

Tuesday July 3

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## Big Artie's memory evoked in close the gap call

Queensland's peak Indigenous health organisation has joined forces with the Arthur Beetson Foundation to urge the Newman Government to meet its financial commitments to the national close the gap campaign.

At the start of NAIDOC Week Selwyn Button, CEO of the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, said that the Indigenous health sector feared the Indigenous health budget was not to be quarantined from the general cuts to the state budget currently being undertaken.

"It is particularly important to retain the current level of funding to the Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations which have demonstrated their effectiveness with the release of the latest patient data," said Mr Button. "Not only do more than 75,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders access these services on a regular basis but the sector is achieving high rates of community screening and follow ups.

Mr Button said the 28 QAIHC member services had completed close to 6000 adult health checks and nearly 3000 child health checks.

"Twelve thousand of our people had smoking checks and blood pressure taken and nearly 8000 were screened for alcohol consumption," he said. "These results indicate the growing effectiveness of our sector and the fact that our concentration on chronic disease prevention is working.

"With impending budget cuts being discussed by the Newman Government at all levels, there is an ongoing need to ensure maintenance of current and future committed investment into the community controlled sector to support continued achievement of these outcomes.

"It would be a myopic tragedy if current budgetary constraints were to undermine these successes just as they are starting to bite," said Mr Button.

Arthur Beetson Foundation spokesman, Tony Currie, said the unveiling of the statue of Artie at Suncorp Stadium tomorrow was a fitting time to remind Queenslanders and the Newman Government of how much more work was needed to close the health gap in the state.

“Artie was a Queensland Aboriginal Rugby League legend who, like many other Indigenous men, died of heart disease before his time,” said Tony Currie. “The heart disease that finally got Artie accounts for an estimated 28% of the health gap in Queensland and the work of QAIHC and its members are starting to turn this statistic around.

“We really hope Campbell Newman and his health minister, Lawrence Springborg understand that this work can only be achieved through continued government investment in a sector which is proving its impact.

“Artie was a big supporter of local community control of Aboriginal health because he knew how important it was for Indigenous people to be actively responsible for our own health,” he said.

QAIHC and the Arthur Beetson Foundation will partner to host the Queensland Murri Rugby League Carnival over the next 3 years as part of the sector’s ongoing commitment to progressing Artie’s goal to closing the gap in health outcomes for all our mob, using sport as a vehicle to achieving better outcomes.

**- Ends -**

The unveiling of Arthur Beetson’s statue will take place at Suncorp Stadium Tuesday 3 July at 11am.

For information on the health gap between Indigenous and other Queenslanders go to:

[http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atsihealth/close\\_gap.asp](http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atsihealth/close_gap.asp)

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