



CENTRAL
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CONGRESS
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Board Communiqué

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Werte!

The following topics were discussed at the most recent meeting of the Congress Board of Directors, held on 23 November 2022:

- Remembering Mr R Hoosan
- Business Services and Human Resources Reports
- Cyber Security at Congress
- Board Performance Action Plan
- Achievements against the 5-year Action Framework
- **CEO's Report to the Board**
 - COVID-19 Update
 - Federal Government Funding Confirmed
 - Congress' 50th Anniversary in 2023
 - Congress founder appointed as history advisor
 - Alcohol monitoring group formed
 - NT Diabetes Summit
 - Transition to Community Control update
 - Children and Families Tripartite Forum meeting
 - NACHO Update
 - Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) evaluation meeting
 - Joint Congress and Remote Health Boards Meeting
 - Productivity Commission Evaluation of the Closing the Gap Strategy
 - AGM Wrap Up
- **Message From the Chair**

The next meeting of the Congress Board of Directors will be held on 22 February 2023.

Remembering Mr R Hoosan

The Congress Board would like to acknowledge the sudden and sad passing of Mr R Hoosan. We collectively send our thoughts, strength and love to Mr Hoosan's family and those closest to him for the heartbreak they are feeling.

Mr Hoosan was a member of the Congress male health subcommittee and then advisory committee from 2015. His leadership on the role of fathers, men's role in domestic violence and all cultural matters relating to male health was invaluable. During the pandemic his role as a church leader was important in assisting to counter some of the misinformation about COVID. He was a man who was known for his deep compassion, care and concern for all human beings.

He embodied enthusiasm and positive energy no matter how serious the issues the community was dealing with, and his generous spirit was uplifting for all who worked with him. He had an infectious smile and was always supportive and encouraging to those around him. He was a loving family man who cared deeply about all young people and their future. Mr Hoosan was a leader in both worlds and was just as effective in parliament house as he was sitting in the dirt out bush with Aboriginal people. He was deeply concerned about the plight of remote communities and the need to support Aboriginal people living out bush, especially his beloved community of Aputula.

Mr Hoosan was a powerful force for our community. He was a leader, advocate and changemaker who was respected and admired by those who had the good fortune of meeting him. His contribution to the Aboriginal community, land rights, community safety and health and cultural maintenance was very significant. His tragic loss at the peak of his influence will be felt for years to come.

Business Services and Human Resources Reports

The Business Services Report showed that lower than usual income from Medicare has impacted the organisation's current financial position. We have seen this over recent years as people tended to stay away from the clinic for non-urgent reasons due to COVID-19. Income received through Medicare allows for the reinvestment into programs and services for the community and as such is vital for the organisation's sustainability. Additionally, Medicare income is linked to the delivery of important health services to allow free access to these services for patients. Annual health checks are one source of Medicare income, and the arrival of the new season 2023 Deadly Choices shirts should see an increase in people attending for these important preventative consultations in the new year. *Have you had your health check?*

Highlighted in the Human Resources report were a reduction in the rate of staff turnover and appointment of a new recruitment coordinator, both positive in the face of a difficult workforce climate affecting services all across the country.

Cyber Security at Congress

The Board were given an update on the measures that Congress has in place to reduce the risk of cyber security breaches. Management of cyber security is a priority at Congress, and the organisation is ensuring resources are available for investment into measures to protect organisational and client information. The IT team employs staff with specific qualifications and makes use of a highly experienced consultant with a background in cyber security in the commercial sector. Congress participates in a sector meeting on the topic, ensuring up to



date knowledge on risks and management tools. Practices such as penetration testing, multi-factor authentication and secure AWS storage are in place, and these are very successful in preventing breaches and monitoring vulnerabilities. Staff training is paramount, and Congress is currently selecting a provider to ensure that all staff have the most up to date training available on the issue.

Board Performance Action Plan

The Board was presented with an action plan resulting from an external review of Board performance conducted earlier this year. The Board is committed to strong governance, and look forward to reporting on the implementation of this plan. The plan includes things like reviewing the skills matrix to ensure that the Board is equipped with appropriate skills to steer the organisation.

