

MEDIA RELEASE

NACCHO and The Snow Foundation partner to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to tackle rheumatic heart disease

10/07/2024: In a significant step towards addressing health disparities in Australia, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) and The Snow Foundation are pleased to announce their partnership to prevent acute rheumatic Fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD) in remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

ARF and RHD are preventable diseases triggered by a bacterial streptococcal infection with lifelong impact. The effects are compounded by the ongoing effects of colonisation, poverty and inadequate access to comprehensive, culturally safe primary health care. A person diagnosed with either ARF or RHD requires lifelong care, including many years of preventive antibiotics and, sometimes, invasive cardiac surgery.

According to the latest Australian Institute of Health and Welfare ([AIHW](#)) report released in March 2024, Australia continues to record some of the highest rates of RHD globally. This disease disproportionately affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This re-affirms our shared view that it is time for a new approach.

The Snow Foundation's grant of \$1 million (\$500,000 annually for an initial two years) will expand NACCHO's ARF and RHD Prevention Program into more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and their communities. This strategic two-year investment aims to bolster the broader Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector, enabling it to scale up efforts to prevent and manage these devastating yet preventable diseases.

Key statistics from the AIHW report highlight the urgency:

- As of 31 December 2022, 10,349 people in NSW, QLD, WA, SA, or the NT were managing and living with ARF and/or RHD.
- 81 % of these people are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.
- In 2022, there were 272 new RHD diagnoses among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, 40% of whom live in the NT.
- 70% of the new diagnoses in 2022 are females.
- ARF rates are highest among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 5–14.

Without immediate and decisive action led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, these numbers are projected to double within the next decade.

"As Australia's peak community-controlled body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing, NACCHO acknowledges The Snow Foundation as one of the first in Australia to support community-controlled program design and delivery. We all have a part to play in closing the gap," Dr Dawn Casey, A/g CEO of NACCHO said.

This significant partnership builds on The Snow Foundation's 13-year focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. It reflects the shared values of listening to and supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, communities, and strengths-based programs focusing on self-determination and sustainability.

More recently The Snow Foundation's focus has been on community-led programs including Champions for Change, Orange Sky laundries, and initiatives that facilitate community outreach by paediatric cardiologists and their multidisciplinary specialist teams.

"NACCHO are the experts in Aboriginal health and wellbeing, driving community-led initiatives where the power and decision-making are in Aboriginal communities' hands. We have seen firsthand that this achieves better outcomes," Georgina Byron, CEO of The Snow Foundation said.

"We're delighted to partner with NACCHO and see the importance of backing Aboriginal leadership and ensuring Aboriginal health is controlled by Aboriginal people and communities. This partnership re-affirms the principles of self-empowerment and self-determination that will achieve more impact through community-led strategies."

The partnership between NACCHO and The Snow Foundation is an example of the collaborative effort required to meet the Australian Government's commitment to eradicate new cases of RHD by 2030.

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BACKGROUND

About NACCHO

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across the country on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. Together NACCHO, Affiliates and members are the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, with over 3,500 out of the 6,000 staff working in ACCHOs being either of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background. Many NACCHO members have almost 50 years of experience in the delivery of comprehensive primary health care. Services are delivered through fixed, outreach and mobile clinics operating in urban, rural and remote settings across Australia.

NACCHO's ARF and RHD Prevention Program is funded by the Australian Government, with additional investment from partners BHP and The Snow Foundation. This partnership brings total investment in the national program to \$42.6 million.

ACCHOs participating in the program receive funding and support to deliver community-led evidence based ARF and RHD prevention activities in their communities. Staff employed through the program are connected through a national Community of Practice, which is facilitated by the NACCHO team.

About The Snow Foundation

The Snow Foundation was founded in Canberra by Terry Snow AM in 1991. It embraces a breadth of causes and programs, from grassroots entrepreneurial initiatives to established for-purpose organisations and stand-out leaders working towards social change, as well as catalysing community infrastructure in Canberra.

Underpinned by the values of humility, social justice, commitment, collaboration, empathy and transparency, the organisation's strategic approach to giving falls under four pillars: Our Place (Canberra and key regions), Our Country (social entrepreneurs and key social justice issues), Our Sector (growing capacity of for-purpose organisations, impact investing and philanthropy) and Our Family. Being a respectful and useful ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is of great importance to the Foundation, as is giving via a gender lens and ensuring a greater weight of giving is towards women.