



CENTRAL
AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL
CONGRESS
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
ICN 7823

Board Communiqué

ISSUE 46: MARCH 2022

Werte!

The following topics were discussed at the last Congress Board of Director's Meeting, held on 24 February 2022:

- Office Bearers Appointed
- Business Services and Human Resources Reports
- Approved Research Projects
- Congress Arrulenge History Project - Culturally Appropriate Research
- **CEO's Report to the Board**
 - COVID-19 Update
 - COVID Outbreak in Central Australia
 - Desert Funerals
 - 127 Todd Street - Meeting with the Mayor
 - Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS)
 - Transition to Community Control - Yulara, Kaltukatjara and Imanpa

The next Congress Board of Director's Meeting will be held on 14 April 2022



Office Bearers Appointed

At the first meeting of the year, the Member Directors appoint the office bearer positions (Chairperson and Deputy Chairperson). The Board is pleased to announce that Graham Dowling was elected to continue as the Chairperson in 2022. Ebony Miller was elected to be Deputy Chairperson and the Board thanked Dorethea Randall for her service as Deputy Chairperson for the previous year. The other Member Directors are Dorethea Randall (Remote), Joseph Hayes, Thomas Coelli (Youth) and Taren Williams (Remote) and newly appointed Tristrum Watkins and Greg Drew. Complimenting member directors are three independent directors Dr Peter O'Mara (Primary Health Care), Leanne Milligan (Finance) and Leon Chapman (General). Appointments were also made to the Finance Risk and Audit, Clinic, Research and Governance subcommittees.

Business Services and Human Resources Reports

The pandemic continues to have a noticeable impact on both income and recruitment, with Medicare income still reflecting the decline in the number of people accessing clinics for things like health checks. This is evident across health services throughout the country.

Similarly, there continue to be issues with recruitment and retention. Congress is working hard to find solutions despite the continued critical shortage of nurses in Australia. This includes the continued workforce plan to develop qualified clinical Aboriginal staff.

In line with Congress' commitment to work health and safety, an external audit was done resulting in a risk rated action plan being in place to ensure we meet ISO standards. A consultant will be employed to assist with the action plan.

Approved Research Projects

The Directors approved Congress' participation in the following new research projects:

- Primary Care Rural Innovative Multidisciplinary Models (PRIMM) Grant Opportunity (Working Title Managing Persistent Pain in Alice Springs and Barkly Regions)
- Examining the impact on heat on health service utilisation in remote central Australia to inform adaptation strategies, Menzies School of Health Research
- Evaluation of impact of Territory Kidney Care (TKC) systems on chronic kidney disease (CKD) identification and management in Northern Territory (NT), Menzies School of Health Research
- Towards improved prenatal care in rural Australia through better point of care testing and empowering of primary healthcare services, University of South Australia
- CRE for Strengthening Health Systems in Remote Australia (CRESTRA)
- Intergenerational Health and Mental Health Study (IHMHS)

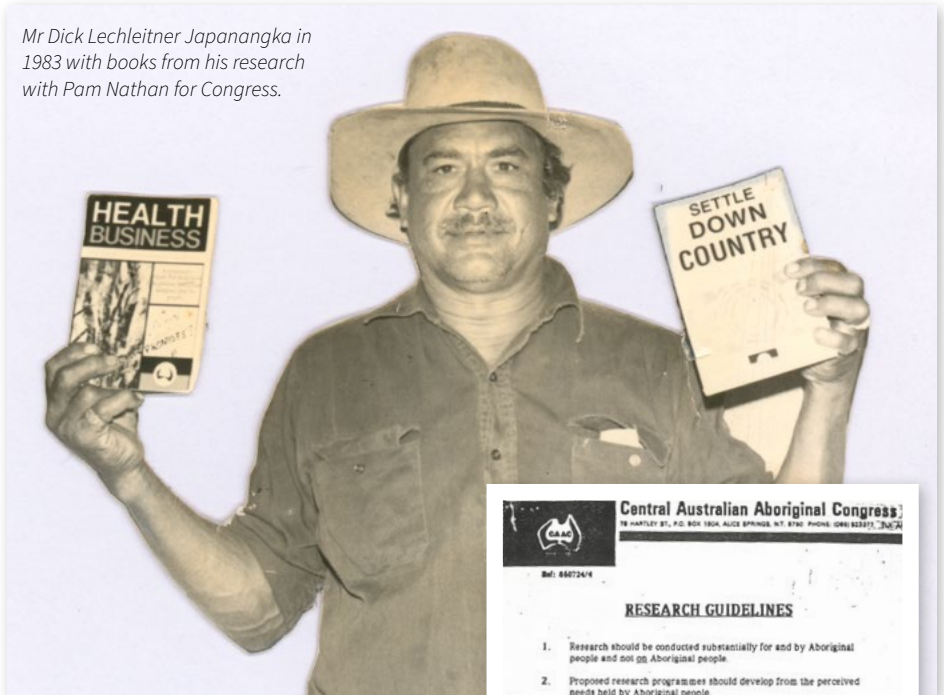
Congress Arrulenge History Project - Culturally Appropriate Research

