



National Indigenous Immunisation message stick newsletter December 2017

Closing the gap in immunisation rates between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children in Queensland

Immunisation rate gap

Despite improvements in childhood immunisation rates across Queensland in recent years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous children at 12 months of age, immunisation rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland at 12 months of age remain lower than non-Indigenous children (See Figure 1).

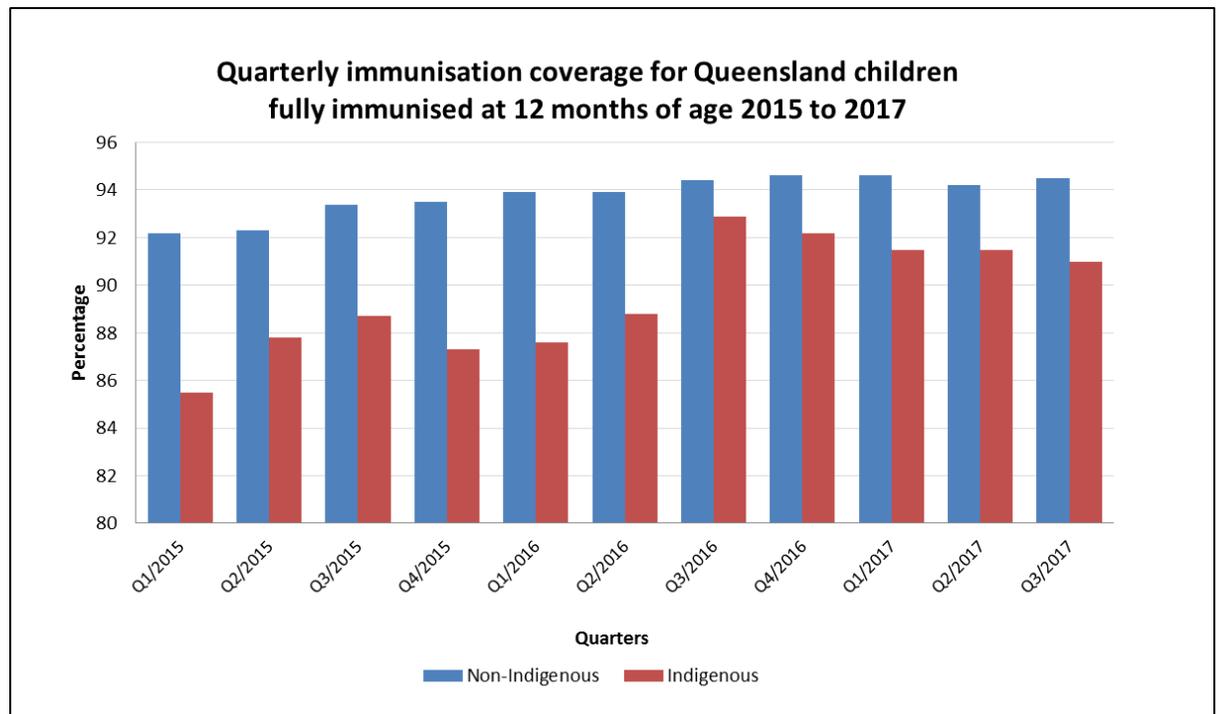


Figure 1: Queensland childhood immunisation coverage by Indigenous status Data source: AIR

The difference between rates of fully immunised 12-month-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared with non-Indigenous children at 12 months of age has been reducing in recent years in Queensland. The green line in Figure 2



shows the quarterly gap difference varying from quarter to quarter. The dotted line reveals the overall downward trend with a gradual reduction in the size of the gap. The trend is encouraging but there is still much more work to be done. The goal of the *Queensland Health Immunisation Strategy 2017–2022* is for 95% of all children to be up-to-date with their childhood immunisations as recommended in the National Immunisation Program (NIP) Schedule.

