

RE 16 September 2008

ISSUE: THE HEALTH STATUS OF ABORIGINAL CHILDREN, MOTHERS AND ADULTS WITH CHRONIC DISEASE WHO LIVE IN WALGETT AND SURROUNDING TOWNS

BACKGROUND

Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service (WAMS) is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) which was established in 1986 in order to respond to the perceived failure of mainstream health services to meet the health care needs of Aboriginal people in Walgett and surrounding towns. WAMS has successfully been providing Primary Health Care services to Aboriginal people since that time. This has enabled Aboriginal people to access quality health care services within their local towns, and be referred to specialists in larger towns or cities as needed which has contributed to improvements in the overall health status of Aboriginal people in Walgett and surrounding areas. However the health status Aboriginal people of remains poor in comparison to that of non-Aboriginal people living in the same area.

CURRENT STATUS

- Services provided by NSW Health through the Greater Western Area Health Service are limited and face continuing challenges in terms of funding, recruitment and retention. This means that they must work in partnership with ACCHO's and other service providers to ensure that Aboriginal people gain access to the health services they require across their lifespan.
- During 2006 Bila Muuji Upper Sector Consortium (BMUSC) was invited to take part in the second round of funding for the Australian Government Healthy for Life Program with WAMS as the funds holder for the ACCHO's in Walgett, Brewarrina, Bourke and Orana Haven which make up this consortium
- The Healthy for Life program focuses on improving the health status of Aboriginal people with chronic disease and that of Aboriginal mothers and their children
- Through this program WAMS has been able to taken a strong operational focus on Chronic Disease particularly Diabetes Type 2 and Chronic Heart Disease. Through this it has become evident that obesity is a major problem across all age groups including children.
- Contributing factors to this obesity problem include limited access to affordable nutritious good quality food as well as a poor understanding of the essentials of a nutritious diet ; failure to exercise and limited access to sporting and exercise facilities.
- During 2008 WAMS was successful in gaining further Australian Government funding to establish a Family Centered Primary Health Care Service which will provide an outreach Primary Health Care service to Aboriginal people in remote disadvantaged communities in North Western NSW. Once operational it is expected that similar findings will be made in relation to obesity and its causes amongst the Aboriginal people living in these communities.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- That the Senate Standing Committee on Obesity note this information and support funding programs which will increase the opportunities for Aboriginal people of all ages in Walgett and surrounding towns to purchase affordable, nutritious good quality food and gain affordable access to local sporting and exercise facilities.