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MEDIA RELEASE

ASK INDIGENOUS MEN WHAT THEY WANT FROM HEALTH CARE

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ASKING Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men how they want to use health care services would be a good way to start engaging more Indigenous men with their health, according to the author of a Reflection published online today by the *Medical Journal of Australia*.

Dr Kootsy Canuto, a post-doctoral research fellow with the Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Equity Unit at the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute in Adelaide, wrote that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men were not engaging with primary health care services at organised health day events, despite the best intentions and efforts of some staff.

"This failed attempt to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men of a community to attend a health event is an all too common occurrence," Dr Canuto wrote. "The intended audience did not arrive, and the event failed to attract the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who are disengaged from their health."

"On the surface and from a distance, it may appear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are not interested in their health and reject the opportunities presented ... [this] cannot be further from the truth."

Dr Canuto suggested that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men were interested in their health and wanted to engage with primary health care services but did not feel those services were meeting their needs.

"Health services must be willing to ask the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men of their community how they want to utilise the service and how it, in turn, can better accommodate and respond to their hopes, wants and needs," Dr Canuto wrote.

"Subsequently, health services must also be able to make the appropriate changes to improve access and, ultimately, men's health outcomes."

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men need to and want to define their own future, which is critical to turning this situation around."

Ultimately, Dr Canuto believes "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men have the answers; however, it is unrealistic to expect them to improve their current situation alone. In partnership, a collaborated effort from all stakeholders is required to improve access to, and utilisation of, primary health care services."

Dr Canuto warned that without appropriate collaboration and the resources to develop, implement, sustain and evaluate engagement strategies, "closing the gap will persist as nothing more than a memorable slogan".

Please remember to credit *The MJA*.

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CONTACTS: Peter McDonald
Senior Communications Officer
SAHMRI
Ph: 0402 293 078
Email: pete.mcdonald@sahmri.com