



CENTRAL  
AUSTRALIAN  
ABORIGINAL  
CONGRESS  
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION  
ICN 7823

# Board Communiqué

## ISSUE 49: AUGUST 2022

## Werte!

The following topics were discussed at the most recent meeting of the Congress Board of Directors, held on 4 August 2022:

- Business Services and Human Resources Report
- Research Applications
- Todd Street Project
- Farewell Sheralee Taylor
- Medical Registrars pass exams
- **CEO's Report to the Board**
  - Address to the NT Clinical Senate
  - COVID-19 Update
  - Youth Crime
  - Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA)
  - Stronger Futures Legislation
  - Alukura Review Update

The next meeting of the Congress Board of Directors will be held on 29 September 2022.

### Business Services and Human Resources Report

Congress remains solvent and compliant with a solvency ratio of 1.62. The Congress Board of Directors considered the preliminary end of financial year report which will now go to the auditors. It is showing a good result for a break even budget. It is noted in the last year that petrol and motor vehicle expenses increased, and personal protective equipment (PPE) and medical supplies expenditure also increased due to COVID 19 infection control requirements.

Congress currently employs over 500 staff.

The internal audit schedule was noted. Congress has current accreditation using the International Organisation for Standardisation (ISO) standards, with an audit scheduled for reaccreditation in November.

### Research Applications

The Board approved the following research projects:

1. *Contemporary lessons from a history of Aboriginal, women's and generalist community health services in Australia 1970- 2020*; University of Adelaide, Prof. Fran Baum
2. *Culturally Appropriate Screening Technology for Mental Health Disorders and Protective Factors in Indigenous Australians: Revision and Validation of the Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklists and the Cultural Resilience Scale*; The Jilya Institute; Greg Dear
3. *Additional Child Care Subsidy (child wellbeing) – Certificate length and*

*language*; The Social Research Centre, Natasha McDonald

4. *Parenting Under Pressure (PUP): Qualitative evaluation of animations*

5. *CAAHSN RART 3 VLCD Project*

*The Research Policy and Procedure and Research Publication and Authorship Policy* were recently updated and were approved by the Board at this meeting.

### Todd Street Project

Consultant Geoff Hayter attended the Board meeting via zoom to report on the Todd Street development project. The design is now 75% complete but due to an increase in building material costs, the cost estimate for the project has increased. Options to rectify this are currently being considered which need to be decided before design is complete.

A project manager has been engaged and Green Star certification through the Green Building Council of Australia is being sought. Through consultation it has been decided that an existing piece of art will be purchased rather than commissioned for the exterior of the building, and a complete list of furniture requirements has been written.

A cost benefit analysis has also been finalised including health outcomes and economic analysis.

Subject to a recommendation from the Board, the project will be ready to go to tender in January 2023.

### Farewell Sheralee Taylor

Sheralee Taylor, General Manager Child, Youth & Family Services Division, regretfully announced her resignation from Congress

to take on the role of Chief of Staff for Hon Malarndirri McCarthy. Sheralee strongly believes in the importance of Aboriginal people in politics and the Board thanks her for her service and commitment to Congress.

### Medical Registrars pass exams

The Congress Board of Directors congratulates our current group of medical registrars on passing their exams. Congratulations to Jess Johannsen, Laura Grant and Eleanor Woodward on this notable achievement.

### CEO's Report to the Board

CEO Donna Ah Chee provided the following updates at the meeting:

#### Address to the NT Clinical Senate

Congress presented our response to the COVID-19 pandemic so far to the NT Clinical Senate. The Clinical Senate is an important high level body formed by the NT Minister for Health to provide advice about the health system in the NT. This particular meeting focused on the impact of COVID and its implications for the future.

Congress presented our response to the pandemic in four phases:

1. 'The coming of COVID' in the early months of 2020
2. 'Waiting and Planning' which stretched from early 2020 until early 2021
3. 'Vaccination', beginning with the roll out of vaccines in early 2021 and continuing until today
4. 'Outbreak' when widespread community transmission of the virus followed the lifting of travel and other public health restrictions in the last days of 2021.

Congress also made four recommendations during the presentation:

- resourcing of Aboriginal community

controlled health services to deal with ongoing effects of the pandemic including workforce; communicable disease control measures; and long-COVID

- establishment of regional isolation facilities given the very high number of Aboriginal people unable to isolate safely at home during future outbreaks
- implementation of the recommendations of the Senate Select Committee on COVID-19, particularly about establishing an Australian Centre for Disease Control to improve Australia's pandemic preparedness; workforce; and data
- appointment of an independent evaluation of the NT health system response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

#### COVID-19 Update

Australia is now in the midst of the third wave of infection due to the BA4/5 Omicron sub-variants.

The good news so far is that the hospitalisations in the NT are still less than half their previous peak in the first Omicron wave in February. This is largely due to high levels of vaccination plus good access to treatment such as Paxlovid which is very effective. Congress has been providing care and advice to clients who register as having COVID-19 through the NTG website or through our service, ensuring access to treatment is gained quickly where appropriate. There have also been few additional deaths here in the NT in this current wave. It appears that BA4/5 has not really spread into the Aboriginal community to any significant extent at this stage but it may be that this will occur with more time. This is what happened with the first Omicron wave – it took longer to spread into Aboriginal communities.

