



The Hon Ken Wyatt AM, MP

**Minister for Indigenous Australians
Member for Hasluck**

MEDIA RELEASE

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Aboriginal Christian leadership unite on COVID messaging

Minister for Indigenous Australians, The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP, and National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) Chief Executive Officer, Pat Turner AM, met with religious and medical leaders from across the country on Friday as part of efforts to increase Indigenous vaccination rates.

The group of respected pastors and remote medical professionals confirmed conspiracies and misinformation were circulating in vulnerable communities, spreading fear of COVID-19 vaccines.

“The meeting was about getting the advice of religious leaders on how to talk in a way that is respectful of people’s beliefs while keeping people safe from serious illness and death,” Minister Wyatt said.

“Indigenous vaccination rates are increasing but I remain very concerned about reports that vaccines are being rejected as a result of conspiracies and misinformation stoking fear and doubt.

“Our spiritual leaders will be crucial in ensuring positive messages succeed. To that end, uniting faith-based and medical messaging will be key to stamping out the dangerous rhetoric and boost vaccine uptake in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.”

NACCHO’s Pat Turner said it was vital to work out what could be practically done to change the minds of people about taking up COVID vaccines.

“We need to be aiming towards 100 per cent vaccination rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and it’s going to be very challenging in the face of this dangerous misinformation.

“Social media might be the vehicle for anti-vax messaging in urban areas, but in regional and remote areas, word-of-mouth is also incredibly powerful, which is why positive messaging straight from our pastors will be key.

“I’d like to thank Pastors Ray Minniecon, Willie Dumas, George Mann, Neville Naden, Tony Richards, Geoffrey Stokes and our remote doctors in committing to work together to stamp out this misinformation wherever possible.”

The group is expected to reconvene this week to develop and implement the messaging roll out.

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