Indigenous wisdom helps empower primary health care

Indigenous health leaders from Australia and New Zealand are being called upon to support and empower people at the center of primary health care systems at the World Health Organization’s (WHO) Global Conference on Primary Health Care starting today in Astana, Kazakhstan, co-hosted by the Government of Kazakhstan and the United Nations Children’s Fund.

The Indigenous Working Group of the World Federation of Public Health Associations has been invited by the World Health Organization to demonstrate Indigenous knowledge and moderation techniques as part of the Empowering People at the Centre of Primary Health Care conference session.

The Indigenous Working Group was formed in Melbourne last year at the World Congress on Public Health and was formally launched this year in Geneva alongside the World Health Assembly.

Adjunct-Associate Professor Carmen Parter, Co-chair of the Indigenous Working Group from Australia and Ms Emma Rawson Co-vice Chair and Public Health Association of New Zealand executive committee member, will be representing the Working Group.

Adjunct-Associate Professor Parter welcomed the invitation saying, “The Indigenous Working Group is honoured to be recognised as an important force bringing Indigenous knowledge and cultural practices to global discussions on primary health care. This conference is a significant international event bringing together health experts and world leaders which also celebrates the 40th anniversary of the Alma Ata Declaration and a renewed commitment to health for all, and for the working group to be part of this is very exciting.”

Co-chair Mr Adrian Te Patu said “We believe strongly in making Indigenous voices heard, as this is critical for our empowerment, and we hope our experiences can help strengthen all primary health care work. Our Indigenous methods at past global health events have been highly successful in facilitating honest and robust discussions on health, and we look forward to bringing a similar experience to this week’s conference.

Ms Emma Rawson, Co-vice chair agreed, saying “The Indigenous Working Group demonstrate a unique way to bring traditional Indigenous communication practices to the health sector, helping to bring practitioners
together and enabling them to find new levels of mutual understanding and solutions to common problems.”

“Health care workers will be able to share and learn from each other’s experiences in a way which celebrates diversity and helps us to gain a better understanding of who needs greater empowerment to deliver the best quality care. Valuing community knowledge, action, kindness and compassion will be highlighted as key to Indigenous health practice and to the success of the primary health sector.”

Ms Summer May Finlay, Co-vice chair of the Indigenous Working Group believes that this is an opportunity for the world to learn from Indigenous peoples. She stated, “Health care must incorporate Indigenous communities’ inherent wisdom, practices, culture and right to self-determination. In Australia, there are Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations which serve as a great example of what local and empowered primary health care workforces can look like.”

“The Indigenous Working Group believes strongly in empowering Indigenous health leaders to take the actions needed in their communities to improve the health and lifespans of the local peoples, and this model is something that all primary health care workers can benefit from.”

It’s great to have the opportunity to share some of our learnings with other health professionals from all over the world,” She said.

Adjunct Professor Michael Moore AM, the Immediate Past President of the World Federation of Public Health Associations congratulated the Indigenous Working Group saying, “Equity, rights and participation are all key values in Indigenous health leadership, and we are seeing these demonstrated in action by the leaders of the Indigenous Working Group.”

Professor Moore added, “This year’s conference theme of working towards Universal Health Coverage and the Sustainable Development Goals is more relevant than ever. Everyone deserves to be able to enjoy the highest level of health and wellbeing possible – and through empowering local communities and primary health networks we will get significantly closer to achieving this goal.”

The WHO Global Conference of Primary Health Care will have over 1000 delegates in attendance and will run over two days from 25-26 October.

Ms Rawson’s attendance has been funded by the WHO and UNICEF and Adjunct-Associate Professor Parter has been sponsored by the Sydney Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and the University of Sydney.

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