

LET'S STICK TOGETHER TO CLOSE THE GAP

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Background: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are disproportionately impacted by blood-borne viruses (BBVs), and sexually transmissible infections (STIs) compared to non-indigenous Australians.

To address this inequality in health status, and Close the Gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Hepatitis NSW, ACON, Sex Workers Outreach Project (SWOP), NSW Users and AIDS Association (NUAA), HIV/AIDS Legal Centre (HALC) and NSW Positive Life united to form the *Close the Gap 414* Working Group.

Methods *Close The Gap 414* has worked together on eight occasions, including organising and delivering health promotion programs associated with the 2018 NSW Aboriginal Rugby League Knockout. The Knockout is the largest national gathering of Aboriginal people, drawing over 22,000 spectators.

At the Knockout, Hepatitis NSW, ACON and SWOP joined Bila Muuji Aboriginal Corporation Health Services, Western NSW LHD and Dubbo Sexual Health to deliver health education and screening opportunities. Everyone who attended could have a yarn, share a BBQ lunch, and find out more about viral hepatitis, HIV and STIs. Together we addressed the barriers associated with access to health care by providing screening for BBVs and STIs on the spot. Voucher incentives were offered to encourage testing and to return for results.

Results: Since 2018 we've reached and engaged with thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including 3,000 education interactions at the Knockout. At the Bilu Muuji event 14 people were screened for BBVs and STIs and offered the option of test results being followed up by the Aboriginal Health Practitioners, or their local health care provider.

Conclusion: *Close The Gap 414* partner organisation's communities overlap, and by working together we provide holistic and integrated health promotion programs. Pooling our financial and staff resources allows for a coordinated approach and builds capacity for future work.

The comradery and shared commitment to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by *Close The Gap 414* Indigenous staff is integral to the program's success.

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