimer’s Australia NSW has stated its commitment to Aboriginal communities in NSW during the Statewide launch of an Engagement Plan in Port Macquarie on 31 May 2013.

The document outlines a commitment to improving equity and access to culturally sound dementia services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of NSW.

The CEO of Alzheimer’s Australia NSW, The Hon. John Watkins, said consulting, nurturing and maintaining positive and respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is the only way to ensure culturally safe dementia services.

“We know from recent research by Professor Tony Broe, a Senior Principal Research Fellow at NeuRA (Neuroscience Research Australia), who conducted the Koori Growing Old Well Study, that the rate of dementia prevalence in Aboriginal Australians is three times that of Australia’s non-Indigenous population,” Mr Watkins said.

“Preliminary results from the study suggest the prevalence of dementia in Aboriginal Australians over 60 years of age is more than 13 per cent. But when it is adjusted for the younger age of the Indigenous populations, the rate is 21 per cent or three times the general Australian rate of 6.8 per cent.

This painting represents Alzheimer’s Australia NSW’s relationship with both traditional and urban Aboriginal communities.

The large blue area represents Alzheimer’s Australia, while the blue dots within the travelling lines represent the flow of information and understanding into the communities, the red dots symbolises the flow of cultural understanding and awareness back into Alzheimer’s Australia which then changes the colour of Alzheimer’s Australia Aboriginal services and supports.

The painting is depicted in the shape of boomerang which symbolises the importance of the return of information back to the community.
“This is a shocking disparity and one which deserves focus and attention. Through this engagement plan and statement of commitment we are aiming to work in partnership with communities to ensure we develop culturally safe dementia services to help people in need.”

The plan includes a commitment to: building and strengthening positive relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in NSW; ensuring services are relevant and appropriate; and increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the organisation.

The Engagement Plan and Statement of Commitment to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples of Australia includes a new artwork (shown above) to represent Alzheimer’s Australia NSW’s relationship with both traditional and urban Aboriginal communities.

A new resource for carers of people living with dementia in the Aboriginal community was also launched.

The short film, You’re Not Alone: Discussion Dementia – Losing the Dreaming, features Birpai Elder Uncle Bill O’Brien discussing his experience of caring for his mother, who had dementia. A link to the short film can be found on the Alzheimer’s Australia website.

On 18 July 2013, the National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples published the results of the 2013 Co-Chair elections. The successful candidates for the two most senior positions on the National Congress were:

**Female Co-Chair Elect**
Ms Kirstie Parker, a Yuwallarai woman from NSW.

**Male Co-Chair Elect**
Mr Les Malezer, a Gubbi Gubbi – Butchulla man from Queensland.

The Congress Co-Chairs will serve a two-year term from August 2013.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Dementia Advisory Group and Alzheimer’s Australia CEO, Mr Glenn Rees, would like to congratulate Mr Malezer and Ms Parker on their candidature.

The resource is freely available to help carers of people with dementia. Importantly, it emphasises the help that is available and that people are not alone on this journey. The launch was held to coincide with National Reconciliation Week, which was held this year from 27 May – 3 June.
The incidence of dementia in rural and remote Aboriginal communities is five times higher than the general Australian population. Research conducted in the Kimberley region with 363 participants found dementia to be 12.4% in Aboriginal people over the age of 45 years and 26.8% in Aboriginal people over 65 years. Research conducted in North Queensland also yielded similar results with 20% of participants aged over 65 found to have dementia.

The rate of dementia in Torres Strait Islander communities remains largely unknown. Recently, Dr Edward Strivens and Professor Leon Flicker undertook a pilot study to estimate the prevalence of dementia in Torres Strait Islander communities.

A total of 28 people living on Hammond Island aged between 45 and 85 participated. The results of the study revealed an increased rate of dementia at 5% with another 20% having some cognitive impairment. 80% of the sample, including those participants with a cognitive impairment, had at least one vascular risk factor for dementia such as diabetes, hypertension, heart problems, currently smoking, and high cholesterol.

Further research is needed to ascertain whether the dementia rate is higher in Torres Strait Islander communities and whether rates vary between communities due to lifestyle variances in different regions.

To download the summary report, click here
To download the full report, click here
LAUNCH OF THE NEW NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND TORRE STRAIT ISLANDER HEALTH PLAN

The new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan (the Plan) was launched in Brisbane on 23 July 2013.

In 2008, the Australian Government established a framework for tackling the disadvantage experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Framework included six targets to close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians with all states and territories agreeing to the targets through the Council of Australian Governments.

