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Dear Sir/Madam

Submission: Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring

The National Heart Foundation of Australia, Northern Territory Division Incorporated welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Australian Government inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.

Physical inactivity is a significant risk factor for cardiovascular disease and other chronic disease, such as type 2 diabetes and some cancers. The growing prevalence of physical inactivity in Australia, coupled with the alarming rise in the number of Australians who are over weight or obese, is putting an enormous strain on the Australian health system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have higher rates of death and illness from cardiovascular disease than other Australians and it is with great importance that we address the importance of good health through sport and other programs that promote physical activity.

This submission will address the following focus in the Terms of Reference: *non government organisations utilising sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Indigenous people.*

Our submission will include a practical example of the Heart Foundation's work in the Northern Territory linking sport and recreation with health promotion action at a population level.

Yours sincerely,

Dorothy Morrison
Chief Executive Officer – Northern Territory

Inquiry into the contribution of sport to Indigenous wellbeing and mentoring.



A submission to the Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, Parliament of Australia, House of Representatives

This submission addresses the following focus in the Terms of Reference: *non government organisations utilising sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Indigenous people.*

National Heart Foundation of Australia, Northern Territory Division Incorporated

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For many years sport has played an integral role in Aboriginal communities across Australia. The Heart Foundation acknowledges the positive impact that sport has on the wellbeing of communities across all settings.

As a co-signatory to the national Close the Gap campaign, we are committed to improving the life expectancy and quality of life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally have significantly poorer health than other Australians; they typically die at a much younger age and are more likely to experience disability and reduced quality of life due to ill health.¹

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are socio-economically disadvantaged when compared with other Australians, and it is well known that low SES populations have poorer health outcomes as a sub population within the broader population.

This socioeconomic disadvantage also places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at greater risk of unhealthy lifestyle factors such as smoking and alcohol misuse, as well as overweight and obesity.

Participation in sport and physical activity can help close the gap in life expectancy between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population and the broader Australian population.² Sport and physical activity has an important role in reducing the impact to negative life stressors, which can help promote positive health behaviour for all.

Physical activity is any bodily movement produced by the skeletal muscles that uses energy. This includes sports, exercise and other activities such as playing, walking, doing house hold chores and gardening.³

Active Living is a way of life that values and integrates physical activity into our everyday routines, helping people lead healthier, more active lives.⁴

The rationale for increasing the focus on physical activity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is compelling:

- Physical inactivity is an important contributor to chronic disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Physical activity can contribute

¹ Dunn KM, Forrest J, Pe-Pua, R, et al, 2005, 'Experiences of racism in the Australian body politics: extent, spheres, and cultural unevenness', in Khoo T (editor), *The Body Politic: Racialised Political Cultures in Australia*, refereed proceedings from the University of Queensland Australian Studies Centre Conference, Brisbane, 24–26 November 2004, University of Queensland Australian Studies Centre and Monash University National Centre for Australian Studies.

² Australian Sport: Emerging Challenges, New Direction; 2008.

³ World Health Organization. 2010. *Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization.

⁴ Blueprint for Active Living

to a reduction in risk for coronary heart disease and stroke, bowel and breast cancer, type 2 diabetes and depression. Furthermore physical activity can help in modifying chronic disease risk factors such as high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol and overweight and obesity.

- Cardiovascular disease *is* the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who experience and die from cardiovascular disease at much higher rates than other Australians.
- Low levels of participation in sports. In 2004 – 2005, 75% of Indigenous Australians aged 15 years and over reported being sedentary or exercising at low levels.⁵

Despite the above reasons, many people in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have limited access to opportunities to be active. Reduced access may be due to a range of factors including age, disability, low income, lack of access to safe and appropriate facilities or lack of equipment and other resources to participate in organised sports.

Like the determinants of health the determinants of levels of participation in physical activity are many and lie largely beyond the control of the individual. They also include historical, economic, political, cultural, social, environmental, psychological and physiological dimensions.^{6,7,8}

Regular physical activity is not only important for adults, but it is vital to the healthy growth, development and future health of children. Physical activity helps to improve metabolic health and prevent or slow the onset of cardiovascular disease risk factors.

Research strongly suggests that physical inactivity and increased metabolic risk in childhood continues through adulthood.⁹

As youth is a time of rapid emotional, physical and intellectual change, the transition from childhood to adolescence to independent adulthood is also a crucial period for establishing positive health and social behaviours. During this period, young people acquire a range of skills and behaviours, face a range of life events and make

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. The health and welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2008.

⁶ Carson, B., Dunbar, T., Chenhal, R. D. & Bailie, R. (Eds.) (2007) Social determinants of Indigenous health, Allen & Unwin.

⁷ National Public Health Partnerships (2005) Be Active Australia: A Framework for Health Sector Action for Physical Activity.

⁸ Baum, F. (2007) Cracking the nut of health equity: top down and bottom up pressure for action on the social determinants of health. *Promotion & Education*, 14.

⁹ Roberts, C.K., Freed, B., McCarthy, W.J. 2009. Low Aerobic Fitness and Obesity Are Associated with Lower Standardized Test Scores in Children. *The Journal of Paediatrics*. 156(5); 711-718.

decisions that can influence their physical and psychological health, their social development, and their education and employment opportunities.¹⁰

New research has also highlighted a strong connection between physical activity, fitness and cognitive development and academic achievement in children.¹¹

Media campaigns that promote positive behaviour can have an impact on individual and collective behaviour. However, the effectiveness of social marketing campaigns in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, is largely unknown, particularly in relation to the diverse contexts in which many Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples live.

