

TEXT OF LETTER OF CONGRATULATIONS TO AIPA ON
ITS FORMATION FROM COMMISSIONER TOM CALMA
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL
JUSTICE UNIT, AUSTRALIAN HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSION.

First of all, I regret that I could not attend the launch in Hobart today in person. I am instead at the Creating Futures conference on Indigenous social and emotional well-being in Cairns. It has been an exciting conference addressing an issue centrally important to the work you do, and one vital to the overall health of both Indigenous individuals as well as our communities. So thank you to Carmen Cubillo for reading this statement in my absence.

Congratulations to the founding members for taking the bold step of creating the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association. It is my hope that this much needed association will take its place with other Indigenous health peak bodies: the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and the Indigenous Dentists Association of Australia in giving Indigenous Australians another voice with which to help drive improvement to Indigenous health in the future, and in particular in relation to Indigenous mental health and emotional and social well-being issues. We now accept that mental, social and emotional health is one of the foundations of strong communities, as well as - ultimately -- our physical health, and the addition of an Indigenous mental health focused body to the existing peak bodies is welcome news,

and important to an overall address to Indigenous health equality in this country.

As I am sure you are all aware, there is a great need to increase the number of Indigenous psychologists, and - more broadly - psychologists and high quality psychological and mental health services working in our communities. If we are to see Indigenous health equality within our lifetimes, work must be done across all the areas of health and the spectrum of health services, and not least of which being in relation to Indigenous psychological services. So the founding of your association, and the new capacity of its members to act collectively, will be greeted with anticipation among the Indigenous health professional community, as well as among our communities.

In my capacity as Chair of the Close the Gap Indigenous health equality campaign, I will be writing to your first Chair, Pat Dudgeon, in the next few days and inviting the APIA to join the leadership group of the campaign.

Many of you will know about the Close the Gap Indigenous health equality campaign that has been underway for about 2-years now. This is led by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association, the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses, the Indigenous Dentists' Association of Australia, Oxfam Australia and Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation and myself and culminated in March this year with the historic signing of a Close the Gap Statement of Intent in Parliament House, Canberra, where the Prime Minister, Minister of Health and

Ageing as well as the Minister for Indigenous Affairs and the Opposition Leader (on top of every major Indigenous and mainstream health peak body) committed:

- To developing a comprehensive, long-term plan of action, that is targeted to need, evidence-based and capable of addressing the existing inequities in health services, in order to achieve equality of health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-indigenous Australians by 2030.
- To ensuring primary health care services and health infrastructure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples which are capable of bridging the gaps in health standards by 2018.

As a result of this, I am cautiously optimistic that our health may slowly start to change for the better as Australian governments begin to deliver on their commitments to closing the gap. But I am not naive about this - signing a piece of paper, as important as the Statement of Intent has the potential to be, is not enough. It remains an ongoing task for the campaign to ensure that the promises and commitments in the Statement happen - and happens as quickly as possible. It is therefore my hope that APIA will take an active part in the campaign, and I look forward to working with your representatives in the future to that end.

And longer term, with the establishment of a national Indigenous representative body likely in 2009, you may also

want to consider how you could work with that body, providing professional advice and so on, and particularly in relation to Indigenous mental health.

In the meantime, enjoy and savour this historic moment -- one in which not only did Indigenous Australia prove its talents once again in producing psychologists - almost 40 to date - but also by demonstrating that Indigenous Australians are willing and able to take greater control of their lives, their professional lives and their communities' lives by acting collectively. The contribution your association can make is enormous and should not be underestimated. Well done and congratulations again.

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