



SEXUAL
HEALTH
SOCIETY
OF QUEENSLAND

Minister for Health
PO Box 48
Brisbane
Queensland, 4001

9th March 2017

Dear Hon. Cameron Dick,

On behalf of the members of the Sexual Health Society of Queensland, I am writing to you to encourage the Queensland Government to allocate funding to the Indigenous 2 Spirits sexual health program in Queensland.

2 Spirits has been operating in Queensland for 21 years, and during that time has worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men and sistergirls taking a whole of community approach to reduce shame, stigma and discrimination and to improve sexual health outcomes. This program is unique in Queensland, and its ongoing collaborative engagement with health and other community services has played a pivotal role in breaking down access barriers and promote safe sex at a whole of community level. However, their work is not done.

The Federal Government's recent defunding of the 2 Spirits program has come at a time when there has never been a more essential need to commit funding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexual Health. With the rate of new HIV infections currently double in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, and with some rates of sexually transmitted infections up to 20 times higher than in the non-Indigenous population, now is the time to increase funding to programs which provide culturally appropriate education to at risk groups. Community based organisations such as 2 Spirits are essential to delivering effective awareness and prevention programs, where community consultation and engagement are required to maximise their success.

This unique approach means the 2 Spirits program has been instrumental in designing and implementing effective programs to address inequalities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sexual health, which were identified as a priority population in the recent *Queensland Sexual Health Strategy*. The 2 Spirits program has a long history of working effectively within this population to promote messages on safer sex, sexual health and HIV prevention, which can only continue with your support.

Especially given the rise of infectious syphilis and HIV infection in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Northern Queensland, and the potential for a generalised HIV epidemic within those populations, the continued funding of the 2 Spirits program has never been more essential to close the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous sexual health outcomes.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Stuart Aitken

President, Sexual Health Society of Queensland



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