



CENTRAL
AUSTRALIAN
ABORIGINAL
CONGRESS
ABORIGINAL CORPORATION
ICN 7823

Board Communiqué

ISSUE 54: OCTOBER 2023

Werte!

Here are the latest updates following the Congress Board of Directors meeting held on 28 September 2023:

- Community Celebrates 50 Years of Congress
- Referendum Outcome
- Health Hub Update
- Change of Chairperson
- Annual Financial Statement
- Home Visiting Risk Assessment Tool
- 6 Months Report Against the 5 Year Action Plan
- My Midwives at Congress Alukura
- Research Update
- Director Nominations
- **CEO's Report to the Board**
 - Meeting with Health Minister Mark Butler and NT Primary Health Care Workforce Summit
 - Mparntwe Urgent Care Clinic

The next meeting of the Congress Board of Directors will be held Wednesday 22 November.

The Corporations Annual General Meeting will be held Thursday 23 November

Community Celebrates 50 Years of Congress!

Thank you to all who were able to attend Congress' 50 Years Strong Community Celebration. A great day was had by all who came, with around 2000 people coming through the gates. The event was hosted by the very talented Que Kenny and Nicholas Williams. We were honoured to hear from speakers who were key people in Congress' history, including Mr Neville Perkins, Ms Doreen Abbott, Mr Geoff Shaw and Mr Vincent Forrester, who reminded us of the people and stories from the beginning of Congress. Later in the evening we were treated to some of the best Aboriginal musicians around, including Jason Lee Scott, Paul Ah Chee, Catherine Satour, Blakbela Mujik and Coloured Stone. It was a difficult day for many being the day after the Voice to Parliament referendum was unsuccessful, however feedback was that Congress provided the community with a day to be together, proud and connected. We are grateful to all those who contributed to this event.

Referendum Outcome

As we all know, on 14 October the Referendum to alter the Australian Constitution to recognise First Nations people as well as establish a First Nations Voice to Parliament was defeated. This is a sad day and not the outcome Congress had hoped to see.

Throughout the campaign, Congress supported a 'Yes' vote because we know from our own experience that when our communities have a say in the issues and programs that affect them; the outcomes are better. The Voice would have helped to improve the health of our communities,

building upon successes we have already achieved. It would have made Australia a fairer and more inclusive nation.

However, despite the millions of Australians who voted 'Yes', the rejection of constitutional recognition for First Peoples in the nation's rulebook is a setback for Aboriginal people and for Australia as a whole. We have faced many setbacks before, and we are still here. Resilience in the face of adversity is part of who we are.

Congress continues to support the Uluru Statement from the Heart which first called for the Voice, and send appreciation and respect to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates who met at Uluru in 2017 and drafted this historic document. Their wisdom and generosity will always remain an inspiration.

It is worth remembering that a year ago, two-thirds of Australians were in favour of the Voice. Unfortunately, the 'No' campaign's strategy of misinformation was effective, turning many previously good-willed people against us.

From the 14 October Congress joined other Aboriginal organisations in a Week of Silence to grieve the outcome of the Referendum and reflect on its meaning and significance. This means Congress will not be commenting officially and publicly about the result during this time. Additionally, Aboriginal flags are at flown at half-mast during the week of silence.

Health Hub Update

You may have noticed some action at 127 Todd Street! Local developer ASbuild were successful in winning the tender for the construction of Congress' Health Hub and have taken possession of the site. Excitingly,

demolition has now commenced. We will continue to see changes to the site and will keep members informed of progress accordingly.

Change of Chair

As voted by Congress' Member Directors at their first meeting of the year, this year the Congress Chairperson role was shared. Graham Dowling was appointed Chairperson for the first half of the year, with Ebony Abbott-McCormack in the Deputy Chair role. In August 2023, Ebony took up the Chairperson role and will stay in the seat until the first meeting of 2024, with Director Dowling supporting as Deputy Chair. On behalf of the board, thank you to both for their leadership.

Annual Financial Statement

The 2022-2023 Annual Audited Financial Statements were approved at the September meeting, in advance of the Annual General Meeting in November. The Directors were very complementary of the finance team for their contribution in producing these, noting the very high standard of reporting.

Home Visiting Risk Assessment Tool

The Congress Board were presented with Congress' new Home Visiting Risk Assessment Tool from the Congress Executive team. This is a mechanism for staff to assess and manage safety in home visits and other outreach, encouraging a safer environment for this kind of work. The Board noted that this necessary move is a cultural shift for the organisation in the way that outreach is conducted. Staff safety is paramount and a major responsibility for the Board. The development of this tool was very responsive to concerns that the Board had raised in this area and is an example of Congress' commitment to the safety of its workers.

6 Months Report Against the 5 Year Action Plan

Congress' management delivers an action plan in order to deliver on the strategic objectives set out by the Congress Board.

