

Response ID ANON-YSR1-YPVP-X

Submitted to **Medical Research Future Fund's Indigenous Health Research Fund - National Consultation on the Roadmap and Implementation Plan**
Submitted on **2021-04-23 16:01:44**

Consultation Questions

1 What is your name?

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3 What is your organisation?

Organisation:

Continence Foundation of Australia

4 Residential state or territory

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5 Are the priority areas for investment identified in the Implementation Plan the most effective way for delivering on the Indigenous Health Research Fund's goal and aims? (Max 300 words)

Are the priority areas for investment identified in the implementation plan the most effective way for delivering on the Mission's goal and aims? :

The Continence Foundation of Australia (the Foundation) agrees with the priority areas outlined for investment in the Implementation Plan in principle. Although the Foundation recognises the need to address infectious and chronic conditions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, this must not preclude significant health issues including physical conditions and disabilities such as incontinence.

Incontinence is a key health morbidity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Without greater inclusion of high prevalence conditions such as incontinence into the Mission Implementation Plan and Roadmap, research investment will remain chronically underfunded. From the evidence available, a higher prevalence of incontinence compared to the general population has been found meaning it must be considered to close the gap on health inequities. Studies have shown between 23 and 54% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience incontinence. In one study of older Indigenous Australians, 45% of participants currently experiencing incontinence reported urinary incontinence on a daily basis and one in five stated it interfered with everyday activities some or all of the time (Benness and Manning, 1999; Smith et al, 2018) highlighting the impact incontinence has in this demographic.

An appropriate focus on incontinence as a significant impediment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing will, like other health and social challenges highlighted by the Implementation Plan, help address short-term funding cycles, a lack of defined and specific evidence base, structural impediments for community development, research conducted in genuine partnership with indigenous communities, improving social and emotional wellbeing and preventing and reducing the impact of chronic and physical conditions.

References:

1. Benness C, and Manning J. Urinary incontinence in Australian Aboriginal women. In 8Th National Continence Foundation of Australia Conference. 1999; Sydney, NSW.
2. Smith K, Sutherland A, Hyde Z, Crawford R, Dwyer A, Malay R, Skeaf L, Flicker L, Atkinson D, LoGiudice D. Assessment, incidence and factors associated with urinary incontinence in older Aboriginal Australians. Internal Medicine Journal. 2018;49(9):1111-1118.

6 Are there existing research activities which could be utilised to contribute to the Indigenous Health Research Fund Roadmap and/or Implementation Plan aims and priority areas for investment? How can these be leveraged? (Max 200 words)

Are there existing research activities which could be utilised to contribute to the Cardiovascular Health Mission Roadmap and/or Implementation Plan aims and priority areas for investment? How can these be leveraged?:

As stated in the response to the previous question, continence health is chronically underfunded and faces many of the Grand Challenges highlighted in the Implementation Plan despite significant need. This is further exacerbated by cultural and social norms within Indigenous communities that act as barriers to diagnosis, management and treatment of the condition. For example, language barriers can make assessment and education difficult, as using an interpreter (whom in most cases would know the person) can be embarrassing and traditional male practices that impact on incontinence may be inappropriate to discuss with female nurses (Smith et al, 2018).

The Foundation has however made considerable progress in facilitating research investment on incontinence within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. In 2011, the Foundation facilitated culturally appropriate continence training for Indigenous health workers in rural and remote Australia (Sutherland & Billimoria, 2011). Prior to the intervention, it was found that over half (52%) did not provide services for incontinence but following the training, 98% stated that their continence knowledge had increased and the majority of these thought they would incorporate part or all of the learning into aspects of their work role.

Greater consultation with the Foundation on how to implement continence-specific research would be welcomed to discuss how best to build on these achievements and utilise this expertise for optimal health outcomes.

Reference:

1. Sutherland A, Billimoria J. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander continence training in rural and remote Australia. 11th National Rural Health Conference. 2011 March 13-16. Perth, Australia.

7 Are the 'Evaluation approach and measures' appropriate for assessing and monitoring progress towards the Indigenous Health Research Fund's goal and aims? (Max 200 words)

Are the 'Evaluation approach and measures' appropriate for assessing and monitoring progress towards the mission's goal and aims? :

The Foundation supports the Evaluation approach and measures outlined in the Implementation Plan. Just as a systematic approach is required for research investment on Indigenous health for it to be effective, the evaluation approach and measures must be inclusive of all relevant aspects to deliver measurable and specific results.

The Foundation, as a national health peak body representing Australians with or at risk of incontinence, their carers and health professionals, has clear expertise in research investment and delivery. The Foundation can provide significant leadership which can be leveraged to coordinate, develop and act on a continence-specific approach on research for Indigenous Australians which will be culturally safe and effective. It has a strong capacity to utilise its health professional membership base, and a high level of expertise in continence care and incontinence management across a range of sectors such as health, disability and mental health which can be translated and adapted for Indigenous Australians to deliver the best outcome possible.

Given the sizable socio-economic, cultural and health barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, it is important to recognise, utilise and implement strategies, knowledge and expertise that is proven to support health equity including for continence care and incontinence management.

8 Do you consent to components of your submission being made publicly available?

Yes