



European Network for Indigenous Australian Rights (ENIAR)

Media release

5th April 2007

Australians overseas can help 'Close the Gap' in Indigenous health

Australian Olympic gold medallists Ian Thorpe and Cathy Freeman have launched an Indigenous health campaign that aims to 'Close the Gap' in life expectancy between Indigenous Australians and the broader community.

When asked what the international community could do Cathy said that it was "important that people were presented with the facts and provided with the invitation to join our cause, its all about basic human rights and equality".

Ian stated that "if every Australian knew what was going on, we would make a difference" and that Australians overseas "should get on board".

Oxfam Australia is asking people to sign a pledge demanding Indigenous health equality within a generation.

Australians for Native Title and Reconciliation launched an online virtual sea of hands, in support of Indigenous health equality.

Cathy and Ian signed the Oxfam pledge and also created their own personal message on a hand, to kick off the campaign.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Tom Calma said "It is a national scandal that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live 17 years less than other Australians and that our babies die at almost three times the rate of non-Indigenous children," and that "achieving equality in life expectancy rates for Indigenous people within 25 years is an achievable goal. Equal access to primary health care and infrastructure for Indigenous Peoples is achievable within 10 years."

ENIAR believes the crisis in Indigenous health is an international disgrace, and one that Australia, as a developed rich country should not tolerate.

Equality in health status should be a right for all. The inequality faced by Indigenous Australians shames Australia and damages its reputation overseas.

If other first world countries such as Sweden, Finland, Norway and Canada can come closer to closing the gap for their Indigenous people then surely it is well within reach of Australia.

A report published 2nd April 2007 by National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and Oxfam Australia, ranks Australia last in a league table of wealthy nations working to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples.

ENIAR fully supports and endorses the 'Close the Gap' campaign and congratulates Tom Calma, Social Justice Commissioner and his colleagues on this initiative.

Media contacts

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Take action

Sign the close the gap pledge at Oxfam Australia;

<http://www.oxfam.org.au/campaigns/indigenous/health.php>

Put your message on a hand at:

http://www.antar.org.au/sea_of_hands/

Further information

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation/ Oxfam Australia;
report on Closing the Gap; <http://www.naccho.org.au/ctg.html>

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HEREOC);

http://www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/index.html

ENIAR health issues page; <http://www.eniar.org/issues/health.html>

Photos included

Cathy Freeman, Olympic Stadium Sydney, among Sea of Hands installation, 4th April 2007

Ian Thorpe, signing the Oxfam 'Close the Gap' pledge, Olympic Stadium Sydney, 4th April 2007