

The Hon Nicola Roxon MP, Minister for Health and Ageing
Opening of the Parliamentary Showcase of Aboriginal Health Research
CRC for Aboriginal Health
Parliament House, Canberra, 13 March 2008

- I would like to acknowledge the Ngunnawal people, traditional custodians of this land on which we meet.
- Acknowledge:
 - Pat Anderson, Chairperson of the CRC
 - Mick Gooda, CRC CEO
 - Ian Anderson, CRC Director of Research
 - MPs, senators and other guests
- I'm delighted to be here to open this Parliamentary showcase of the work of the CRC for Aboriginal Health
- The CRC is one of Australia's leading Aboriginal health research organisations – committed to excellence in Aboriginal-led research, building strong partnerships in research, and disseminating the latest research results
- As you know the Rudd Government is strongly committed to improving Indigenous health, and to closing the gap in life expectancy
- We understand that a solid evidence base, built on good quality research, is absolutely critical if we're going to achieve this goal – which is of course why the work of the CRC is so important
- I'm very pleased that my Department provides support to the CRC both in cash (\$1.5m or 4 per cent of the CRC's total budget, over seven years until 2010), and in kind (the equivalent of three staff positions, giving support and expertise to the ongoing work of the CRC). Please be assured that this support will continue under the Rudd Labor Government
- Of course, to be effective, health research programs with a focus on Indigenous health need to be designed in partnership with Indigenous people – and I'm

pleased to note that the CRC for Aboriginal Health has a 16-member board with an Aboriginal majority, led by the wonderful Pat (Anderson)

- I also note that Professor Michael Good – Chair of the health session of the Government’s upcoming 2020 Summit – is a member of your Board
- The CRC’s research agenda – focusing among other things on providing comprehensive primary healthcare; chronic disease; and social and emotional wellbeing – aligns very closely with the Government’s priorities in Indigenous health
- We know that there is now overwhelming evidence in support of investing in the early years – and that ensuring good health early can help to head off chronic disease later in life
- There have of course been some gains on this front – including a reduction in infant mortality rates in the Indigenous population over the last two decades, from 23 deaths per 1000 in 1991, to around 12 per 1000 in 2003
- These are important improvements but its worth noting that a mortality rate of 12 per 1000 is still around three times higher than for the general population. And as you will all know low birth-weight is twice as prevalent in Indigenous babies compared with non-Indigenous babies ... so we have much work to do
- Its for this reason that the first down-payment in the Rudd Government’s efforts to close the life expectancy gap is our \$260 million package for additional child and maternal health services for Indigenous mums and their babies; early development and parenting support; and to improve literacy and numeracy in the early years
- More generally, there’s a lot of work to do in addressing the high rates of chronic diseases like cardiovascular disease and diabetes in the Indigenous community. The CRC’s work on chronic disease and on comprehensive primary health care will be critically important in this task into the future
- I also note that the CRC’s research has a strong focus on addressing the social determinants of health. You will find us in furious agreement on this point – we know, for example, that good health is intimately connected with decent housing.

This is why the Government will invest \$1.6 billion over the next four years to address Indigenous Housing in remote areas

- Like all of you, we in the Government are committed to outcomes. That's why the work of the CRC is vital
- Over the relatively short lifespan of your organisation you may not have been able to close *all* the gaps in the Indigenous health evidence-base and in our body of knowledge about Indigenous health, but your work will put the nation on a stronger footing to achieve these things
- We need new partnerships to bring people together to find new solutions to improve Indigenous health – and I know the partnership approach is something the CRC is strongly committed to under Pat and Mick's leadership
- I know the CRC is also strongly committed to supporting ways to build the capacity and representation of Indigenous people within the research process – also critically important in meeting the goal of closing the gap
- So let me again say how strongly committed we are to working in partnership with you as we work towards closing the gap in life expectancy
- I wish you well for this important showcase and in the presentations the CRC researchers will be making about their work to help improve the health of Indigenous people across Australia