

2nd CSANZ Indigenous Cardiovascular Health Conference

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MEDIA RELEASE

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NZ PROGRAM'S SUCCESS IN TACKLING INDIGENOUS CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE SETS THE BAR FOR IMPROVING AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS HEALTH OUTCOMES

A New Zealand preventative health campaign which has significantly improved take-up of cholesterol lowering medication among Maori and Pacific Island males sets the bar for Australia to develop its own initiatives to achieve similar outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

The New Zealand campaign, known as *One Heart Many Lives*, goes under the microscope today at the 2nd CSANZ Indigenous Cardiovascular Health Conference currently being held in Alice Springs.

Conference co-convenor Professor Leonard Kritharides said the 150 delegates attending the event would learn about *One Heart Many Lives* programme's success from Pharmaceutical Management Agency of New Zealand (PHARMAC) General Manager Marama Parore.

Supported nationally in New Zealand from 2004, *One Heart Many Lives* was developed to spread the messages that Māori and Pacific Island males died up to 14 years earlier than other men, but could make lifestyle changes to close that gap. Women – mothers, wives and daughters – were targeted by the campaign as key influencers to get their men checked.

The campaign was rolled out with a regional focus and encouraged men to:

- 'Get your heart checked' and seek help and medical management if needed
- Improve awareness of heart disease and the likely outcomes if it is diagnosed and treated
- Improve lifestyle habits as part of self management; and
- Take long-term cholesterol lowering medication (and other heart medications) to help decrease the risk of heart disease.

Since 2004 the programme has been successful in driving behaviour change to improve heart health among the targeted men. In regions where the programme has been run, PHARMAC has seen an increase in referrals to smoking cessation programmes, the Green Prescriptions personal activity programme, and greater than average increases in the rate of statins prescribing. These are all consistent with the aims of the campaign.

Marama Parore said the programme's community-driven focus had been key to its success.

"PHARMAC and the District Health Board providers took the campaign to 'where men are' – workplaces, tertiary institutions, even prisons and local heroes have emerged in each region," Ms Parore said.

"Finding local people and local heroes to tell their stories has proven very effective," she said.

“They carry the messages far more powerfully than we ever will. Simply by putting themselves forward they have become the leaders and flag bearers for others to follow – and they are following.”

Conference co-convener Professor Leonard Kritharides said Ms Parore’s presentation at the 2nd CSANZ Indigenous Cardiovascular Health Conference would generate vital debate about Australia’s response to similar Indigenous cardiovascular health issues.

“Access to appropriate medicines is essential to reducing cardiovascular disease and death in Indigenous Australians, yet remains problematic for many people,” Dr Kritharides said.

“Learning from our colleagues about what has worked, discussing options for increasing the community’s awareness of heart disease and reducing barriers to effective therapies is essential to close the gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people”, he said.

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