



Cooperative Research Centre for  
Aboriginal Health

# Media Release

## Young leaders call for Australian action on causes of ill-health

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Twenty-three future public health leaders from across Australia and the United States have called on the Rudd Government to establish an Australian Commission on Social Determinants of Health.

The young leaders, who met recently in Adelaide as part of a Fulbright Commission-funded Symposium, argue that Australian governments should be more organised in their approach to addressing the social determinants of health.

Spokesperson for the group, Katherine Biedrzycki, says the proposed Commission would develop and report on Australia's progress around improving social determinants of health such as employment, education, empowerment and environmental protection.

"The health and well-being of everyone in the population, and not the performance of the economy, is the best measure of how well Australian society is doing," said Katherine.

Young health research leader, Megan Williams from the Indigenous Health Unit, University of Queensland, said the proposed Australian Commission on Social Determinants of Health would also coordinate action to promote health across multiple portfolios of government.

"Public health is increasingly finding that all the activities of government – from employment and education, through to transport and agriculture – have implications for the population's health," said Megan. "The World Health Organisation calls these the *causes of the causes* of ill-health".

Brought together by the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health (CRAH) and Flinders University the meeting of young leaders nominated supporting early childhood and education, decent housing, a healthy food supply, work-life balance, a sustainable transport system and mitigation of climate change as being essential prerequisites for improving Australia's public health..

The future leaders' call comes just days before the release of the report of the World Health Organisation Commission on Social Determinants of Health at the end of August.

"Australia has an opportunity right now to build on international momentum around these issues" says Katherine Biedrzycki. "It's time for Australia to follow in the footsteps of the United Kingdom, Canada and the United States by organising its national response to the substantial body of evidence about the social determinants of health, and in particular to implement relevant recommendations from the WHO Commission's report.

Megan Williams said the meeting also celebrated the announcement that Professor Ian Anderson would lead the new National Indigenous Health Equality Council.

"The Council's work would be well supported by an Australian Commission on Social Determinants of Health," said Megan. "Without addressing low employment rates, low educational outcomes, overcrowded and substandard housing, the inter-generational disempowerment of Aboriginal people and the almost relentless racism experienced by so many Aboriginal people it is hard to see how the health gap can be closed."

The twenty-three future public health leaders included early career researchers, policy makers, community workers, advocates and activists with expertise spanning population health, medicine, education, economics, law, engineering, transport, environment, community development and social work.

The 2008 Fulbright Symposium, entitled 'Healthy People, Prosperous Country', was jointly run by Flinders University and the CRC for Aboriginal Health.

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