Since then, work has been undertaken to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the 2013 Closing the Gap Report revealing the Government is on its way to achieve its under-5 mortality by 2018 and efforts to close the gap in life expectancy.

To further close the gap, the Australian Government since 2011 has worked with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to produce the new National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan in order to set out a 10 year plan for the direction of Indigenous health policy. This has involved a collaboration between the Australian Government, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations and their peak bodies. The National Congress of Australia’s First Peoples have also had a pivotal role though the National Health Leadership Forum to ensure input and feedback into the development of the Plan.

The Plan will build on previous work aimed at addressing the social inequality and determinants of health that are key to improving health in the long term. A priority is placed on social and emotional wellbeing and issues that impact upon this including alcohol and other drugs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services will receive continued support to fulfil their important role in improving health outcomes. The Plan adopts a strengths based approach to ensure that policies and programs implemented improve the health, social and emotional wellbeing, and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as well as promote positive health behaviours. The Plan emphasis the centrality of culture in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the right to lead safe, healthy and empowered lives. Please see Diagram 1 for a brief overview of the priority areas of the Plan.
Diagram 1 – Priorities At A Glance

The Plan replaces the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health with the new Plan to be implemented over the next decade to 2023.

To view the report, click here
‘They say a picture speaks a thousand words - our pictures speak a thousand languages’

Christopher Brocklebank, Founding Director, italklibrary.

italklibrary was founded 20 years ago by director Christopher Brocklebank when he identified the urgent need for resources and educational tools that speak in visual and oral languages, rather than written or spoken in English. The company, based in the Northern Territory, has a growing collection of stories that overcome literacy barriers, making information accessible to all. italklibrary has also created a database of stories in multiple languages including 14 Aboriginal languages.

The Love in the Time of Dementia video is the third story in the series which aims to teach people useful skills to care for family members who have a disability. This video describes how to provide support for people living with dementia.

The resource was produced by isee-ilearn/italklibrary as a part of the Disability stories project.

To view the resource and others, click here
ADVOCATES JOIN TO HELP SPREAD THE GOOD NEWS
by Christianne White

Australian actress and Australia’s first Ambassador for Ageing Noeline Brown and co-chair of the Federal Government’s Dementia Advisory Group and author Sue Pieters-Hawke joined Western Australian Centre for Health & Ageing’s Indigenous Healthy Ageing researchers in the Kimberley, to help share, their key research findings, with participants and local health professionals.

People who live in regional and remote Australia often suffer poorer health and have a lower life expectancy than those who live in metropolitan areas. By sharing the study’s findings the researchers hope to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in the Kimberley.

The Kimberley Healthy Adults Project is an extension of previous research and has focused on exploring the prevalence of common conditions in old age such as dementia, falls, depression, chronic pain and incontinence.

The study completed a comprehensive health survey on Aboriginal people over the age of 45 years in the town of Derby and six remote communities across the Kimberley region. It was funded by a National Health and Medicine Research Council (NHMRC) grant and was nominated as a Top 10 Projects of 2012 by NHMRC.

The research team led by geriatricians, Associate Professor Dina LoGiudice and Professor Leon Flicker have developed an easy-to-understand guide booklet based on research results for health professional based in the Kimberley. It aims to help clinicians identify factors that contribute to increased independence and improved well-being for older people living in the region. The booklet is freely available on our website www.wacha.org.au

Left to Right: Associate Professor Dawn Bessarab, Linda Skeaf, Sue Pieters-Hawke, Dr Steve Fenner, Associate Professor Melissa Lindeman, Anne Poelina, Ruth Crawford, Noeline Brown, Assoc Prof Dina LoGiudice, Prof Leon Flicker
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER DEMENTIA HELP SHEETS

A series of help sheets about various dementia topics have been developed to inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about dementia.

These include:

- Memory Changes
- What is dementia?
- Diagnosing dementia
- Alzheimer’s disease
- Information for family and friends

To view the help sheets, click here

For the latest information about upcoming conferences, workshops and events look under the Dementia section on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet

CONTACT NUMBERS

National Dementia Helpline
1800 100 500

Alzheimer’s Australia
1800 100 500 OR
WWW.FIGHTDEMENTIA.ORG.AU

Dementia Behaviour Management Advisory Service (DBMAS)
1800 699 799

This newsletter has been edited by Kristen Holdsworth.
Articles were contributed by Christianne White and Kristen Holdsworth.

We can’t do it without you: please remember this newsletter belongs to you. If you would like to share a story, tell other people what’s happening in your community, or to make any other comments or suggestions, please contact:

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To download previous editions of this newsletter, click here

For further information about dementia, click here