

**SENATE COMMUNITY AFFAIRS REFERENCES COMMITTEE
ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION**

Petition on Gynaecological Health Issues

Question - Ms Heffernan—Chair, may I ask Linda Powell: what percentage uptake has there been thus far as a result of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum that is being designed to increase uptake in screening?

Date asked: 3 March 2006

Response

- The Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing established the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum to advise the Australian Screening Advisory Committee on strategies to improve participation by Indigenous women in breast and cervical cancer screening.
- The Women's Forum has an all Indigenous female membership comprising State and Territory Government and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) representatives from all Australian jurisdictions.
- The Women's Forum provides an opportunity for the members to consult with their own communities to develop a pro-active, health-promoting work plan in relation to cervical and breast screening at the national level.
- The ATSI Women's Forum developed *Principles of Practice, Standards and Guidelines for Providers of Cervical Screening Services for Indigenous Women* to better inform health professionals on how they provide cervical screening services to Indigenous women. This was completed in February 2004 and distributed nationally. An evaluation of the document is being undertaken in 2006.
- The Women's Forum is currently undertaking consultation to inform development of two videos on colposcopy – one for Indigenous health workers and one for women – to explain the process and encourage uptake of colposcopy when it is recommended.
- It is not possible to attribute changes in participation directly to the work of the Forum. While the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum has undertaken activities to increase participation rates, States and Territories also implement a range of local strategies with the same aim, including employing Aboriginal health workers, developing communication and education resources to meet the needs of specific language and cultural groups, and providing culturally appropriate services in consultation with Indigenous communities.
- For more information on the activities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum, the Secretariat can be contacted through Ms Carolyn Smith, Assistant Secretary, Targeted Prevention Programs Branch, Department of Health and Ageing.
- The Terms of Reference of the Women's Forum are attached for information.

Agency:	Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing		
Action Officer:	Carolyn Smith Assistant Secretary Targeted Prevention Programs Branch	Phone:	(02) 6289 8197
Cleared By: (SES level)	Andrew Stuart First Assistant Secretary Population Health Branch	Phone:	(02) 6289 4522

ABORIGINAL & TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN'S FORUM TERMS OF REFERENCE

Role

The role of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum is to:

- identify issues at the local and national level and provide policy advice to the Australian Screening Advisory Committee (ASAC), the national committee addressing (Indigenous) women's screening issues;
- make recommendations for key actions to the ASAC;
- provide a consultation mechanism which encourages and supports community engagement and genuine participation within existing networks of related communities with key partners and with other professional organisations;
- propose options for directions and priorities of activities for the Indigenous community for National Cervical Screening and BreastScreen Australia Programs through the ASAC;
- when indicated, co-opt persons with knowledge, skills and experience, often through inviting guest speakers to present on a topic, to provide information and advice when possible; and
- co-opt persons who have knowledge, skills and experience, to support and advocate on issues identified by members at national Forum meetings.

Membership

Membership of the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Forum is built upon a spirit of consensus and respect for the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and aims to improve the health and well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women. It is expected:

- membership will consist of two representatives from each State and Territory (one Community Controlled Sector representative & one State/Territory Government representative) and a representative from the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO);
- all members are expected to report back to their respective organisations about issues raised at Forum meetings and when possible use opportunities to raise the profile and explain the work undertaken by the Forum within their respective departments and organisations;
- members will report back to the Forum about issues which could impact on Forum business;
- members will be of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent and if there is no representative present from the Torres Strait Islander community, no decisions will be made on behalf of Torres Strait Islander peoples;

- the Forum may receive recommendations for membership. However Community Controlled Sector representatives can only be nominated by the peak NACCHO affiliate in each State/Territory based on the nominated person's recognised link with that specific community and/or because of their knowledge and expertise about that particular community;
- members failing to attend two consecutive meetings without reasonable notification and cause will forfeit their place on the Forum; and
- members who do not attend Forum meetings and who have been paid expenses by the Department of Health and Ageing to attend Forum meetings will be expected to reimburse all of these monies back to the Department of Health and Ageing.