Nhenhe unte areme photo ante pipe mape Congress Arrurlenye-ntyete. Congress-le alhengke areme tyerrtye apmere arenye mape ante tyerrtye arrpenhe areye. Mwantye-le araye photo nhenhe mape tyerrtye-itethe-kwenye mape-arlke.

Here you can see photographs and documents from the history of Congress. Congress pays respect to traditional owners and to the wider community. Be mindful that these pictures may include deceased people.

Congress has worked for many decades to improve the way that research is done in central Australia. Wisdom, advice and advocacy about good ways to do research has come from listening to what community people say.

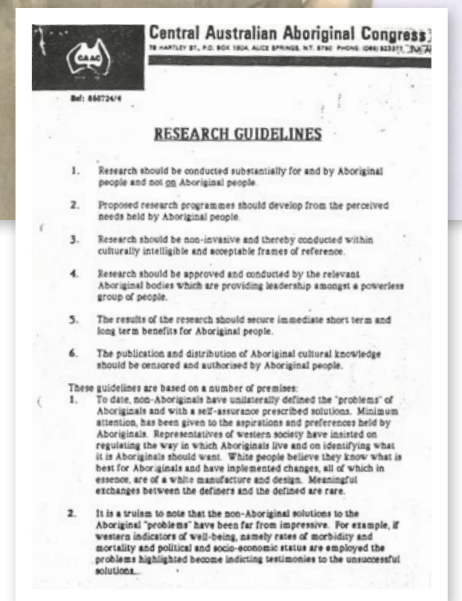
Mr Dick Lechleitner Japanangka in 1983 with books from his research with Pam Nathan for Congress.



Right: These are the first research guidelines developed by Congress, in 1982. They still capture key requirements for good research on Aboriginal matters.

Congress first gave advice to researchers in 1982. Congress CEO John Liddle and Deputy CEO Barb Shaw recommended six guidelines for future research into Aboriginal matters. These were based on experience from two Congress research projects: Health Business and Settle Down Country: Pmere Arlalttyewe. The researchers, Pam Nathan and Dick Lechleitner Japanangka, had listened to the knowledge and experiences of Aboriginal people in many places in central Australia about health and why country is important.

Congress sent these research guidelines to the Australian Institute for Aboriginal Studies (now AIATSIS) in Canberra and arranged for them to be presented at the Australian Anthropologists Association conference in Sydney. Four years later there was a national conference in Alice Springs on improving Aboriginal health. Aboriginal delegates spoke about the need for better research practice. They led the conference to recommend that the National Health and Medical Research Council develop ethical guidelines for health research involving Aboriginal people.



The Congress guidelines were a landmark in the struggle for Aboriginal empowerment in many fields of research. Dr Jocelyn Davies, a geographer who now works with the Congress Arrulenge (History Project), says she didn't know about Congress in 1990 when she first read the guidelines. She said "Back then, the Congress guidelines were unique and they were a beacon. They showed me what I needed to learn. They are still relevant. They still point to what is important for good research."

Congress recently built on its experience with guidelines for research through the Doing It Right (Aremella Arratyenye-ileme) Research Project. Late last year Congress published [a new guide for researchers](#) on how to work safely, respectfully and appropriately in research in Central Australia. Once again, this guidance has come from listening to community

members' experiences, expectations and cultural protocols.

Name and image used with permission of a son of Mr Lechleitner.

