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PEAK HEALTHCARE BODIES UNITE IN CALLING FOR URGENT ACTION ON MATERNITY CARE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WOMEN

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM), CRANaPlus and the Australian College of Midwives (ACM) today announce their jointly created position, calling for radical reform to maternity care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women.

This is the first time these organisations have taken a combined public stand on an issue. The collaboration came about from an urgent need to address the lack of progress on the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) mandate on closing the gap in healthcare. The three bodies state that current initiatives are not working, perpetuating poor health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and newborns which continue to have an impact in later life.

Despite the COAG commitment to addressing inequality in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, and halving deaths among children ages 0-4 years by 2018, progress has been slow and inconsistent.

Care of pregnant women and newborns is critical in closing the gap in healthcare.

The joint initiative has developed "Birthing on Country" models, and the partners now call for this approach to be implemented across Australia.

Janine Mohamed, CEO of CATSINaM said: "Our position is that Birthing on Country models of care should be implemented because they provide integrated, holistic and culturally safe and respectful care to provide the 'best start in life' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities."

Birthing On Country models can be incorporated in any setting, from highly urbanised to very remote environments, and are designed, developed, delivered and evaluated for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and midwives.

Christopher Cliffe, CEO, CRANaPlus said: "It is vital that wherever an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander baby is born, his or her mother and family are encouraged, supported and enabled to incorporate relevant cultural aspects within that place or service. Just as importantly, they should have access to maternity services that address their cultural, spiritual, social, emotional and physical needs."

Ann Kinnear, CEO, ACM said, "Birthing on Country models of care require services to be tailored to women's needs, where women and families are able to define their own cultural practices and choices within a safety and quality framework, and which enables connection to culture."

Call to action

ACM, CATSINaM and CRANaPlus collectively urge Australian, State and Territory governments to show leadership and develop a strategic approach to implementing Birthing on Country Program/s that can be delivered appropriately at the local level.

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