

Media Release



Aboriginal Prisoners - Improving Health and Reducing Recidivism

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In an Australian first, health researchers are meeting with corrections staff, prisoner advocates and health service providers in Canberra today to explore ways to improve Indigenous prisoner health and reduce recidivism.

The Aboriginal Prisoner Health Roundtable, organised by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRCAH) in conjunction with the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and the Public Health Association of Australia (PHAA), aims to identify priority areas of research which will assist in developing programs to improve Indigenous prison health and reduce recidivism.

The meeting will also explore ways of evaluating successful community driven programs to find out what works best in achieving improved health and reduced Indigenous prison rates.

According to Mick Gooda of the CRCAH, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are much more likely to be imprisoned and much more likely to be a victim of crime than other Australians.

“Our incarceration rates continue to rise with Indigenous women the fastest growing group in the prison population,” said Mr Gooda. “The tragedy is that many of our people in prison are themselves victims of violent crime and there is a desperate need to develop a program of research to address the appalling social and health costs of Indigenous incarceration.”

“In the twenty years since the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody reported on the disproportionate rates of Indigenous imprisonment in Australia and recommended action to reduce these rates our people continue to fill the country’s prisons.”

The Canberra meeting will hear from the Native Counselling Services of Alberta about the successes of Canadian Aboriginal people in reducing recidivism rates amongst Canadian Aboriginal people through development of discrete and culturally designed programs including what is believed to be the world’s first Aboriginal-run prison.

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Mr Gooda said that there is very little research being undertaken on prison health and recidivism and that which is being done is mainly descriptive rather than solutions focussed.

“At the end of today we are confident that we will have a list of priority areas where research is needed and from there our challenge is to advocate for that research to occur.

“We welcome the Prime Minister-elect’s statement that he will govern for Indigenous Australians and hope that this implies a commitment to address the soul-destroying levels of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander imprisonment,” said Mr Gooda.

“As a first step we will certainly be seeking a commitment from the new Australian Government to support a rigorous and broad research program to ensure that policy is informed by quality evidence.”

Mr Gooda said today’s meeting will also start the process of building a broad network of interested organisations and individuals who can share knowledge and work together to progress work in this area.

For more information:

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http://www.craah.org.au/events/aboriginal_prisoner_health_industry_roundtable.html