



Indigenous Injury Prevention and Safety Promotion Position Paper

Background

Recent national campaigns such as Close the Gap highlight the unacceptable discrepancies between the health of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia, including the gap in life expectancy estimated to be between 10 and 12 years¹. Deaths due to injury account for 15% of all Indigenous deaths¹. Injury is also major cause of disability to Indigenous people which is largely unmeasured and unnoticed.

Current injury prevention activity concentrates its efforts on specific key issues, however, Indigenous people see their lives in a holistic way and do not tend to segment issues in this way. Thus alcohol issues, violence, children falling from playground equipment etc. are all part of an understanding of the need for safety in the community.

A lack of knowledge, arising from the paucity of research in this area and the lack of implementation of existing recommendations, reports and strategies poses a problem for advocacy efforts in this area. This document attempts to address these issues and offer a set of recommendations.

The AIPN recognises that:

- The Australian Government has implemented a broad range of mainstream injury prevention initiatives which include suicide prevention, water and snow safety and quality use of medicines.
- Injury prevention is a shared responsibility between the Australian Government and the states and territories.
- The current National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Safety Promotion Strategy has prioritised the following areas for action:
 - Chronic disease
 - Communicable disease
 - Substance misuse, mental disorder, stress, trauma and suicide
 - Injury and poisoning
 - Family Violence
 - Child and maternal health and male health
- Safe Communities is one of the building blocks of the Closing the Gap policy endorsed by Commonwealth, State and Territory Governments through COAG agreements.²
- Action on Closing the Gap includes agreements for improved Indigenous identification in data collections.³

- Injury prevention and safety promotion is multi-sectoral. Many sectors, including health, education, local government, planning, need to be fully engaged in responsibility, activity and advocacy for Indigenous injury prevention.

The AIPN acknowledges:

- Indigenous Australians are three times more likely to die and twice as likely to be hospitalised as a result of injury.¹
- Lack of uniform and consistent data hampers our efforts to accurately detect changes in trends which might tell us either how bad the situation is in comparison with the rest of the population, or indeed, how effective our current prevention efforts are.
- Indigenous injury has its greatest impact on the young and middle aged.
- There is clear evidence that mainstream safety initiatives have had only limited impact on Aboriginal safety due to the different mix of causes and age and gender distribution of causes. There is therefore a need for specifically targeted programs for Aboriginal people.
- The cost of injury to Indigenous people and communities include: life long suffering or the loss of a family member; cost of hospitalisation and disability to the individual and the health system; and the 'intangible' costs of trauma are unable to be measured and has a ripple effect throughout communities.
- Indigenous injury is also linked to justice issues and the much greater levels of incarceration of Indigenous people

The AIPN recommends:

- The Australian Government broaden the focus of the newly formed Australian National Preventive Health Agency to include injury as a priority area.
- The Australian Government allocate responsibility and resources to oversee the development of an implementation plan for the Strategy which would outline evidence based strategies for each priority activity and identify possible priorities for local community action.
- The implementation plan take into account local jurisdictions to avoid duplication, to complement other plans, to be flexible, and to develop a monitoring and evaluation framework
- Taking a holistic approach to engaging Indigenous communities in initiatives that promote safety and raising awareness of the issues, providing information so that these can become a community priority.
- Indigenous injury be addressed in the urban, regional and remote centres.
- The lack of effective, sustainable programs targeting Indigenous injury prevention be addressed by researchers, practitioners and policy makers working cooperatively. This leading to the development of initiatives which would lead real improvements.

- That quality research into Indigenous injury is funded in order to provide an evidence base for policy decision making.
- It is also crucial to build the capacity of the Indigenous injury prevention practitioner workforce so that we can design, implement and undertake programs that reduce the burden of Indigenous injury in Australia.

References

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2. Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (2009) 'National Indigenous Reform Agreement (Closing the Gap)', COAG: Available at: http://www.federalfinancialrelations.gov.au/content/national_agreements/downloads/GA_FFR_ScheduleF_National_Indigenous_Reform_Agreement_Feb_2011.pdf . Accessed 15 March 2011.
3. Council of Australian Governments (COAG) (December 2008) 'National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes', http://www.coag.gov.au/intergov_agreements/federal_financial_relations/docs/national_partnership/NP_closing_the_Gap_indigenous_health_outcomes.pdf . Accessed 15 March 2011.

Other useful references and resources:

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- Senserrick T, Hinchcliff R, Ivers R, Martiniuk A, Boufous S, Clapham K. Aboriginal injury prevention projects: a review. (2010) Sydney: The Sax Institute.
<http://www.saxinstitute.org.au/contentUploadedByEWeb/Files/Boufous%20et%20al%20FINAL%20FOR%20PUBLICATION.pdf>
- The Australian Indigenous Health Info Net provides a very useful tool for our efforts
<http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/>