



Media Release

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Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance launches, forging a Kimberley-driven health research agenda.

Broome, WA, 19 March 2021

Kimberley-based Aboriginal community-controlled and government health services, research institutes and universities have united to form the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance (KAHRA) with the objective of improving and promoting the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people in the Kimberley through the development and application of practical health research.

This collaboration combines the power of research to drive evidence-based change, the commitment of regional health services, and the vast cultural knowledge and strength of communities.

The Alliance is pleased to announce its strong leadership, with Mr Mick Gooda appointed as the Chair of KAHRA. Mick brings a wealth of knowledge, experience and leadership to the Alliance, with previous roles such as the CEO of the Aboriginal Health Cooperative Research Centre (predecessor of the Lowitja Institute), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and First Nations Advisor to the Minister for Housing and Public Works. Mick has a strong voice for his people and a clear vision for the Alliance to ensure research follows the Kimberley model, conducted with community involvement and non-negotiable guidance on topics prioritised from the grass roots.

“The launch of KAHRA is a watershed moment in how health research will be carried out in partnership with the Aboriginal community in the Kimberley,” Mr Mick Gooda, KAHRA Chair.

With Lotterywest as the major supporter and backed by six founding members, KAHRA is looking to address these community-led research themes:

- Social and cultural determinants of health
- Social and emotional wellbeing
- Healthy lifestyles and the prevention of chronic disease
- Environmental health
- Health service improvements and use of data

The development of collaborative projects utilising the strengths of the Alliance will seek to drive change to health outcomes, policy and services within the Kimberley and ultimately improve health outcomes of Kimberley Aboriginal community members. KAHRA has already seen unprecedented collaboration across health services in the region, with a collective voice advocating for better use of data to inform health service delivery in the region. Work has begun on a project to enable health services and researchers to see the full picture of disease burden in the region.

“We intend to rethink the word on how research is carried out and translated up here in the Kimberley, flipping it on its head to be driven by community priorities, enabled to thrive with the support of our own knowledge and research expertise combined with that of our partners,” Vicki O’Donnell, KAMS CEO.

The WA Country Health Service Kimberley is proud to be part of the esteemed Kimberley-based health services and research organisations that form the Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance. This partnership will enable us to improve the equity of access to healthcare for Kimberley Aboriginal people. Through working together with the local community, we will drive a research agenda across the region that focusses on the needs and solutions for Aboriginal people.

Among other collaborations is the work across KAHRA members which has commenced to leverage the insights from the Centre for Research Excellence to implement the Endgame Strategy to End RHD in the Kimberley.

Another collaborative project involves adapting and evaluating the ‘Be Healthy’ program with different communities, utilising partnerships between Aboriginal organisations and academic researchers. The original program was co-designed and piloted in Derby. These culturally secure lifestyle modification programs will be run by Aboriginal community members and aim to foster internal motivation, enhance health knowledge, and modify health beliefs and risk perceptions.

“The RCSWA has been working in partnership with KAMS to improve the benefits of research for Aboriginal health for 18 years, however with limited resources only so much is possible.

KAHRA is a major expansion of research partnerships in the Kimberley. It will provide strong support for Kimberley Aboriginal communities and people to develop a substantially expanded, coordinated and practical research program focused on priority health issues,” David Atkinson, Rural Clinical School of WA.

Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Executive Director of Telethon Kids Institute, said the Institute was proud to be a founding member of the Alliance. “At Telethon Kids, we are committed to collaboration and to research that makes a measurable difference to the lives of Aboriginal children and families.” Mr Glenn Pearson, Director of Aboriginal Health at Telethon Kids added: “The Alliance is an opportunity for us to work with local Kimberley organisations to tackle the issues that are most important for Kimberley kids and families.”

“Notre Dame Australia is proud to be a founding member of KAHRA. As educators and researchers, we acknowledge the importance of the collection and distribution of data to inspire change, demonstrate achievement and provide evidence to policy makers. To make change and improve health across the Kimberley requires collaboration, and Notre Dame look forward to working alongside our partners to facilitate access to research to people in the Kimberley,” Rose Newitt, A/Director Majorlin Kimberley Centre for Remote Health, Notre Dame Australia.

KAHRA will facilitate research excellence and collaboration in the region, with strong support in health and research capacity building for communities, to empower Kimberley people with the skills to develop evidence on key issues and get their voices heard.

Thursday 18 March marked the official launch of this influential Alliance.



About Kimberley Aboriginal Health Research Alliance and its founding members

KAHRA's founding members include:

- *Aboriginal Health Council of WA (AHCWA)* - the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) in Western Australia. AHCWA exists to support and act on behalf of 23 Member ACCHS throughout WA, actively responding to the individual and collective needs of these Members.
- *Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS)* - a regional Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS), providing a collective voice and support for a number of member ACCHSs from towns and remote communities across the Kimberley region of Western Australia.
- *Rural Clinical School of WA (RCSWA)* - a vital contributor to the sustainable health of the people who live, work and raise families in the rural and remote regions of WA. RCSWA research focuses on health issues that are relevant to rural and remote locations, especially on questions that cannot be readily explored in a city context. RCSWA supports a range of other rural medical training opportunities.
- *Telethon Kids Institute (TKI)* - a Western Australian research institute focused on improving the health and development of children through excellence in research, and the application of that knowledge. Telethon Kids has an ongoing commitment to Aboriginal health, with an office in Broome and dedicated research and community engagement staff. Telethon Kids is an independent not-for-profit, non-government organisation with close affiliations with WA universities and the Perth Children's Hospital.
- *The University of Notre Dame (Broome Campus)* - The University of Notre Dame Broome campus is home to Nulungu Research Institute and Majorlin Kimberley Centre for Remote Health. Nulungu Research Institute is a Kimberley-based organisation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, each with extensive practical and theoretical knowledge. Nulungu encourages the pursuit of excellence in research through valuing community-based Indigenous knowledge. The Majorlin Kimberley Centre for Remote Health contributes to the health and wellbeing of the communities of the Kimberley through an innovative program of education and research.
- *WA Country Health Service (WACHS)* - runs a major regional hospital in Broome, two district hospitals in Derby and Kununurra and smaller hospitals in Fitzroy Crossing, Halls Creek and Wyndham. WACHS also leads in the provision of services for mental health, aged care and public health programs. Aboriginal health is a major focus for the WACHS Kimberley team.

During its establishment, KAHRA is under the auspices of KAMS.

For further media information contact:

KAHRA Communications Coordinator
Email: communications@kamsc.org.au
Phone: (08) 9194 3200



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