



## Media Release 21 September 2021

The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress today acknowledged the Northern Territory Government's Plan for COVID-Management At Stage 3 of The National Plan which will enact some of the strongest protections in the nation for our vulnerable Aboriginal population.

"The modelling for Victoria shows that even opening up at 80% will lead to daily infections in the thousands along with potentially thousands of deaths and a hospital system close to breaking point," said the Congress Chief Executive Officer Donna Ah Chee.

"The NT cannot afford to get to anything like this and the Northern Territory Government should be commended for their approach," she continued.

"The commitment to vaccination equity is key whereby the Chief Minister has made it clear we need to achieve 80% coverage in each of the 5 regions and in each age range before we move to stage 3."

"It is vital that we have quality data on regional vaccine coverage rates to support this plan and ensure we are all well protected."

"Congress is working with the Commonwealth government's Australian Immunisation Register to ensure that we have data that is accurate and up to date. This will give us a very accurate picture of vaccination coverage in Central Australia," she said.

However, Congress will continue to push for an equitable benchmark for the Aboriginal population of 90% to 95% vaccination rates: because of the much younger age profile of the Aboriginal population this rate of vaccination of those 16 year old and older is equivalent to about 80% vaccination rate of people aged 16 or older in the non-Aboriginal population.

Ms Ah Chee also stated that the Northern Territory needs a fixed date for the introduction of the foreshadowed vaccine passports to drive high rates of vaccination.

"We need the government to lead on this and not leave it up to businesses to decide: unless people are double vaccinated they should not be able to go to restaurants, pubs, clubs, sporting venues etc. This will create an immediate reason for people to be vaccinated."

Ms Ah Chee also identified other aspects of the Northern Territory Government's plan which are very positive.

"The plans to make vaccines mandatory for all workers across high risk settings in the NT is a very welcome announcement which will help ensure all of our key institutions are able to continue even when COVID becomes endemic in the NT. Anyone working directly with vulnerable people will need to be vaccinated."

“Finally, the proposed traffic light system makes it clear that the NT will still be declaring jurisdictions as hotspots when needed and there will be a requirement for people coming from these places to quarantine either at home or another suitable place if they are fully vaccinated or at the Centre for National Resilience at their own expense if they are unvaccinated and have an essential reason to travel here. Our borders will continue to be controlled to prevent COVID coming in to the NT although they will be open.”

“We are in the midst of a global pandemic which threatens the lives of First Nations peoples disproportionately”, Ms Ah Chee said.

“The unique needs of our vulnerable population coupled with the reality that our hospital system is already very stretched demands a strong approach. Congress commends the Northern Territory Government for this announcement, and urges them to take the necessary extra steps to protect all Territorians,” she concluded.

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Media contact: Sally Martin 0490 040 607