

## **MEDIA RELEASE**

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### **CALL FOR NATIONAL ACTION TO TACKLE INDIGENOUS KIDNEY DISEASE**

Kidney disease is a silent killer of Indigenous Australians. It impacts regardless of locality and people often have few symptoms until they need to have dialysis.

At a Parliament House event this morning to mark World Kidney Day, Kidney Health Australia was joined by the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee and the Australian & New Zealand Society of Nephrology (ANZSN), to highlight the critical impact of chronic kidney disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Anne Wilson, CEO Kidney Health Australia, said the statistics are staggering and clearly demonstrate that there is not enough being done to effectively address the issue.

“Kidney disease is a major health issue facing Indigenous Australians and is leaving a catastrophic mark on families and communities,” said Ms Wilson, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are almost four times more likely to die with kidney disease as a cause of death than non-Indigenous Australians, and research shows that nine out of ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have CKD may be unaware that they have the disease.”

Each State and Territory manages access to renal dialysis and transplant services differently. This creates particular challenges for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, who are much more likely to live in remote areas, with the nearest renal service often being across a state boundary. Patients may be required to relocate hundreds or thousands of kilometres away to a totally unfamiliar city to access lifesaving treatment. This is a cause of confusion and distress.

“We’re calling on the Federal Government to demonstrate strong leadership on this critical issue,” continued Ms Wilson.

“We need a coordinated national approach and a focus on prevention, early detection, and intervention – Kidney Health Australia believes this can be achieved through the development of the implementation plan under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.”

Indigenous social justice and health advocate, Professor Tom Calma AO, Founder and Member of Close the Gap Steering Committee, spoke at this morning’s event about the progress and priorities to close the gap in Indigenous life expectancy, highlighting the significant levels of undetected treatable and preventable chronic conditions, such as kidney disease that impact on life expectancy.

“Federal, State, and Territory Governments need to partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to develop intervention strategies that must include a much greater focus on kidney health education and access to appropriate primary health care services to detect, treat, and manage these conditions,” said Professor Calma.

Professor Alan Cass, President of the Australian and New Zealand Society of Nephrology, echoed the call for urgent government-led action towards overcoming the issue.

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“With 60,000 Indigenous Australians currently affected by kidney disease, and almost 2,000 of them relying on dialysis or a kidney transplant to stay alive, there is a dire need for better renal health care options and improved accessibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities,” he said.

“The situation in Indigenous communities is unsustainable. Many renal units, especially for patients from regional and remote areas, are operating at, or beyond capacity. Crucial support services and kidney health education materials, in formats that are accessible for people who often have poor literacy skills, are lacking,” he added, “We need to act to prevent severe kidney disease, so we can reduce the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders needing renal dialysis treatment. This can only be done with targeted investment to support early identification and effective, best-practice management. State and federal governments, health services and community organisations will need to come together to achieve this.”

This morning’s event will be followed by a roundtable attended by members of parliament, key kidney experts, services providers and decision makers to discuss challenges and models of care for frontline impact. The outcomes of which will be made public in the coming months when tabled in Parliament.

Kidney Health Australia recently presented its [submission on Indigenous kidney health issues](#) and later appeared in front of the Senate Select Committee on Health. The full submission is available for download at [kidney.org.au](http://kidney.org.au).

*Kidney Health Australia is a national health care charity with a vision 'to save and improve the lives of Australians affected by kidney disease'. As the national peak body, Kidney Health Australia promotes good kidney health through delivery of programs in education, advocacy, research and support.*

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