

MEDIA Release

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Ten priority actions for improving Aboriginal maternal and child health – improving the health status of our nation's future generations of Indigenous people

In November 2012, ASMR conducted an Indigenous Health Forum on achieving “*Better Health Outcomes for Mums and Bubs*”. The report and recommendations from the Forum are released to government today highlighting ten priority actions that can improve the health status of Australia's Indigenous women and children.

The disproportionate level of poor health and disease amongst Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is one of the most unacceptable health issues in Australia.

At the foundation of these health disparities are numerous challenges facing Indigenous women before, during and after pregnancy.

Dr Paul Dawson (ASMR Immediate Past President) said, “*The recommendations in this report come from listening to Indigenous Australians and leading health advocates. We want to put forward some practical, realistic proposals that focus on the beginning of life where there is enormous potential to influence for positive, life-long and even trans-generational health outcomes.*”

ASMR believes the key element in moving the conversation forward and implementing the recommendations of this report is understanding the importance of family, country and culture in maternal infant health care and developing effective models for the transfer of knowledge and evidence from Elders to women and children and across society.

Australia is considered to be one of the safest countries for childbirth but this is not true for the entire community. *The numbers of mothers dying in childbirth is starkly elevated in our Indigenous populations.* Our report cites the Canadian experience of ‘birthing on country’ where the Innuulitsivik Midwifery Service in Northern Quebec developed a model with excellent outcomes despite being many hours from surgical services. While ‘birthing on country’ may challenge some in the medical community, we can learn from the Canadian model that childbirth in very remote areas can offer a safe, sustainable and culturally acceptable alternative to routine transfer of women to regional centres.

Professor Naomi Rogers, ASMR President said, “*The ten recommendations contained in the report offer practical proposals which could be implemented now and begin to make immediate differences.*”

The complete report is available from <http://www.asmr.org.au/Submissions.html>

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