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Menzies researcher endorses United Nations Statement

A UN Human Rights Council statement calls on Australia to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are front and centre in Australia's push towards cervical cancer elimination

Today in Geneva at the 41st Human Rights Council Session, Cristyn Davies delivered a powerful call to action supporting the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to protection against cervical cancer, on behalf of the Human Rights Council of Australia.

The statement recognizes Australia's world leading programs and successes in the prevention of cervical cancer through HPV vaccination and cervical screening, which have led to predictions that Australia may be one of the first countries to achieve cervical cancer elimination as a public health problem.

The World Health Organization is currently working on a strategy to achieve this elimination in all countries by the end of the century. However it notes the higher burden of disease currently borne by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and urges the Australian government to take action to ensure that no one is left behind in the push for elimination of this terrible yet preventable disease.

These actions must be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and health experts and include improvements in vaccination and screening rates, provision of culturally appropriate health care and in the collection of Indigenous status data in relevant datasets including from the private pathology sector, who manage large volumes of cervical screening data.

Cristyn Davies, Senior Research Fellow at the University of Sydney said "I was honoured to give this statement on behalf of the Human Rights Council of Australia and to call for equality for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women of Australia. The time for action is now – we have the tools to eliminate this disease, but it must be for all women."

Dr Lisa Whop, Senior Research Fellow at the Menzies School of Health Research, Australia, endorsed the statement, calling for a sustained active commitment from the highest level of government to end this disparity.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently have a rising burden of cancer in Australia. The major breakthroughs in prevention of cervical cancer provide us with an opportunity to help turn this around and we must seize it now for the current generation of women" said Dr Whop.

Assoc Prof Julia Brotherton, Medical Director of VCS Population Health at the VCS Foundation, said 'We have been working for over a decade alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women to show that it is possible to systematically support accessible and culturally appropriate cervical cancer prevention for all women. The collection and use of better quality data from our programs is vital to maximise the impact and reach of HPV

vaccination and cervical screening. It's time to build on these initiatives and push nationally for equality and best practice in cancer prevention for all women. We commend the Human Rights Council of Australia on this important statement.'

The statement was also co-sponsored by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Family Violence Prevention and Legal Service (Victoria) (Djirra), and endorsed by Menzies School of Health Research, the National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance, the Australian Association for Adolescent Health, and the VCS Foundation.

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Menzies School of Health Research

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