Listening—the first step to developing a state-wide hearing health plan

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Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC) supports twenty-seven community-controlled health services. An important role is to build organisational capacity and assist in planning, development and delivery of comprehensive primary health care to their communities; as well as assessing health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.

It is widely recognised that otitis media is a significant health problem in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Otitis media can significantly impact language development, education, social interactions and psychological health, which lead to poor employment opportunities, greater likelihood of substance use (including tobacco and alcohol) and in turn lay down the foundation for other chronic illnesses/diseases. It would be impossible to ‘Close the Gap’ on education and health if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children’s hearing is impaired by this largely preventable condition.

The Commonwealth Government’s Improving Eye and Ear Health Services for Indigenous Australians for Better Education and Employment Outcomes measures expand these health services for Indigenous Australians. Funds have provided the first steps for QAIHC to investigate strategies that determine an implementation plan for our health sector that will enhance prevention, early identification and early treatment of appropriate ear and hearing health programs towards Indigenous communities.

These steps include the importance of consultation amongst Aboriginal and Islander Community Controlled Health Services; as well as the importance of negotiations amongst key organisations involved in Hearing and Ear Health Plans across the state.

This paper will report on the key findings of this process and the recommendations to be included into a state-wide Hearing Health Plan for the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector in Queensland.