



BOARD COMMUNIQUÉ

Issue 5, September 2013

Board Meeting Wrap – September

Held on September 26 2013, the September meeting of the Congress Board of Directors covered the following topics:

- Visit by the **Chief Minister**
- **Management Appointments**
- Congress' recent **Media Coverage**
- The success of the **CASSE Public Forum**
- Wrap up of the **42nd Annual Public Health Association Conference**
- News from the **AMSANT General Meeting in Katherine**
- About the **NT Aboriginal Health Forum Meeting in Darwin**
- Update on the **AGM**
- Coalition Government Changes to the **Aboriginal Health Portfolio**

GM Appointments and New Executive Team

Appointments have been made to the positions of General Manager – Finance and General Manager – HR which means the new Executive Team is now complete

Gavin Robins is the successful applicant for the GM Finance position and he comes to Congress with a wealth of experience. He has previously worked for the World Bank and IMF in developing countries, been the CEO of Aboriginal health services and held senior Government appointments. He has an in depth understanding of finance as well as a solid understanding of primary health care. He is now adding to his list of financial and management qualifications a law degree that he has almost completed.

Janette Sando has been appointed to the position of GMHR. Janette is highly qualified for the position and has been working at Congress as the HR Manager for the past 9 months

Media Coverage

Following the election of the new Coalition Government the newly appointed Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, Senator Nigel Scullion, gave an interview with the Alice Springs News and the comments he made about Congress have been sent all over the nation:

NEWS:

What about Congress?

SCULLION:

Congress in Alice Springs is probably one of the best health organisations in Australia, full stop. They have moved to a very good business model that has been picked up in other parts of Australia.

They're fundamentally welded to Medicare, they ensure all of their clients have a Medicare card. It's the same sort of [positive] index you get across Australia, particularly in demographics with larger areas of need.

There have also been two feature articles in the Alice Springs News. One feature story based on an interview with the acting CEO was a positive story about Congress and Aboriginal health in the lead up to the election. It was posted on August 23 2013. Another feature story was written following the recent Congress / CASSE summit and provides a very detailed account of the summit and the

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comments made on the issue of violence from the panel members as well as from people in the audience.

There was also media coverage in the Advocate on the announcement of the former government in relation to ongoing funding for the Nurse Family Partnership Program until 2016 for all of the 3 existing sites across Australia as well as funding for new sites including Darwin.

This announcement has come after significant advocacy from Congress with the former Minister for Aboriginal health and with OATSIH. Congress has also worked with the AMA in the production of their recent Aboriginal Health Report Card which focused on early childhood and the need to fund this program along with the Abecedarian Educational Day Care program.

CASSE Public Forum

The Congress / CASSE public forum "Walk in my shoes" was held at Centralian College and there was significant media coverage from local newspapers, the ABC and NITV.

For board members who are interested Kieran Finnane has written a comprehensive account of the forum in the Alice Springs News which can be accessed at: <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/2013/09/11/aboriginal-men-need-to-reinvent-themselves-forum/> Also for the people who might have missed the TV Awaken program on NITV last Friday night it can be accessed at Awaken S2013 Ep35.

Everyone who was present commented on the respectful way in which people were allowed to express their views and be listened to by others. There was excellent participation from the audience with many Aboriginal community members making good observations and comments from the floor. The Panel was also very effective at expressing a range of perspectives and Ken Leichleitner was able to fill in for William who was ill on the night.

42nd Annual Public Health Association Conference

CEO Donna Ah Chee attended the annual Public Health Association meeting in Melbourne with CMOPH, Dr John Boffa.

A presentation was given on Aboriginal health improvement in the NT and the NT Medicare Local also presented the work it is doing in Aboriginal health.

The conference provides a key opportunity to network, and meetings were held with Prof. Fran Baum, Prof. Leonie Segal, Prof. Mike Daube and the new NT Chief Medical Officer, Dr. Steven Skov.

