



CENTRAL
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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, 8 June 2023

- Happy Birthday Congress!
- Prioritising Staff Safety
- Growth at Congress
- 2023-2024 Budget
- Cyber Security Update
- Transition to Community Control Project Update
- Research Update
- Workforce Crisis
- Urgent Care Health Service
- Alukura Midwifery Group Practice and My Midwives
- Social Issues in Central Australia

The next meeting of the Congress Board of Directors is on 3 August 2023.



Happy Birthday Congress!

On Friday 9 June, Congress held a special event to mark fifty years since the organisation was founded in 1973. The event was centred around sharing outcomes from Congress Arrulenyé (Congress from a long time ago), a study that looked into the organisation's history and the impact it has had on Aboriginal health in Central Australia. Before being walked through the project assets and findings by Ms Acacia Lewis and Dr John Boffa, event attendees were treated to a strong introduction from Congress Chair, Mr Graham Dowling followed by a warm reflection on where it all started from Congress' founder and first CEO, Mr Neville

Perkins AOM, as he recalled the early years of the organisation.

It was wonderful to see so many people there to celebrate, including leaders from Congress' proud fifty year history.

This event kicked off the celebration period for Congress, which will include engagement events with members and clients in town and remote communities. These activities will culminate in a large community celebration in October, which is currently being planned. Stay tuned to our website and facebook page as well as CAAMA radio for more info! We hope to see you there!



Neville Perkins AOM giving a valuable reflection at the anniversary event, on stage with Chair, Graham Dowling.



Happy Birthday Congress! Neville Perkins AOM and Congress Chair, Graham Dowling cutting the birthday cake!

Prioritising Staff Safety

The safety of staff and clients is a key responsibility of the Board of Directors, and is an issue that is taken very seriously. The Board, in conjunction with the Congress Executive Management are currently revisiting the parameters of home visits.

Growth at Congress

Congress is a growing organisation. This is good, but growth does need to be managed well to ensure that it is sustainable, and we have heard from our members and staff about this.

The Board has prioritised rapid growth as one of the key strategic risks for 2023.

Strategies for managing Congress' growth were workshopped with the Board, who will now be receiving regular reports on this.

This exercise ensures that the stability of Congress' core functions – such as clinic operations – are prioritised while growth is managed.

Managing our risks is one of the key responsibilities of the Board and a different strategic risk is workshopped at each Board meeting.

2023-2024 Budget

The Board of Directors approved the budget for the 2023-2024 financial year. Program and associated funding has again increased, and careful fiscal management is key to ensuring that funds are used resourcefully and support service delivery well. The continued investment into Congress is a positive for the community and reflects the importance of the community controlled sector.

Cyber Security Update

As a health service, Congress keeps a lot of sensitive information including health information of our patients. There have been recent instances where organisations have had their computer systems hacked and sensitive information has been stolen. This includes an Aboriginal community controlled health service in Queensland.

In recognition of this, cyber security is now a standing item on the Board agenda which ensures that it is revisited at each meeting. On the 8 June 2023, the Board noted an update from the Chief Information Officer who detailed the various ways that Congress is investing prudently in this space. It was noted that governments are now requiring particular standards of IT security to be met to be eligible for particular funded



“We want our young people to learn about the history of our old people – the stories of resilience, courage and strength. We are grateful for our old people and their contributions,” At the anniversary event Ms Acacia Lewis introduced Congress Arrulenyne, a digital cultural archive and timeline preserving Congress’ history.

programs. Congress’ has been committed to data protection for some time now, which puts us in a good position to meet these expectations.

Transition to Community Control Project Update

The Board received a detailed update about the community consultation which occurred in Kaltukatjara between NT Health and Congress, evidencing that the process is supported and resulting in increasing confidence from community members of Kaltukatjara.

The Board expressed their appreciation and congratulations to staff in the Transition and Health Promotion teams, along with projects leads, for facilitating such a successful consultation and transition to date.

Research Update

The Board supported and approved participation in the following research

projects to be conducted through Congress:

- MIC-Plus: a new diagnostic and treatment platform to guide effective antibiotic therapy; Dr. David De Oliveira.
- Using continuous glucose monitoring and medical yarn-ups (Shared Medical Appointment) in pregnant women with type 2 or gestational diabetes: Protocol for a case study in Central Australia; Dr Valerie Quah.
- Investigating the impacts of alcohol policy changes around Alice Springs: 2022 – 2024; Prof Peter Miller and Congress Team.

Workforce

Health services throughout Australia and finding it hard to find health professionals and unfortunately this includes Congress. Unfortunately, given the number of vacancies in clinical positions, Congress’ Northside Clinic will continue to remain closed for the foreseeable future.

Congress is being impacted significantly by the reduction in GP Registrars (GPRs). To

illustrate this shortage, there would typically be 64 GPRs employed within the Northern Territory. Presently there are only 14 in total, and only two of those are with Congress.

Urgent Care Health Service

Earlier in the year, Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that the government was negotiating with Congress to deliver an Urgent Care Health Service (UCHS) in Alice Springs which would take the pressure off the Alice Springs emergency department.

Negotiations about this continue, supported by the Board. Given the closure of Northside Clinic, the site presents a sound opportunity for the UCHS location. This service is substantially different to the primary health care provided at other Congress clinics, providing an attractive offer for clinical staff with urgent care skills. And, although this service would be to all community members of Alice Springs, Congress’ management of it ensures that it is operated with cultural responsiveness embedded throughout.

Alukura Midwifery Group Practice and My Midwives

For some time Congress has been working to implement a Midwifery Group Practice (MGP) with full birthing rights to Alice Springs Hospital for Alukura clients, but there has been a difficulty in recruiting due to the workforce crisis which has historically prevented this project from progressing.

In Alice Springs and Central Australia, pre-term labour and low birth weight remain a major health problem with around 17% of babies born under 2500 grams. This is a critical area for improvement in Aboriginal health in Central Australia, and has not been improving over the past 20 years. There is very strong evidence that the MGP service model will significantly improve maternity outcomes for mothers and babies and there is now an opportunity to make a big difference through a partnership with My Midwives. Based in Toowoomba, My Midwives is the largest employer of endorsed midwives in Australia. It has been

established since 2010 and has provided care to nearly 3500 women over the last decade. The organisation's track record includes a partnership with the Institute for Urban Indigenous Health in the northern suburbs of Brisbane where a team of six endorsed midwives are credentialed and provide midwifery continuity of care to First Nations women within the Birthing in Our Community model (Brisbane North). This move, endorsed by the Board, is a significant step towards changing the lives of Aboriginal women in the Alice Springs region.

Social Issues in Central Australia

Acting CEO David Busuttill provided an update to the Board about this issue, detailing the data supplied by police that Congress monitors each week. The report indicated that the reductions in crime have continued, and in particular there has been a reduction in property offences. These improvements have been attributed to the effectiveness of the restrictions on alcohol

sales, the incarceration of some of the key offenders and the effectiveness of the Lhere Artepe patrol service.

Congress continues to lobby for restrictions on alcohol sales but also argues for actions that address the underlying social determinants or root causes of the problems Central Australia has been experiencing.

The next meeting of the Congress Board of Directors is on 3 August 2023, followed the next day by annual governance training which this year is being facilitated by the Australian Institute of Company Directors.



Great to see some familiar faces at the anniversary event. Congress Lead Male Cultural Advisor, Michael Liddle, Charlie Maher Snr, and Congress Ingkintja Men's Health Manager, John Liddle.