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I WANT TO BE HEARD: COMMUNITY REPORT LAUNCH

The stories of nearly 100 Indigenous people from the ACT and region who are illegal drug users have been launched as a community report.

I Want To Be Heard aims to be an accessible publication reflecting the outcomes of an ANU study on illegal drug use. The publication is aimed at community support groups, health groups, families and friends of Indigenous illegal drug users and the broader community.

The report is based on research conducted collaboratively between researchers from the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health at ANU and the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service. Undertaken between 2001 and 2004, it investigated the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander illegal drug users in the region for treatment and other services.

Research leader Dr Phyll Dance from ANU said: "The Community Report was produced in collaboration with the local Aboriginal community to inform participants in the original research as well as the wider Aboriginal community about the findings, and to also provide some messages about treatment and other relevant services."

"It's estimated that there could be up to 500 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander illegal drug users in the ACT and surrounding region and the average age of starting to use illegal drugs of any type was 14 years, which is around five years younger than for other Australians who have ever used illegal drugs. So it's important we listen to them about trying to improve this situation."

"Elders were very concerned about the high level of illegal drug use among young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT and region. They were concerned about the harm this was doing, and the effect it could have on the young peoples' lives if nothing was done," Dr Dance said.

Nearly 100 people participated in the original research and this community report — funded by the ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health — is a 'plain language version' which has been written and presented in a way to which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can relate.

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service Chief Executive Officer, Ms Julie Tongs, said: "Drug use is a serious problem affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait islanders in the Canberra, Queanbeyan and Yass region".

"However, the major findings of the research are not particular just to this region but can be more generally applied to other Australian urban Aboriginal communities," Ms Tongs said. "At Winnunga we live daily with the after affects of drug abuse. This report should help inform governments what those most affected believe needs to be done to help and treat those with drug problems."

The *I Want To Be Heard* community report, which was produced with funding from the ACT Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, was launched today at the Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service by Australian Olympic sprinter Patrick Johnson.

More information: http://nceph.anu.edu.au/Publications/Indig_docs/Embargo/

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