

Healthy win for the NT

EXCLUSIVE
GARY SHIPWAY

THE Territory's kidney disease sufferers will be the major beneficiaries of a new Medicare item to be announced by the Turnbull Government today.

Federal Minister for Health Greg Hunt will unveil the new plan which will offer new support to Australia's most dialysis dependent sector – indigenous Territorians.

The Territory's Indigenous Affairs Minister CLP senator Nigel Scullion hailed the decision as a potential game changer for indigenous Territorians.

"The Turnbull Government is committed to better health outcomes for indigenous Territorians and part of that is tackling life threatening kidney disease," he said.

"This Medicare decision will go a long way to improving those outcomes."

Federal Minister Hunt echoed the CLP senator's sentiments.

"This is a great outcome for indigenous Australians and especially those in remote areas," Mr Hunt said.

"The new Medicare item will support the delivery of dialysis in very remote areas to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with kidney disease.

"Significantly it will enable dialysis to be managed by a

registered nurse, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner or Aboriginal health worker with appropriate training, on behalf of a medical practitioner.

Menzies School of Health Research and a renal dialysis specialist Professor Alan Cass described the news as an important initiative that has the potential to address a devastating problem among remote communities. Prof Cass said there was no disease which

had a more devastating impact on Aboriginal Territorians than kidney disease.

"One in 50 Aborigines are touched by kidney disease — we have more than 800 Aboriginal Territorians currently on dialysis," he said.

"The significance of this announcement should not be lost on anyone. Living on country is important for remote Aboriginal Territorians and leaving it to receive treatment is daunting. "There are often

cases of patients leaving treatment to go back to country rather than continuing in a city treatment facility."

NT Health Minister Natasha Fyles said the decision was a win for Territorians suffering end stage renal failure.

"The Territory Labor Government has lobbied strongly for this inclusion on the MBS that will significantly improve health outcomes for many Territorians," she said.

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SUNDAY Territorian OUR SAY

A good move but too long overdue

KIDNEY disease sufferers will be the major beneficiaries of a new Medicare item announced today.

This is undoubtedly positive news for health services in remote communities and the Government should be commended for the action. This announcement comes as the final posthumous album of Yolngu singer Gurrumul hit No.1 in the ARIA charts this week, exemplifying the incredible loss we all suffer as a nation from the failure of successive governments to adequately address indigenous health issues in remote communities.

The death of Gurrumul at 46 highlights the crippling impacts kidney failure have on indigenous Australians.

The incidence of end-stage kidney disease in the NT is three or four times the national Australian figures, and it is largely confined to indigenous communities.

The Territory has been the hardest hit in the nation from this issue and our health care system has been struggling to meet demand. Hopefully, this announcement will put us at the forefront of treatment for kidney disease, not just playing catch up – and definitely not lagging behind in the ways that we have been.