

## Researchers call for global action to improve Indigenous health outcomes

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A Menzies researcher is calling on the World Health Organisation (WHO) and governments to prioritise improvements in cancer control for Indigenous people globally.

Professor Gail Garvey, a leading cancer researcher at Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and Kamilaroi woman from New South Wales, co-authored an open letter published today in leading international medical journal, the *Lancet Oncology*.

"Population-level cancer surveillance provides data to set priorities, inform policies and monitor progress over time," said Professor Garvey.

"However, some Indigenous cancer patients are effectively invisible; Australia cannot report national cancer incidence and mortality for all Indigenous people as not all jurisdictions or administrative datasets accurately report their Indigenous status.

"Australia has newly-developed Optimal Cancer Care Pathways to improve patient outcomes from prevention to survivorship, and the challenge now is monitoring if services are providing inclusive care to Indigenous patients that is concordant with these pathways."

Professor Garvey was part of an organising committee of cancer researchers from New Zealand and the Pacific for the Indigenous Peoples and Cancer symposium held in Wellington in February 2018.

Researchers urged authorities to provide better support for the health and wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in the region by developing, implementing and maintaining cancer control plans, which included the monitoring of and reporting on progress.

Professor Diana Sarfati, the *Lancet Oncology* letter's lead author from the University of Otago, Wellington, said cancer policies need to have a clear focus on Indigenous populations to ensure health inequities are addressed.

"While there has been tremendous progress in preventing, diagnosing and treating many cancers in general, the potential of this progress has yet to be fully realised by the Indigenous peoples in our region. Large disparities remain in many countries," said Professor Sarfati.

"We have identified issues - from lack of effective cancer prevention strategies, unequal access to and through cancer treatment and support services, and variable monitoring of cancer outcomes for Indigenous peoples, and these need to be addressed."

The significance of the letter was recognised by the Director-General of the WHO, Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who responded to the letter in the same issue of the *Lancet Oncology*.

The letter in Lancet can be viewed at  
[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045\(18\)30336-X/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lanonc/article/PIIS1470-2045(18)30336-X/fulltext)

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**Menzies School of Health Research**

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.