The following example illustrates how a non- government organisation, the Heart Foundation, has utilised sport as a vehicle to improve outcomes for Indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

Healthy Lifestyle Project – Northern Territory

Since 2009, the National Heart Foundation has coordinated, designed, facilitated and delivered a number of healthy lifestyle workshops to the remote and very remote physical activity workforce in the Northern Territory; this has been conducted as part of the Close the Gap initiative, funded by the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing

The target audience for the workshops were employed Sport & Recreation Officers, Youth Workers and other workers (outside of the health sector) from remote Shires and non government organisations in remote Aboriginal communities. The majority of these workers were and continue to be, responsible for providing community based programs that promote sport and other physical activity.

By collaborating, with a range of key health service providers and external sporting partners such as Softball Northern Territory and Hoops for Health. It was possible to increase the reach of key health messages to the widely dispersed Aboriginal populations. And strengthen the capacity of a remote workforce to support healthy lifestyles in remote communities through their actions at a local level.

The project also showcased and celebrated the effort of the community and regionally based workers who continue to contribute to the well being of their communities through programs that engage others in living active lifestyles.

¹⁰ Cited in Young Australians Report. Blakely T, Hales S & Woodward A 2004. Poverty: assessing the distribution of health risks by socioeconomic position at national and local levels. Geneva: World Health organisation; Turrell G & Mathers C 2000. Socioeconomic status and health in Australia.

¹¹ Singh, A., Uijtdewilligen, L., Twisk, J.W.R., van Mechelen, W., Chinapaw, M. 2012. Physical Activity and Performance at School A Systematic Review of the Literature Including a Methodological Quality Assessment. Archives of Pediatric Adolescent Medicine. 166(1):49-55

Recognising that sport is a vital link for health and social wellbeing in Aboriginal communities, each workshop included a half day introductory session of a popular community sport. During these sessions participants were re introduced with the rules of their chosen sport whilst key heart health messages were incorporated into the game.

Feedback from the project showed an increase in awareness and knowledge of key messages relating to nutrition, tobacco, physical activity, and the need for regular health checks. Other feedback revealed some useful insights into sport and physical activity at community level.

A Snapshot from the Healthy Lifestyle Project

1. More physical activity is needed, in particular for young people in communities
2. Ongoing support is needed to increase knowledge, skill and confidence of Sport and Recreation Officers to act locally and increase opportunities for increased levels of physical activity.
3. Infrastructure for active living (sport and other physical activity) needs to be improved.

Healthy Lifestyles Project 2012

The findings above are an accurate reflection of the real need for more physical activity opportunities in remote Aboriginal communities. This is consistent with the outcomes sought by the *Blueprint for an active Australia* to increase population levels of physical activity, that lead to community-wide benefits in health, the environment, social policy and the economy.



Participants from the Healthy Lifestyle Workshops Alice Springs 2013

Blueprint for an Active Australia: 10 key action areas

- 1** Implement a national, integrated and ongoing physical activity mass-media strategy.
- 2** Regulate to provide a built environment that supports active living.
- 3** Actively encourage, support and facilitate more walking, cycling and public transport use.
- 4** Develop and implement a physical activity workforce training strategy.
- 5** Provide financial incentives (tax and price) for individuals, families and business to make active choices cheaper and easier.
- 6** Activate healthcare funding systems that support general practitioners (GPs) and other health professionals to prescribe and provide advice about physical activity.
- 7** Provide programs and opportunities to increase physical activity levels among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 8** Implement a life-stage approach to physical activity programming, including:
 - a comprehensive active children and youth program
 - an active families initiative
 - an active adults initiative
 - an active older adults campaign.
- 9** Provide physical activity programs in key settings where people live, work and are educated, including:
 - workplaces
 - local government
 - schools and childcare facilities.
- 10** Provide leadership, coordination and infrastructure to support implementation of the above actions:
 - establish a Prime Minister's Advisory Council on Physical Activity to oversee development of an implementation strategy for *Blueprint for an active Australia*
 - identify fiscal measures to ensure dedicated financial resources to fund ongoing implementation
 - fund and support regular monitoring of the Australian population's physical activity levels
 - prioritise funding for physical activity research and program evaluation
 - monitor the impact of a changing environment.

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Blueprint for an active Australia provides a national physical activity plan of action for government, agencies, associations and organisations, to address barriers to physical activity and create opportunities for Australians to be active in their homes, neighbourhoods, schools, workplaces and communities.

Together, the Healthy Lifestyle project and *the Blueprint for an active Australia* reveal important points for consideration by this review, including the following recommendations:

1. Support the development of community based physical activity infrastructure through key groups such as local government.
2. A range of training and capacity building strategies is needed to support the remote workers whose role is to develop, implement and evaluate programs that impact on population physical activity at a community level; and
3. Fund the expansion of programs with proven effectiveness to be sustained and implemented in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

In the future it may be possible to increase physical activity through a life-stage approach to physical activity programming including:

- A comprehensive active children and youth program
- An active families initiative
- An active adults initiative
- An active older adult's campaign.