

## **Australian Government's Emergency Response in the Northern Territory.**

The Northern Territory Emergency Response Health Expert Panel (the Panel) has been established as a collaborative initiative between the Australian Government and a range of health professional peak organisation. The Panel aims to facilitate the improvement of health concerns for the Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. The Panel is co chaired by Dr Bill Glasson and Ms Paula Arnol. Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) has been a founding member along with a number of medical, nursing and health organisation bodies, and is the only member representing Allied Health professionals. Heather Jensen is representing SARRAH on the Panel.

The Australian Government's Emergency Response in the Northern Territory was announced on June 21<sup>st</sup> 2007. One of the major health initiatives of this response is the child health checks which are being conducted by health professionals brought in for short periods of time to communities.

- Phase 1 is the establishment of teams to conduct the child health checks and is still being completed in some communities.
- Phase 2 is the follow up of the conditions found from these checks, and is based around ear health, dental health, drug and alcohol issues and primary health care needs. This phase is required to be completed by June 30<sup>th</sup> of this year.
- Phase 3 is the enhancement of the current Primary Health Care services already existing on the ground.

Allied Health professionals have had a limited role in Phase 1 of the response. Audiologists and Dental Hygienists or Therapists are being recruited for Phase 2, although there may be a role for other Allied Health professionals who will probably be utilised via existing services. Recruitment processes for Phase 3 are still being developed for both government and non government services. SARRAH members are actively involved in the development of these processes.

While there are concerns about the way in which the intervention was announced and has developed, the longer term focus on improving health outcomes of Indigenous people is to be commended. The additional funding for Phase 3 to expand remote Primary Health Care provides an opportunity to extend much needed Allied Health Services to Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

SARRAH has developed a position paper on the intervention which has been sent to the Commonwealth Minister for Health and Ageing. SARRAH is also developing a second paper on working in remote Aboriginal communities. Contact Rod Wellington in the SARRAH national office for more information about these papers.

The Panel hopes to attract more Allied Health professionals to work in this exciting and challenging area so if you are interested please register your details on line at [www.ntahp.org.au](http://www.ntahp.org.au). Contact Heather Jensen at [heather.jensen@cdu.edu.au](mailto:heather.jensen@cdu.edu.au) if you have any further questions.