



# KEY THINKERS FORUM

## Briefing Paper

### 7<sup>th</sup> BIENNIAL KEY THINKERS FORUM

#### Close the Gap Ten Year Anniversary – Aboriginal traditional medicine and Ngangkari healers - *the Gap that's missing?*

#### **About Poche Centres for Indigenous Health**

Poche Centres for Indigenous Health are an example of the power of partnership in achieving real change to contribute to closing the gap in life expectancy. Established and funded by philanthropists Greg Poche AO and Kay Van Norton Poche, Poche Centres seek to leverage the expertise within Universities to seek solutions that address complex health issues faced by Aboriginal people. The Poches have gifted more than \$50million dollars to Aboriginal health over the past six years.

#### **The Poche Indigenous Health Network**

The Poche Indigenous Health Network has been created to enhance the collaborative efforts, expertise and resources of each of the individual Poche Centres. The bi annual Key Thinkers Forum represents a powerful example of this, providing an opportunity for all sectors of community, Government, non- government and academia to come together in critical discussion of significant issues within Aboriginal public health at a national level.

#### **What is a Ngangkari?**

The Ngangkari<sup>1</sup> are Aboriginal traditional healing workers that continue the spiritual healing work as handed down to them by their grandparents. They work independently of the medical service working to heal and assist the recovery in people affected by disease.

<sup>1</sup> Ngangkari are the Aboriginal traditional healers – men and women - from the Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra Aboriginal language groups from Central Australia. The terms Aboriginal traditional healers and ngangkari are used interchangeably in this paper. This paper acknowledges other Aboriginal traditional healers from different language groups who practice their traditional medicine and cultural practice across Australia.

The Key Thinkers Forum will consider the health maintenance and traditional healing practices of Aboriginal Ngangkari alongside western medicine.

This year the Poche Indigenous Health Network has collaborated with the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health at The University of Sydney and The University of Sydney Equity and Diversity Strategy to bring you this Key Thinkers Forum titled:

***Do we need traditional Aboriginal medicine working with western medicine to close the gap?***

With special guest from Anangu Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (ANTAC) the first organisation of Aboriginal traditional healers in Australia from the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands (APY) in South Australia.

It's been ten years since the Australian Commonwealth, State and Territory Government's committed bipartisan support to close the gap in health and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non - Indigenous Australians within a generation.

There is considerable debate about the progress being made to close the gap in Australia. This forum will examine the notion of a "missing gap" which incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and spirituality into mainstream health.

The 'Hand in Hand Report: on Aboriginal Traditional Medicine', is a substantive analysis investigating the Australian legislative and policy framework on Aboriginal traditional medicine and Aboriginal healing. In its policy analysis the report identifies a foundational flaw in the current Close the Gap policy agenda – ***'the complete disregard of Aboriginal traditional medicine...and limited application of the human rights based approach to Australia's Closing the Gap Indigenous health policy, that contravenes articles 24.1 and 31 of the UNDRIP international legal standards on the right to health.'***

This forms the basis for our Key Thinkers Forum. Will we close the gap by better understanding and incorporating traditional healing into our approach alongside of mainstream health systems and practices? Or do we simply need to improve mainstream health services to better meet the needs of Aboriginal patients?

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We are joined on the panel by both traditional and mainstream health practitioners and policy makers to help us tackle these questions and form a Poche Opinion.

## Discussion Questions

1. What are the underlying concepts of mainstream health services?
2. Can traditional healing work effectively alongside mainstream health services?
3. Will incorporating indigenous knowledges into health care help to close the gap?
4. What conditions are required to enable effective healing that meets the holistic needs of Aboriginal people?

## Details of the Key Thinkers' Forum

Date/ Thursday, 28th April 2016

Time/ 09.00am – 12.30pm

Venue/ University of Sydney's New Law Building Foyer. Darlington/Camperdown Campus

Chair/ Dr Tom Calma AO

## Further Information

At the conclusion of each forum a paper is produced, which summarises the issues raised and makes comment or presents an opinion about the topic discussed. This is published as a 'Poche Opinion paper'. Poche Opinions are a tool to contribute to knowledge and to draw the wider community into the key debates and issues in Aboriginal health.

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