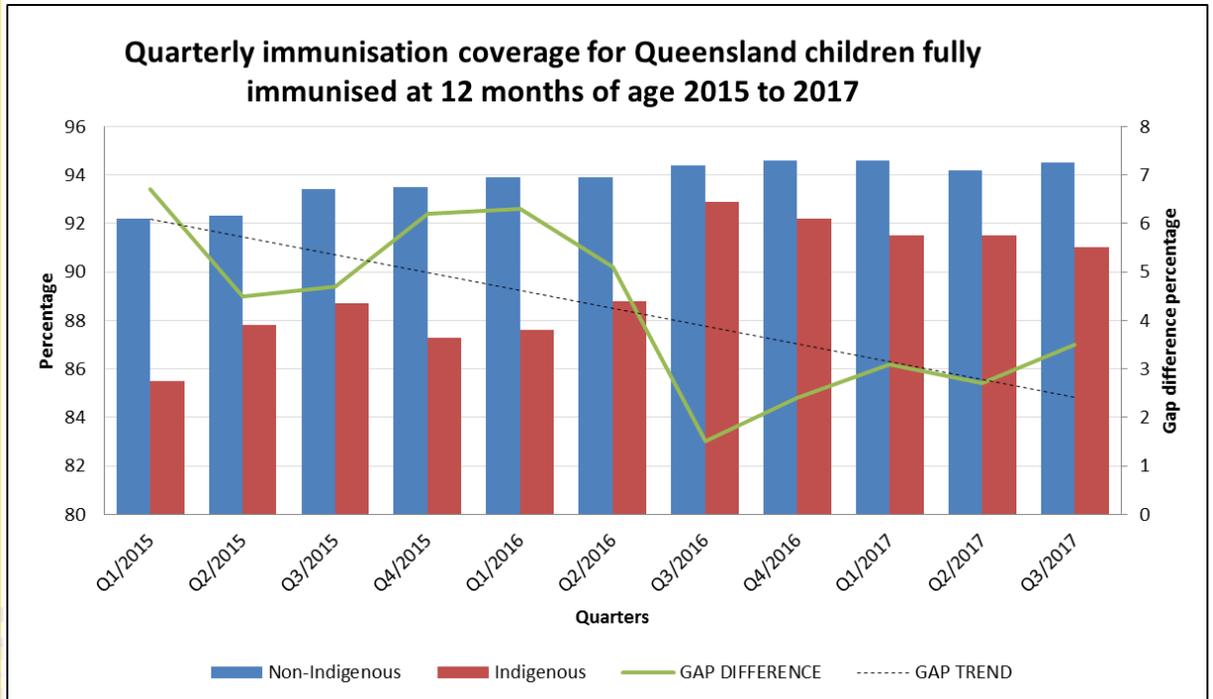


Figure 2: Differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous immunisation rates

Data source: AIR

A significant gap between rates of fully immunised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared with non-Indigenous children also occurs for cohorts of children at two years of age. Mapping this gap however in recent years has been problematic due to frequent changes to the NIP schedule and subsequent wide variations in coverage data. Hence the focus in this article on the 12-month-old cohorts to monitor changes in the gap.

The data for the one-year-old and two-year-old cohorts of children indicate that proportionately, a larger percentage of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander infant population may be at risk of vaccine-preventable disease than non-Indigenous infants. There is a particular concern with regard to rotavirus as Rotarix®, the rotavirus vaccine used in the National Immunisation Program in Australia cannot be given to a child after 25 weeks of age.



Data on the five-year-old cohorts of Queensland children indicate that the gap between fully immunised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and non-Indigenous is frequently reversed. The quarterly rates for five-year-old Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in Queensland in recent years have been higher than non-Indigenous children. This is a remarkable achievement and a testament to the support for childhood immunisation in Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. However, these data can be misleading as they mask issues such as timeliness of primary immunisations and vulnerability of the younger age groups.

Actions in response

The Queensland Health report, Closing the Gap Performance Report 2015 https://www.health.qld.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0024/153861/closing-gap-2015.pdf recommends efficient use of recall systems, community leadership, support of immunisation programs and integration of immunisation services with community-based programs and services as effective strategies to address immunisation coverage issues.

The Communicable Diseases Branch, Queensland Department of Health produced a discussion paper in 2016 focussing on immunisation coverage data for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children at 12 months of age across Queensland. This paper highlighted issues and encouraged further activity to address the lower rates of immunisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children compared with non-Indigenous children.

In August 2016, the then Minister for Health and Minister for Ambulance Services, the Honourable Cameron Dick MP wrote to the Chair of each of the 15 Hospital and Health Services in Queensland to encourage their continued cooperation in addressing the challenges outlined in the discussion paper.

Towards the end of 2016, a plan for an intensive, state-wide approach to follow-up Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children overdue for immunisations was developed in collaboration with the Health Contact Centre (HCC) which had already commenced a whole-of-population, cohort-based follow-up initiative under the banner of Immunise to 95.

On 16 January 2017, under a new initiative called Bubba Jabs on Time, the HCC commenced weekly follow up of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children



less than 12 months of age who were identified on the Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) as overdue for immunisations. From the commencement of this

initiative through to 31 October 2017, a total of 1,932 children's records were followed up. Follow-up activities included:

- parent phone contact
- immunisation provider contact (phone, email or facsimile)
- parent letter/email (where they cannot be contacted by phone)
- AIR correction of errors (advised via telephone or secure email).

As a result of the follow-up activities over 500 records were updated. Approximately half of those updated records (250+) included children whose immunisation status became "up-to-date". Of those records not updated at the time of closure (approximately 1400), almost half of these (i.e. approximately 700) were in the process of being updated with ongoing activities such as:

- parents indicating they intended to have the child vaccinated in the future;
- parents intending to send records to HCC to verify the child had received immunisations;
- AIR informed of recording error requiring correction.

A range of locally-based strategies are underway in Hospital and Health Services (HHS) which aim to improve coverage by assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families with their children's immunisation needs to complement the Bubba Jabs on Time project. The Communicable Diseases Branch has provided additional resources to the Townsville HHS and the Cairns and Hinterland HHS where there are large populations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander childhood immunisation rates for one-year-olds are lowest.

