

CLOSE THE GAP PARLIAMENTARY EVENT



Photo Arthur Mostead/OxfamAus
Members of the Close the Gap Steering Committee with The Hon. Tony Abbott MP, Prime Minister, at the CTG parliamentary breakfast.

Wednesday 12 February marked a significant day in Australia's health landscape, with the meeting of the Close the Gap Campaign (CTG) Steering Committee to receive the annual Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report in Parliament.

Established in 2006, the CTG committee is made up of a collection of Australia's peak Indigenous and non-Indigenous health bodies, NGOs and human rights organisations. Sitting within a wider Closing the Gap framework that incorporates six human rights-based targets set by the Council of Australian Governments, the CTG's goal is to close the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians by 2030. Each year the prime minister reports on the overall progress of Closing the Gap, and this event saw the handing down of the fifth annual report.

The meeting was the first major opportunity for the CTG to build a relationship with the new government, providing an opportunity to engage with opposition and coalition leaders, as well as the new parliament more broadly. Representing the Association at the event was Chair of the APA Indigenous Health Committee, Marilyn Morgan, APAM, and CEO Cris Massis.

According to Cris, the meeting's focus was on communication and engagement across all sectors. 'The event had four main purposes—to engage across the new parliament on the continued need to prioritise efforts to close the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality gap, to emphasise and strengthen the non-partisan support all parties have shown on the issue of Close the Gap, to communicate the Close the Gap campaign's view of progress and what needs to be done going forward if we are to achieve the goal of closing the gap by 2030, and to give the new government a sense of ownership over the Close the Gap agenda,' he says.

'While there has been some progress in closing the gap, the Prime Minister's Report still highlights the long way we have to go as a society to meet the ambitious target by 2030.'

Cris identifies the demonstrable commitment and support for CTG from a broad spectrum of contributors as one of the highlights from the event.

'The passion on this issue from all sides of politics was paramount during the day,' he says. 'In addition, the support given to this campaign by corporate heavyweights such as Andrew Forrest and media advocates such as Jeff McMullen demonstrates that this issue cuts across all parts of society.'

He highlights a number of key messages from the event, including the fact that all political parties and almost 200 000 Australians have committed to end the health equality gap by 2030. With 16 years to go until this date, Cris comments that 'it is critical to build on the success thus far, we need to continue the national effort as a priority and expand and strengthen it in key areas with bold policy initiatives.'

Cris also touches on the fact that there are already positive outcomes that are visible as a result of the campaign, such as reductions in smoking rates and improvements in maternal and childhood health that can be expected to flow into increases in life expectancy.

'These positive outcomes provide evidence that the national effort to close the gap is working, and that generational change is possible,' he says.

Commenting on the importance of the APA's involvement in this national issue, Cris asserts that involvement in macro social issues is an essential way to demonstrate the value of physiotherapy in so many settings.

'The APA has made a conscious effort to align with issues that connect with society in general in recent months, and we will continue to do this for the betterment of the profession,' he says.

'Physiotherapy has an important role to play in this campaign.'



NEW HICAPS CODES

Over the past year, the APA has worked with Private Health Australia (PHA) and 13 major health funds to revise the HICAPS codes for physiotherapists. The HICAPS codes were reviewed to reflect the revised 2012 APA National Physiotherapy Service Descriptors. A meeting was held on 19 March 2014 to finalise the codes and confirm when they will

come into effect. More information will be provided in upcoming issues of *InMotion*.

MEDICARE LOCALS—REVIEW

The APA recently wrote to the Department of Health on the Medicare Locals (MLs) review. Positive feedback was received from our members that MLs have been effective in providing support to clinicians and service providers to improve patient care.

Outcomes of the review will be available in the coming months.

MEDICARE LOCALS—HEALTHPATHWAYS

To assist clinicians to provide best care, a new support tool called HealthPathways is now available. It is a support tool initiated in New Zealand and taken up by the Hunter ML, Barwon ML, as well as the Perth Central and East Metropolitan ML, among others.

HealthPathways is an online resource with clinical guidelines on the management

of individual medical conditions. It also provides details of local services that can offer support in the management of specific conditions. The expected outcome of the HealthPathways tool is to document guidelines or pathways for the treatment of various conditions, to outline relevant services and provide details of appropriate service providers. The guidelines will be made available on a localised website or through an online health information portal.

The APA supports HealthPathways because physiotherapists have a unique opportunity—as stakeholders in the primary healthcare team—to contribute to the design of the guidelines on how conditions are best managed.

The APA believes this may lead to better integration of physiotherapy services with other health services provided to the public, as well as help to provide the best (and most cost-effective) outcomes for patients.

OVERVIEW OF THE NDIS

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) creates a nationally coherent system which better directs long-term resourcing and shifts decision-making to people with a disability and their carers. The scheme signals a historic change in the way people with significant and permanent disability access a range of supports and services.

Bruce Bonyhady, Chair of the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA), has acknowledged that physiotherapists have a key role in the scheme and identified that successful rollout will depend on physiotherapists and other allied health workers becoming familiar with the NDIS.

This major change is taking place in stages across every state and territory. Full rollout across Australia will start from July 2016. As the scheme rolls out, planners at the NDIA will work with people who need support and services, and develop individualised plans.

Participants can then choose how they access the support and services agreed in the plan and select providers.

A provider describes an individual or organisation that delivers services to a participant in the NDIS. Providers must be on the NDIS registered provider list, from which participants select the supports and services they need. Registered providers can then use the NDIS online provider portal to connect with participants and make claims for payments. If you or your organisation choose to provide services to NDIS participants you will need to apply to be a registered provider in each individual site where you want to offer services.

As APA members may have experienced with previous programs, such as Better Start, the application process may require a significant administrative input, and there may be teething problems as the new application

process evolves. The APA will work closely with the NDIA and other allied health professionals to ensure the NDIS application process is reasonable and fit for purpose.

With the implementation of any significant program, experiences in launch sites reveal problems. The NDIA expects delays in processing registrations of providers outside of launch sites, for example, and has asked that if you are not providing supports within a launch site that you do not register yet.

In the meantime, however, the APA strongly advises members to start finding out what you need to do and prepare for the NDIS rollout in your area. While the APA will also consider developing resources to help members, the NDIS has a range of fact sheets and publications about the new scheme, and there are resources to answer questions and help you through the application process. This information is available on the NDIS website: ndis.gov.au.

The APA will continue to monitor how the NDIS is implemented and work to ensure the best possible outcomes for members and their patients.