National Best Practice Unit – Tackling Indigenous Smoking

Advisory Group Workshop
Adelaide, 18 October 2016

Summary for distribution

Acknowledging that all elements of the Tackling Indigenous Smoking (TIS) program have been implemented, the Advisory Group for the National Best Practice Unit (NBPU TIS) commenced looking for opportunities to maximise the outcomes related to the program. Accordingly, the Advisory Group held a facilitated face-to-face workshop on opportunities and challenges for the successful implementation of the TIS program at Nunkuwarrin Yunti in Adelaide on 18 October 2016. An indication of the commitment and generosity of the Advisory Group members was shown by 15 people attending the workshop from almost every State and Territory.

During a series of structured activities, participants identified, prioritised and discussed opportunities and issues impacting on the ability of TIS organisations to reduce smoking among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as other strategic factors affecting the success of the TIS program. The following issues and options were discussed in detail.

1. Funding and policy
The flexibility of TIS funding is a benefit which allows TIS organisations to address smoking in a way that meets local community need. However, the lack of funding predictability challenges the ability of organisations to plan and maintain stable teams, and competitive funding can limit collaboration. Advisory Group members indicated their support for sustainable funding to tackle Indigenous smoking. Specific ideas for action included:

- discussions at the National Expert Reference Group on Tobacco to improve mainstream collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tobacco control efforts, and

- the preparation of briefings emphasising the importance of TIS organisations in adding to the momentum of falling smoking rates, their role in raising community capacity to address complex health issues, the importance of community control, and the need for long-term, sustainable efforts to address smoking-related harm.

2. Workforce
The TIS-workforce is relatively young, with associated benefits of adaptability and enthusiasm. However, many TIS organisations have difficulty recruiting and keeping skilled staff, and capacity building in an environment of high turnover remains challenging. Retention and recruitment is affected by short timelines and policy and funding uncertainty (see above). The NBPU TIS has developed a good understanding of TIS organisations' workforce needs and will continue to assist them to build capacity. Possible ways forward discussed by the Advisory Group included:

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Providing tailored support to organisations funded under the national Tackling Indigenous Smoking programme.

- enhancing connections with the mainstream tobacco control sector to share information and support workforce development strategies,

- provision of career planning opportunities for young recruits into TIS organisations, and

- use of webinars and other remote solutions to support the provision of training and workforce development activities.

3. Senior management / Board leadership

Senior Aboriginal management and Board members within TIS organisations are highly influential in the success of TIS programs at local/regional levels. However, some senior community members may be smokers and feel they are unable to advocate strongly for tobacco control measures such as smoke free environments; and some TIS workers may feel unwilling or be unable to address senior community members about their smoking. Amongst several ideas for action, participants identified:

- the importance of making messages 'systemic', for example about the health of children and families, rather than aimed at individuals in a way that may be construed as 'blaming', and

- encouraging TIS organisations to share effective resources and approaches (such as cross-promotion with other health promotion activities) through the TIS Portal and other pathways.

4. State-wide / mainstream collaboration

TIS organisations' efforts to reduce tobacco use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be strengthened through collaboration with mainstream agencies (government and non-government) in each jurisdiction and nationally. This includes Primary Health Networks which have an important role in tackling complex health issues. Potential ways forward identified by the Advisory Group included:

- recognition that peak-bodies representing the ACCHO sector could play an important role in encouraging and supporting collaboration in each jurisdiction. It was noted that in the current environment, additional resources to support such activities are unlikely to be available, and

- Advisory Group members from governments can promote the TIS program in jurisdictional and national forums to foster collaboration.

5. Other Topics

A number of other topics were briefly discussed:

- **Positive momentum and community context:** the TIS program works within a positive environment for change, with smoking rates already falling, communities increasingly willing to address tobacco use, and the ACCHO sector providing a well-established holistic approach to health.

- **Accessible evidence base:** The TIS Portal provides access to the evidence base about what works in tackling Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking.

- **The impact of remoteness on service delivery:** Remote organisations in particular face challenges due to recruitment, training and retention of staff, access to other support (e.g. mainstream tobacco control agencies), costs of delivery of services, and availability of infrastructure and technology.

- **The challenge for some TIS organisations to provide services at a regional level.**

- **The challenges in promoting smoke-free environments/implementing smoke free policies**.

The next Advisory Group meeting time and location is to be confirmed.

For further information contact:

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