In Townsville, the project involving local services in follow-up activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children overdue for immunisations is promoted as "Boots on the Ground". Cairns HHS is developing a similar project, "Connecting Our Mob", which will work with local communities and immunisation



service providers to address barriers and assist families to get their children up-to-date with their immunisations.

The Department of Health also funds an immunisation project located within the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council which supports Aboriginal Community-Controlled Health Services in the delivery of immunisation services.

Queensland Health is committed to improving childhood immunisation coverage rates across the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population to protect families and communities from vaccine-preventable diseases. The goal we continue to

strive towards is for 95% of all children to be up-to-date with their childhood immunisations, as recommended in the National Immunisation Program Schedule.

Are all your bubbas jabs up to date?

Ask your healthworker, nurse or doctor **today!**

Get reminders for bubba's jabs & appointments with the free VacciDate app, go to: vaccinate.initiatives.qld.gov.au/vaccidate

Download VacciDate FREE from your app store.

For more information contact your local health centre or public health unit.

FEBRUARY 2016

Queensland Government

Report by

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Branch QLD Department of Health



2018 National NAIDOC Theme Announced



BECAUSE OF HER, WE CAN!

8-15 JULY 2018

Statement by National NAIDOC Co-Chairs Dr Anne Martin & Mr Ben Mitchell

NAIDOC Week 2018 will celebrate the invaluable contributions that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have made – and continue to make - to our communities, our families, our rich history and to our nation.

Under the theme - Because of her, we can! - NAIDOC Week 2018 will be held nationally from Sunday 8 July and continue through to Sunday 15 July.

As pillars of our society, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have played – and continue to play - active and significant roles at the community, local, state and national levels.

As leaders, trailblazers, politicians, activists and social change advocates, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women fought and continue to fight, for justice, equal rights, our rights to country, for law and justice, access to education, employment and to maintain and celebrate our culture, language, music and art.

They continue to influence as doctors, lawyers, teachers, electricians, chefs, nurses, architects, rangers, emergency and defence personnel, writers, volunteers, chief executive officers, actors, singer songwriters, journalists, entrepreneurs, media personalities, board members, accountants, academics, sporting icons and Olympians, the list goes on.

They are our mothers, our elders, our grandmothers, our aunties, our sisters and our daughters.



Sadly, Indigenous women's role in our cultural, social and political survival has often been invisible, unsung or diminished.

For at least 65,000 years, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have carried our dreaming stories, songlines, languages and knowledge that have kept our culture strong and enriched us as the oldest continuing culture on the planet.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women were there at first contact.

They were there at the Torres Strait Pearlers strike in 1936, the Day of Mourning in 1938, the 1939 Cummeragunja Walk-Off, at the 1946 Pilbara pastoral workers' strike, the 1965 Freedom Rides, the Wave Hill walk off in 1966, on the front line of the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972 and at the drafting of the Uluru Statement.

They have marched, protested and spoken at demonstrations and national gatherings for the proper recognition of our rights and calling for national reform and justice.

Our women were heavily involved in the campaign for the 1967 Referendum and also put up their hands to represent their people at the establishment of national advocacy and representative bodies from the National Aboriginal Congress (NAC) to ATSIC to Land Councils and onto the National Congress for Australia's First Peoples.

They often did so while caring for our families, maintaining our homes and breaking down cultural and institutionalised barriers and gender stereotypes.

Our women did so because they demanded a better life, greater opportunities and - in many cases equal rights - for our children, our families and our people.

They were pioneering women like Barangaroo, Truganini, Gladys Elphick, Fannie Cochrane-Smith, Evelyn Scott, Pearl Gibbs, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, Celuia Mapo Salee, Thancopie, Justine Saunders, Gladys Nicholls, Flo Kennedy, Essie Coffey, Isabel Coe, Emily Kame Kngwarreye, Eleanor Harding, Mum Shirl, Ellie Gaffney and Gladys Tybingoompa.

Today, they are trailblazers like Joyce Clague, Yalmay Yunupingu, Evonne Goolagong Cawley, Nova Peris, Carol Martin, Elizabeth Morgan, Barbara Shaw, Rose Richards, Vonda Malone, Margaret Valadian, Lowitja O'Donoghue, June Oscar, Pat O'Shane, Pat Anderson Jill Milroy, Banduk Marika, Linda Burney and Rosalie Kunoth-Monks – to name but a few.



Their achievements, their voice, their unwavering passion give us strength and have empowered past generations and paved the way for generations to come.

Because of her, we can!

The National NAIDOC poster competition and award nominations will open in the coming weeks. Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander artists aged 13+ are encouraged to start working on artwork which reflects the 2018 theme. Keep an eye on the website and the National NAIDOC Facebook page for more details.



BECAUSE OF HER, WE CAN!

8-15 JULY 2018

For more information visit: naidoc.org.au



Save the date – PHAA 16th National Immunisation Conference

**Immunisation for all: Gains, gaps and
goals**

**Tuesday 5th to Thursday 7th June
2018, Adelaide Convention Centre
South Australia**

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