Prof. Sir Ian Gilmore who is the leading British expert on the alcohol floor price will visit Darwin in late October and plans were made for the Chief Medical Officer supported by PAAC to host an event that ensures his visit gets wide coverage. This could include a presentation to a grand round in Royal Darwin Hospital and media events.

Prof Baum. has received funding from the Lowitja Institute to be able to undertake another exchange visit between Congress and the Flinders University Southgate Institute as part of our research collaboration on comprehensive primary health care. This means there is funding to bring Prof. David Sanders (South Africa) and Prof. Ron Labonte (Canada) and Fran herself back to Alice Springs where we could hold a symposium on Comprehensive Primary Health Care. I think it would be useful to use the opportunity, with these visiting experts to hold the symposium with the Congress Board of Directors as we have not yet been able to schedule this. In addition to the Congress Board we could open the symposium up to include Directors from the boards of the remote auspiced services. It is planned for this event to happen over two days in late March next year.

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AMSANT General Meeting in Katherine

This meeting was attended by Board Members Joe Hayes and Graham Dowling who participated in the members update on behalf of Congress.

The main agenda items were:

- Governance: Presentation and discussion with consultants McGrathNicol on governance reform for AMSANT. There was good support for the need for a skills based board.
- Presentation by NAAJA on the Royal Commission into Institutional child abuse
- Regionalisation update
- Presentation by Public Health Advisory Group

- Early Childhood Coalition - it was agreed to create this
- Data issues - it was agreed that there is great benefit to data sharing and most services have signed up
- Report back on the Central Australian Grog Summit
- COAG based on the same briefing provided to the board at the last meeting
- Hospital and Health Network reforms based on the same briefing that was provided to the last board meeting

The next AMSANT General Meeting and AGM will be held in Alice Springs and we will work to ensure good participation from our bush services.

NT Aboriginal Health Forum Meeting in Darwin

Jenny Cleary gave the same presentation that she gave to the Congress Board at the August Board Meeting on Health and Hospital Reform.

The most significant part of the presentation was the information that the NT DoH will not be devolving responsibility to make decisions about which providers will be funded to deliver PHC services to the new hospital boards. The NT DoH will retain responsibility and therefore the two-provider policy is still largely in place. The Health and Hospital Networks will be funded by the NT DoH to be providers of PHC services in remote communities but they will not in turn be able to subcontract this role.

It was agreed that the NT Medicare Local with an annual budget of more than \$27 million will become a full member of the NTAHF so that it can participate in joint needs based planning for resource allocation.

There was a lot of discussion about regionalisation and a strong commitment to move the process forward by all partners.

AGM Update

The AGM usually occurs the day after the November Board meeting so this would mean holding the AGM on November 22 at 9.30am. It is now clear that the original appointment of the current Directors was for two years so there will now be no need for any elections at this year's AGM. It will just be the standard format and Congress has contracted Bellette to develop the Annual Report for 2012/13 as we are currently recruiting to the Communications Officer position.

Change in the Aboriginal health portfolio in the new Coalition government

The new Coalition Government has decided to remove the portfolio of Aboriginal health so there will not be a Minister for Aboriginal Health to replace Warren Snowdon.

Instead they have argued that they have elevated responsibility for this important portfolio area by giving responsibility back to the Minister for Health, Peter Dutton, who is a senior Minister in Cabinet. There are some potential advantages to this arrangement as long as Minister Dutton takes an active interest in Aboriginal health and becomes more informed. The good news is that responsibility for health is left in the health department and responsibility for education is in the education department. The former FaHCSIA portfolio areas will transfer to the new Aboriginal Affairs office being established in the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Senator Scullion has been appointed as the new Minister for Aboriginal Affairs and has been a key advocate within the Coalition on the need to ensure that responsibility for Aboriginal health remains in the health department. He and Andrew Laming sought a briefing from Congress on this issue during the election campaign and we provided them with the evidence of the improved health outcomes that have occurred since the transfer of responsibility from ATSIC to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing.