

Media Release

For Immediate Release

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Apunipima Leading the Way on RHD Awareness and Prevention

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Apunipima Cape York Health Council is tackling the endemic issue of Rheumatic Heart Disease (RHD) and Acute Rheumatic Fever (ARF) in Cape York communities.

RHD is a leading cause of serious illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly young people, and Apunipima's RHD Prevention Project is aimed at decreasing the rates of ARF and RHD in Cape York communities.

Commenting on RHD in community, Apunipima CEO Debra Malthouse says, "RHD is a completely preventable disease, and to see so many families and communities here in the Cape affected deeply by this is just heartbreaking."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have the highest reported rates of ARF and RHD in the world. This is Australia, this should not be happening here."

"The loss of any young person shakes families and communities to the core, and for so many young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in community to be seriously ill, or tragically passing away from a preventable disease is just not something we're prepared to accept."

Apunipima works with Queensland Health in the detection and treatment of ARF and RHD; and by assisting clients to receive the required bicillin injections which are used to treat the conditions. However prevention really is the endgame in the battle against ARF and RHD.

Debra said, "We work with community members to develop culturally appropriate messaging, deliver community-based education in schools, provide resources and training, and work with communities to support healthy living environments. We're doing everything we can to support this fight with the resources we have.

"This is not just a health issue. It requires a coordinated and collaborative response to address the social and environmental factors that result in preventable health conditions, like RHD."

Information and resources about ARF and RHD are available at www.apunipima.org.au/health-promotion.

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About Apunipima

Apunipima Cape York Health Council is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. We provide comprehensive Primary Health Care and Social Emotional Wellbeing Services to eleven Cape York communities.

Media Contact

Tyrel Collins
Marketing and Communications Manager
Apunipima Cape York Health Council
07 4037 7249
communications@apunipima.org.au