



SEXUAL
HEALTH
SOCIETY
OF QUEENSLAND

Minister for Health
PO Box 6022
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

9th March 2017

Dear Hon. Greg Hunt,

On behalf of our members, I am writing to you to express our concern and dismay at the recently announced cuts to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Sexual Health funding, specifically to the 2 Spirits program in Queensland.

The 2 Spirits program has been operating in Queensland for 21 years, and during that time has worked closely with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander gay men and sisters/girls taking a whole of community approach to reduce shame, stigma and discrimination and 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.

While I acknowledge that the Commonwealth considers it the responsibility of the State Government to fund these services, announcing a cut to this program without negotiating a continuation of service with the State Government is disappointing. Community based organisations such as the 2 Spirits program 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. 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 such as 2 Spirits which provide culturally appropriate education to at risk groups. The critically important nature of these programs cannot be underestimated 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.

I ask that you reconsider your decision and restore funding to these essential programs. Better yet, please consider expanding this vital service to encompass other states and territories.

Yours Sincerely,

Dr. Stuart Aitken

President, Sexual Health Society of Queensland



PO Box 1399

TOOMBUL
Queensland, 4012

Website www.shsqld.com