Achievements against the 5-year Action Framework

Congress' work to achieve strategic objectives is measured through reporting against a 5-year action framework. Some of the key achievements from the 2021-2022 period were:

- Leading the way through the COVID-19 pandemic
- Increase in funding
- Maintaining Aboriginal employment and a skilled and professional workforce
- Reduced waiting times in town clinics
- Establishing regional podiatry/diabetes nurse educator (DNE) services
- Child immunisation rates
- Action on reducing smoking rates
- Number of clients receiving social-cultural support services
- Greater access to the NDIS for our clients with disabilities
- Support for local Indigenous Businesses
- Congress History project
- Progress towards implementation of new

Human Resource Management systems

- Preschool Transport Service
- Launch of the new website

CEO's Report to the Board

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

COVID-19 Update

The new wave of COVID-19 has come to the Northern Territory, meaning that we have to remain careful and protect ourselves and our loved ones from the illness, especially with fewer public health measures in place and lots of travel related to the holiday season.

Recent data shows that the death rate from COVID for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 1.7 times higher than non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Because of this, access to the medication Paxlovid was extended to all Aboriginal people over the age of 30 living in central Australia, regardless of whether they have chronic health conditions.

This treatment is very effective at reducing hospitalisations and death, but needs to be taken as early as possible in the illness. Apart from being fully vaccinated and avoiding exposure by wearing masks, the best thing you can do is test yourself if you are unwell or exposed to someone with the virus. If you test positive, contact the clinic so you can get access to this very effective treatment as soon as possible.

Federal Government Funding Confirmed

\$19.5 million of infrastructure funding promised as part of the 2022 Labor election campaign was confirmed in early November. Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy and Member for Lingiari Marion Scrymgour, visited Alice Springs and Mutitjulu community to make the announcements.

Congress Chair, Graham Dowling, Director

Joseph Hayes, Mutitjulu Health Board Director Natalie Ray Malbunka, Congress CEO Donna Ah Chee and Congress General Manager Health Services Josie Douglas were present for the announcement of \$8 million for the building of a new Mutitjulu Health Service Clinic. A community celebration followed where young Director Natalie Ray Malbunka stepped up and responded to the announcement on behalf of the Mutitjulu Health Board.

The following day at Gap Clinic, the Ministers publicly announced funding of \$10 million for the Health Hub Todd Street development and a further \$1.5 million for the refurbishment of the clinic at Ltyentye Apurte.

We welcome this commitment to Aboriginal health and to the Central Australian community.

Congress' 50th Anniversary in 2023

As Congress heads into its 50th year, plans are underway to ensure that the anniversary is celebrated appropriately. A working group has been formed comprising of Aboriginal staff, Board members and other key staff, meeting regularly to steer planning of accessible community activities and events. Updates will be provided as planning progresses for this exciting and significant milestone.

Alcohol monitoring group formed

The lifting of alcohol restrictions due to the cessation of the Stronger Future Alcohol reforms in July has created the need to monitor and respond to impacts, particularly increased levels of harm associated with greater access to alcohol.

Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians Linda Burney, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians Malarndirri McCarthy and NT Chief Minister Natasha Fyles have committed to the establishment of an Alcohol Monitoring Group to monitor both NT and national data and advise on concerns and possible actions.



Above: Photos taken at Federal Government Funding Announcements

NT Diabetes Summit

In early November, Alice Springs hosted the NT Diabetes Summit at the Convention Centre. CEO Donna Ah Chee delivered the keynote address in the opening session talking about Congress' approach to diabetes.

Recent research shows that Central Australia has amongst the highest prevalence rate of diabetes in the world with 40% of Aboriginal people over 18 in remote communities having diabetes. In light of these increasing rates, the keynote a holistic comprehensive primary health care approach which includes addressing the social and political drivers of diabetes by reducing poverty and inequality; addressing food security; and reducing alcohol availability through population-level interventions.

Transition to Community Control update

Congress is now in the implementation stage of transitioning the health centres at Yulara, Kaltukatjara and Imanpa communities to a community controlled health service model. Key activities and milestones are on track to meet planned transition dates in early and mid 2023.

Community consultation and engagement has been a fundamental part of this process, and reception by the communities has been very positive. A Transition Health Advisory Group has been established in Imanpa, where a resolution in support of Congress was also passed at a Local Authority Meeting. Community meetings have been the preferred method of engagement in Kaltukatjara with strong support for Congress expressed by the majority of community members.

