



# Media Release

## **Australian of the Year says Indigenous adults' lack of basic literacy is a major barrier to closing the gap**

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Australian of the Year Mick Dodson says the fact that 30% of Indigenous adults lack basic literacy skills has a direct and significant impact on Indigenous health.

'Ensuring that Indigenous children attend and succeed at school, and enabling their parents and carers to give children a healthy, happy future depends on raising the level of English literacy,' said Professor Dodson, who has been attending the Popular Education for Critical Literacy Workshop in Alice Springs this week. 'But right now, thousands of Indigenous people are missing out on the opportunities available to them.'

'Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults suffer such low levels of basic literacy that they are unable to fully participate in the wider Australian society. Unless this problem is addressed the serious discrepancy in health and life expectancies that divides Australia is bound to continue.'

Professor Marcia Langton from the University of Melbourne supported Professor Dodson's call for urgent action. She expressed her wish to see Federal, State and Territory Ministers for education and employment heed the call for an adult literacy campaign for Indigenous people. 'Without action on this problem, our people will continue to be stuck in the welfare economy,' said Professor Langton.

The focus of this week's Popular Education for Critical Literacy Workshop was to develop a fresh approach to improving Aboriginal health in the form of a national adult literacy campaign. The workshop was organised by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH), supported by Central Australian Aboriginal Congress and the Australian National University's National Centre for Indigenous Studies.

Taking part in the gathering alongside Professor Langton and Professor Dodson were other senior Aboriginal people with expertise and interest in adult literacy including CRAH Chair, Ms Pat Anderson.

Professor Dodson identified education as his central concern when he was announced Australian of the Year in January. In addressing the workshop, he reiterated his belief that reform in education was central to all other improvements in the well being of Aboriginal people.

**For further background, contact CRAH Workshop Convenor:**

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