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# NACCHO Position Statement on 'Medicare Locals' within the proposed National Health and Hospital Reforms

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## Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector

NACCHO is the national peak body representing over 140 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) across the country on Aboriginal health and well being, NACCHO with its State/Territory Affiliates are well positioned to facilitate the involvement of this sector in reform processes outlined by the Australian Government in aspects of the National Hospital & Health Reform (NHHR) Agreement.

In keeping with the philosophy of self-determination, Aboriginal communities operate ACCHSs across Australia. They range from large multi-functional services employing several medical practitioners and providing a wide range of services, to small services without medical practitioners, which rely on Aboriginal health workers and/or nurses to provide the bulk of primary care services

The services form a network, but each is autonomous and independent. The integrated primary health care model adopted by ACCHSs is in keeping with the philosophy of 'Aboriginal Community Control' and the holistic view of health that this entails.

### Our response

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and its Affiliates are determined to pursue a good outcome for Aboriginal Peoples from the national health reforms in the Agreement, to ensure integrated and accessible services for Aboriginal Peoples.

In this spirit, NACCHO embraces improvements to the health system that the Government seeks to achieve that are in line with the State/Territory Aboriginal Health Framework Agreements and the 'Close the Gap Statement of Intent', which should form the basis for ongoing discussion and negotiation with the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector (ACCHS). We believe that active involvement of the ACCHS in the design and implementation of national health reforms in terms of their impact on both the public health and ACCH sector is essential.

NACCHO acknowledges the Australian and State Government investments made to date in the ACCHS sector, as expert providers of 'holistic' comprehensive primary health care services to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population in Australia. These investments need to continue to increase the capacity of these services, and ensure the momentum towards health system improvements that address long-standing inequities and achieve better Aboriginal health outcomes.

NACCHO believes that the ACCHS sector has created a nationally coordinated and integrated primary health care system for Aboriginal peoples for decades and is far in advance of mainstream general practices in this regard. Through this process the ACCHS has built significant infrastructure throughout Australia. This existing 'national infrastructure' readily lends itself to supporting and strengthening integrated and accessible services for Aboriginal Peoples. Having equitable access to all reform funding sources will ensure the ACCHS can

further enhance both infrastructure and services in the pursuit of better Aboriginal health outcomes.

Therefore, NACCHO believes that the ACCH Sector can significantly value-add to the Australian Government proposed investments towards a better-integrated primary health care system, by building on this 'national infrastructure' and utilising strategies based on existing evidence.

NACCHO acknowledges the Governments intent to ensure the responsiveness of mainstream general practices towards Aboriginal peoples in order to close the gap in Aboriginal health disparity. In moving towards this needed activity, NACCHO believes there are ways to improve access for Aboriginal peoples to both mainstream and ACCHSs. We propose a way forward to achieve this.

### **NACCHO Position regarding the establishment of Medicare Locals**

Therefore, NACCHO's position is that:

1. NACCHO is represented on the Transition Committee, as it requires NACCHO's skills and expertise to address Aboriginal health effectively with the implementation of the reforms;
2. There be established, specific Primary Health Care Organisations in urban, regional and remote regions throughout Australia to provide dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health functions pertaining to the integration and coordination of primary health care services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. These 'Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander PHCO's' would function for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders in regional planning/development, coordination and consistent and standardised approaches to: quality improvement/safety; primary health care integration; regulation compliance; performance management and identification of areas of "market failure" and action to address service access gaps.
3. NACCHO should be afforded resources for the detailed articulation of this proposal. Specifically, NACCHO seeks funding to develop and implement a transition strategy to enable/ provide:
  - a. A sufficient timeframe to consult with our Sector regarding the reforms and to synthesize this information into a report. NACCHO will then provide Government decision makers with an analysis of the key issues involved for the ACCHS sector in establishing Medicare Locals and a practical plan for involvement, development and implementation of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australian PHCOs- that support comprehensive Primary health Care to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population.
  - b. A discussion of the key strategic and organisational issues required to transition existing ACCHS network infrastructure into a new level of operation required from MLs and for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australian PHCOs.
  - c. A guide to the practical steps involved for all levels of the ACCH sector in the establishment of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Australian PHCOs and

their intersection with ML's - eg Boundaries, Partnerships, Governance, Membership etc,

4. The ACCH Sector will identify how we will strengthen our networks and relationships, and review our operations so we are actively engaged in the new health environment created through the reform process.
5. The ACCHS sector be given the opportunity to submit expressions of interest to develop specific Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Organisations in addition to the 15 Medicare Locals by July 2011.
6. In addition to the establishment of APHCOs NACCHO continues to support the need for a National Aboriginal Health Authority which would be the principal funder of the APHCOs and oversee the development of Aboriginal community controlled health services and a more responsive health system through the nation. NACCHO will need to be involved in further negotiation with the government in order to establish the NAHA.