Children and Families Tripartite Forum meeting

The Children and Families Tripartite Forum held a meeting in Mparntwe on 1 November. During this meeting, the community sector expressed concern about the reporting on the implementation of the Royal Commission recommendations and asked for further explanation in a number of key areas.

The Minister for Youth Laruen Moss and Minister for Police Kate Worden joined the meeting where the issue of youth crime was discussed in detail, as was the lack of attendance in schools, as the issues are related.

NACCHO Update

The NACCHO AGM, Special General Meeting, members meeting and conference was held on 18 to 20 October at the national convention centre in Canberra.

There were some fantastic sessions at the conference, including the session led by Pat Anderson on the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the proposal for the Voice. The proposed referendum for the Voice and the other key parts of the Uluru Statement from the Heart on truth telling and treaty have the full and unequivocal support from NACCHO.

Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) evaluation meeting

On 4 November Congress met with IAHP Yarns Evaluation team who are undertaking an evaluation of the IAHP - the program within the Indigenous Health Division that funds Aboriginal community controlled health services.

Congress provided information about the critical role that the IHD and the IAHP play in



funding ACCHOS, and in helping to overcome the lack of access to primary health care that Aboriginal people experience. There was also discussion around Medicare, access to grants, and the requirement of additional accountability and transparency, the allocation of resources and development of new programs and services.

Joint Congress and Remote Health Boards Meeting

The joint Congress and Remote Health Boards meeting was held on 6 October, providing an opportunity for our remote directors to speak directly to Congress management on key issues of concern.

A representative from the Dept of Families, Housing and Communities also presented and then answered questions on issues relating to remote housing and child protection. Discussion also included youth crime in Mparntwe, the critical role and employment of Malpas at remote clinics, declining school attendance of young people in remote communities and bilingual education.

Productivity Commission Evaluation of the Closing the Gap Strategy

The Productivity Commission is undertaking a national evaluation of the Closing the Gap Strategy and progress towards the key targets. As part of this evaluation, they visited the NT and met with Congress, AMSANT and other Aboriginal organisations. The main points raised by Congress included the impacts that COVID, alcohol legislative changes, school attendance, food security, housing, employment and early childhood development have on the long-term health outcomes of Aboriginal people.

AGM Wrap Up

The Annual General Meeting (AGM) was held on 24 November 2022. Aunty Sabella Turner gave a warm Welcome to Country and to the members for the AGM. The Chairperson, Graham Dowling and CEO, Donna Ah Chee both gave speeches on the achievements of Congress and the Board over the last financial year (2021-2022).

As Member Directors' terms are for four years with half of the Directors terms expiring every two years, it was an 'off year' for elections so there were no Director's nominations for the members to consider.

Youth Representative Director Thomas Coelli term on the Congress Board expired. He had filled the Youth Representative role as a casual until the 2022. The Congress Members and Directors thanked him for his service on the Congress Board.

It was noted that the Board will try to fill the Youth Representative vacancy until the 2023 AGM, and will also seek to fill the role for four years at the 2023 AGM, and will seek nominations in 2023.

Resolutions passed by the members at the AGM included the acceptance of the Congress Annual Report 2021-2022, including finance, auditor's and director's reports.

Congress members passed a special resolution accepting some amendments to the Rule Book which removed the limit of time that Independent Directors (who are appointed by the Member Directors) can serve. The updated rule book will be lodged with ORIC which will then be made available on the ORIC website.

The Board thanked all members for attending the AGM and look forward to continuing the great successes Congress has achieved to date.

Christmas message from Chairperson, Graham Dowling

On behalf of the Directors I would like to wish all members a very merry Christmas.

We would also like to thank you all for a successful year, successful last Board meeting and most importantly the Annual General Meeting (AGM) which is a fantastic time to connect with our members. The AGM is a time of coming together and celebrating with members the achievements of the 2021- 2022 year.

We also want to acknowledge all staff, town and remote, for their contributions and commitment over the year. It is much appreciated and they are valued. Congress continues to improve and grow and we wish staff, Directors and members all a merry Christmas and a safe festive season. Travel safe and look after yourself and each other. We look forward to seeing you all in the New Year.

**Graham Dowling,
Congress Chairperson**

