



The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP
Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Indigenous Health
Member for Hasluck

Ref No: MC18-016572

Ms Susan Tilley
Manager Aboriginal Policy and Advocacy
Advocacy Unit
Uniting Communities
10 Pitt Street
ADELAIDE SA 5000

Dear Ms Tilley

Thank you for your correspondence of 19 July 2018 regarding the high level of hearing loss amongst children living in remote communities across South Australia.

The Australian Government recognises that ear disease is highly prevalent amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, and that the impact of hearing loss in infancy and youth can have lifelong consequences for education, employment and wellbeing.

As such, the Government is targeting investment of almost \$97 million between 2017-18 and 2021-22 to improve the ear and hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the Indigenous Australians' Health Programme and the National Partnership on Northern Territory Remote Aboriginal Investment. This funding is implementing annual hearing assessments for children aged 0-6 years, increasing access to clinical services (including surgery), providing equipment and training, and raising awareness of otitis media symptoms and the need for regular surveillance and early treatment, including in remote areas across Australia.

The Government's overall investment of \$3.9 billion in Indigenous health from 2018-19 to 2021-22 includes funding for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) across Australia to deliver holistic and culturally safe patient care that aligns with the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These ACCHS contribute to the ear and hearing health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by providing access to comprehensive primary health care services and facilitating access to specialist, allied health and other health services across Australia, including in the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands in South Australia.

As you have highlighted, addressing the social and cultural determinants of health can assist in responding to the ear and hearing health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Accordingly, in the next iteration of the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023, a key priority will be addressing the social and cultural determinants of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In addition, at the meeting of the Council of Australian Governments Health Council earlier this month, I discussed national collaboration with state and territory governments to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, including the need for collaborative effort, research and knowledge transfer in relation to ear disease. The Health Council agreed in 2017 to explore a national approach to reducing the burden of middle ear disease and associated hearing loss in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as an important step towards achieving Closing the Gap targets.

The Government is committed to tackling this critical area in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through shared responsibility between governments, the medical profession, health workers and parents. I am confident that by working together we can make real progress towards solving this important issue across Australia.

I have provided a copy of my letter to Ministers Hunt and Wade for their information.

Thank you for raising this matter.

Yours sincerely



The Hon KEN WYATT AM, MP
Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Indigenous Health

cc: The Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Health

The Hon Stephen Wade MLC
Minister for Health and Wellbeing

15 AUG 2018