CEO's Report to the Board

COVID-19 Update

The Congress Vaccine Acceleration Program (VAP) was undertaken in the three-months prior to Christmas with 12 additional vaccination nurses and 24 local Aboriginal community engagement officers with funding from the Commonwealth health department through NACCHO. The VAP and the first COVID-19 outbreak in the Northern Territory resulted in an increase of first and second doses of the vaccine. This program was recently re-funded and is continuing into 2022 with a focus on third doses (especially in older clients) and children's vaccinations.

This is having some success. Rates of third doses (previously known as 'boosters') are not yet being reported through the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) but Congress data reflects that 76% of Aboriginal people aged over 80 and 60% of Aboriginal people aged between 60 and 79 have had three doses. Third dose rates are currently very low in younger people.

COVID Outbreak in Central Australia

It took very little time from the borders opening on 20 December for Omicron to hit Alice Springs. Congress lobbied the NT Government to public announce a New Year's Eve exposure site but this was not done quickly enough and people who were exposed had travelled back to communities, resulting in a large number of infections. The NT Government failed to instigate their *Test, Trace, Isolate and Quarantine (TTIQ) policy* which resulted in further spread and infections.

In response to the rapid spread of the virus, Congress started a testing and contact tracing program, working hard to identify cases so that people could access care, isolate and attempt to slow the rates of infection. This included centralising town services through Gap Clinic to ensure sufficient resources for the response. This effort was maintained for several weeks, after which the focus had to shift from mass testing to providing outreach care and treatment for those people who were COVID-19 positive and at risk of becoming very unwell.

Congress has continued to lobby the NT Government (directly and publicly) to follow their Test Trace Isolate Quarantine policy including removing positive people from overcrowded houses to slow the spread of the virus and the establishment of large scale appropriate isolation facilities where people can freely move around. Further lobbying included the critical shortages of Rapid Antigen Tests (RATs) for in testing close contacts early, and the equity of access to medication.

Another major issue of concern is the under reporting of COVID related deaths in Central Australia which Congress has also advocated about. This has resulted in an independent review by the Office of the Chief Health Officer of all deaths that have occurred since late December.

Congress is concerned that the failure of appropriate action of the NT Government, and the under reporting is resulting in complacency amongst Aboriginal people about COVID. Congress continues to advocate the NT Government and communicate the serious nature of COVID, especially for the unvaccinated, and the importance of having three vaccination doses.

Desert Funerals

Desert Funerals is a new culturally appropriate funeral service based in Alice Springs that will also service remote communities. Desert Funerals provides

culturally sensitive funeral services. These services include arranging a pastor, funeral ceremony and burial either on Country or in Alice Springs. This is a very exciting development for Central Australia.

You can get more information at www.desertfunerals.com.au

127 Todd Street – Meeting with the Mayor

The Congress Chairperson, Graham Dowling had a meeting with Alice Springs Mayor Matt Patterson about support from the Alice Springs Town Council (ASTC) for our 127 Todd Street development. The Mayor was briefed about what is proposed for the site. Positively, the Mayor indicated that the ASTC will do what it can to support our need for funding including joint lobbying the Federal Government.

Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS)

The national TIS CEO Meeting was held on 15 February, with the announcement that the program will continue with an additional \$5 million national funding, distributed via direct tender. Changes to the funding regions being based on the Indigenous Regions used by the ABS could be a challenge due to the size of Central Australia as the funding may be required to reach across a larger geographic area made more resource heavy to service due to its remoteness.

Transition to Community Control – Yulara, Kaltukatjara and Imanpa

We have recruited a new transition manager to assist the ongoing project to move Yulara, Kaltukatjara and Imanpa communities to a community controlled health service model. Sarena Ruediger is a very experienced public health nurse who has worked in this region, even speaking some Pitjantjara. Community consultations for this project will commence soon.



CONGRESS
VACCINE
CLINIC

KEEP OUR COMMUNITY STRONG!

CUZ CONGRESS SAYS GET

VACCINATED

3

DOSES



LET'S BEAT COVID-19!

Being fully vaccinated is the best thing you can do to stop COVID making you very sick - and even dying. Fully vaccinated means having 3 needles if you are 16 years and older and 2 needles for kids 5 to 16 years old.

Vaccinating our kids is really important because lots of them are bringing home COVID. So getting your little ones protected also keeps your whole mob safe.

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