Omicron and other respiratory viruses are affecting Congress staffing levels every day. In order to manage the workforce crisis

that COVID causes to staffing shortages and to provide care equally to clients in all town areas the decision was made to close each clinic in town one day per week for a four week period from August 8. Details are available on our website and this was communicated to clients through our phone messages, signage, Facebook, website and other networks.

Services (including transport) have been available for clients in town every day, and no remote services have been affected. Gap Clinic Pharmacy has remained open every day.

#### Youth Crime

In an effort to help reduce the impact of youth crime in Alice Springs, Congress and several other local Aboriginal organisations, have written to a number of Commonwealth and Northern Territory Ministers and MPs with strategic proposals to both address the underlying issues contributing to offending behaviour and develop an immediate improvement in the service response. Congress is currently considering what role it can take in further helping to address these issues in the community.

#### Australian Digital Health Agency (ADHA)

Following on from the visit to Alice Springs by members of the ADHA in May, members of the Congress Executive were invited to attend the joint meeting of the Board and their five advisory committees in July to share a presentation on the issues faced in remote service provision.

The meeting was a significant coming together of the governing bodies of the Agency and included leaders from all relevant areas of the Agency's work – clinicians, consumer advocates, technology, privacy and security specialists and experts in governance, risk and financial management. It also included Prof Brendan Murphy, the head of the Commonwealth department of health and a representative

from each Australian jurisdiction who together sit as the ADHA Jurisdictional Advisory Committee. The CEO of the National Broadband Network Company (NBN Co) was also in attendance – he has operational responsibility to ensure good connectivity to the internet for all Australians.

Congress' presentation focused on the key issue of equity of access to a suitable high-level connection to the internet. This is the biggest barrier in remote communities and is expected to be solved regardless of the investment required to make it happen. The presentation also addressed the issue around Aboriginal people not always having a correct Individual Health Identifier (IHI) meaning that they cannot have a My Health record. Without a My Health Record, the capacity to provide quality health care to someone who is mobile is very much restricted. Proposed solutions to this issue were well received by the meeting.

### Stronger Futures Legislation

The Stronger Futures Act sunset clause lapsed on 17 July. Since then, there have been significant increases in both take away alcohol sales and domestic violence incidents. No communities in Central

Australia have opted-in to be an Alcohol Protected Area. Congress has continued to advocate for an “opt-out” rather than an “opt-in” system relating to this legislation. Despite the Chief Minister advising that there has been community consultation, Congress continues to advocate for greater transparency of the consultation process including the inclusion of women and young people. At the end of July Congress attended a meeting with federal ministers and other signatories of a letter of concern from key Aboriginal organisations. Congress is calling for a data monitoring group to be established with access to key real time data including representatives from Aboriginal organisations, police, NT Department of Health, Territory Families and Commonwealth government agencies.

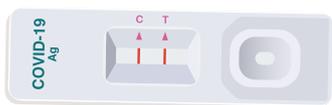
### Alukura Review Update

Congress is steadily working on the implementation of the major recommendation of the Alukura review – the re-establishment of the Alukura Midwifery Group Practice in partnership with Alice Springs Hospital. The internal working group continues to meet, led by Dr Josie Douglas and we are receiving excellent support from Dr Yvette Roe and Prof Sue Kildea from the CDU, Molly Wardaguga Research Centre.

The evidence is very clear that this model of care improves outcomes and leads to more healthy pregnancies, less pre-term labour, improved birth weights and less interventions in the birthing process. Congress knows how important these outcomes are for the long term health of our people and the primary prevention of chronic disease in later life.

In October, a conference led by the Molly Wardaguga Research Centre in partnership with Congress will bring together researchers, community representatives, midwives, obstetricians and other clinicians to focus on best practice maternity models of care to ensure the best start to life for First Nations babies and communities. The conference will showcase what our sector is doing in different parts of the country to improve birthing based largely on the very successful Midwifery Group Practice model that ensures continuity of care in the birthing process. Additionally, high level policy makers have been invited to participate, including in a forum designed at hearing their commitment to the movement and its strategic direction.

## TESTED POSITIVE FOR COVID?



### Here's what to do next in 3 easy steps!

- 1** Isolate from others, tell people you've been around that you have COVID and get ready to stay home for 7 days. *You might need friends or family to get you food and supplies as you can't go shopping or visiting anyone.*
- 2** Register your result online at <https://health.nt.gov.au/covid-19/testing/register-positive-test>  
*If you can't register yourself online, call us on 1800 514 400 so we can help.*
- 3** In the online form, choose Congress as your health service. *A nurse will look at your health information to see what risk factors you have. A doctor or nurse will get in touch to provide care and treatment if appropriate.*

It's important you register or call the day you test positive. Some people will be able to have a medicine called an anti-viral, and this needs to start quickly to best help. A Congress doctor will tell you if you should have this medicine, which is free for Aboriginal people who are eligible for it.

If you need a doctor or medicine for covid or any other health matter while you are in isolation, you can call your clinic on 1800 142 900.

Kele Mwarre.