In the most recent 6-monthly report on this plan, the following achievements were highlighted:

- Despite workforce shortages, individual client numbers have increased, although the number of episodes of care did reduce.
- Funding for service and program delivery across Congress was increased by 3%.
- Congress' advocacy on Alcohol following the cessation of the Stronger Futures legislation strongly influenced the implementation of alcohol supply restrictions, leading to immediate and dramatic falls in alcohol consumption, domestic and family violence, assaults, and property crime in Alice Springs.
- Congress Arruleny (Congress from a long time ago) was successfully launched in conjunction with the celebration of Congress 50th Anniversary in June.
- Congress' dental services have increased, including a collaboration with Alice Springs Family Dental who release one of their employed dentists to provide services at the Congress based dental clinic one day per week. During 2022-23, our dental service delivered over 1,900 episodes of care to Aboriginal clients, almost double the number of 2021-22.
- Congress secured funding for a new phase of the Connected Beginnings program which will assist with integrating our Child Health Team, Transport & Engagement Officers, and PRP Early Years Aboriginal Community Connectors. This will increase our ability to provide timely child health checks and developmental screening for all children, as well as supporting pre-school enrolment.
- The Hot Foot Hotline was developed and has resulted in 40 podiatry consultations per month with clients with chronic disease. Data has shown that 75% of intended remote visits were fulfilled despite drastic workforce shortages. All remote clinics have 'Hot Foot Boxes' supporting wound healing without direct podiatry intervention or need to travel to Alice Springs for care.
- Staff retention has improved, with turnover of all staff reducing from 40% to 33%.
- All Congress clinics maintained accreditation.
- At a time of increased cyber security risks, including breaches impacting organisations in the ACCHS sector, Congress' IT systems have remained secure, owed to a range of initiatives implemented and maintained by Congress' highly skilled IT team.
- Congress Clinical Information Systems have progressed towards merging into a single database. This will better support client care and increase usability for staff. Significant progress has been made during this period with Mutitjulu, Utju and Amoonguna and consolidated into the new Congress Communicare database.
- A Fleet Coordinator has been employed and as a result vehicle servicing has improved. Vehicles speeds are now being monitored and this is resulting in safer driving, cost savings and a reduction in our carbon footprint.

My Midwives at Congress Alukura

Congress has commenced a partnership with MyMidwives to provide the Midwifery Group Practice (MGP) through Alukura Women's Health Service. MyMidwives is an organisation who has proven experience delivering high quality maternity services to First Nations women.

The team have hit the ground running in Alice Springs employing a team of fully endorsed midwives and completing all the required agreements with the Central Australian Health Service so that birthing can re-commence in Alice Springs Hospital with the MGP continuity of care service model.

This is a very welcome development that will improve the health and wellbeing of mothers and babies through the provision of culturally and clinically safe birthing services.

Research

The following research projects were supported by the Board of Directors:

1. *Mapping the landscape of oral health service provision and programming for remote communities in central Australia.*
2. *ED Frequent attenders/care coordination Program: A holistic case management service for Aboriginal ED frequent attendees;* Congress, Dr Sophie Collins.
3. *HTLV-1 Community Survey - Linkage Analysis;* Baker Heart and Diabetes Institute, Professor Tom Marwick.
4. *Using telehealth effectively to ensure the clinical and cultural safety of care for patients requiring complex chronic condition management in the Northern Territory.*

Director Nominations

Thank you to those who nominated. The nominees have been endorsed by the board and information will become available to members as we approach the 2023 Annual General Meeting, scheduled for 23 November 2023.

CEO's report to the Board

Congress CEO Donna Ah Chee provided the following update to the Board of Directors:

Meeting with Health Minister Mark Butler and NT Primary Health Care Workforce Summit

As a result of continued advocacy from AMSANT and Congress, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Aged Care agreed to hold a workforce summit which was held in Alice Springs on 23 August at the Double Tree.

Following the summit, AMSANT and Congress met with Health Minister, the Hon Mark Butler to brief him on the workforce crisis and the key strategies we are advocating to address the situation. It was impressed upon the Minister that the primary health care system is in a state of collapse when it comes to preventive health care. This position was supported with case studies and data from the ACCHS sector. The Minister then heard a comprehensive range of suggested solutions based on the short term, medium term and long-term strategies Congress has previously advocated.

Mparntwe Urgent Care Clinic

Earlier in the year Prime Minister Anthony Albanese announced that Congress was being funded to operate an Urgent Care

Clinic in Alice Springs. The Mparntwe Urgent Care Clinic set to open on 1 November. This clinic will be operating from the Northside Clinic site, after the ongoing closure of Northside Clinic due to the primary health care staffing crisis. Clients living in the Northside area have continued to be cared for by clinicians operating from Gap Clinic, with transport available for those who need it to attend appointments. This will now continue, with town primary healthcare services being adequately provided through Congress' current sites at Gap, Larapinta, Sadadeen, Ingkintja and Alukura.

The Urgent Care Clinic is a very good development for health services in our region. The Mparntwe Urgent Care Clinic will provide free (bulk billed) care for an urgent but not life-threatening illness or injury. That means one that can be managed without a trip to the emergency department, but cannot wait for a regular appointment with a GP. This service will be available to all people who are eligible for Medicare services. It will help improve your access to urgent care away from the hospital and reduce pressure on the hospital's emergency department, making the service better for all.

SAVE THE DATE - AGM

Congress members are invited to attend the corporation's Annual General Meeting.

Thursday 23 November 2023 10am

32 Priest St, Alice Springs

Please refer to the meeting notice and agenda available here.

Refreshments will be provided.