

# Tackling Aboriginal health

By Alena Nickell

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MESSAGE BEARERS: Six of the 10 members of the Tamworth Aboriginal Men's Health and Wellbeing Expo steering committee, from left, Gary Creighton, Norman Allan, Geoffrey Suey, Shane Reid, Shane Salvador, Luke Allan and community member Colin Bergan. Photo: Geoff O'Neill 100713GOB01

WHILE Australian men can expect to live a relatively long life, life expectancy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men is considerably lower – and average of 11.5 years lower to be exact.

In order to help tackle the problem, the Yaamanhaa Aboriginal Men's Group has partnered with Hunter New England Health, New England Medicare Local, Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service (WACHS), Tamworth Family Support Service and Tamworth Anglican Northern Inland Counselling Service to organise an Aboriginal men's health and wellbeing expo.

Organisers hope the week-long event, to take place from December 2 to 6, will engage the community, bring awareness to the services available to men and also break down stigmas that prevent all men, not just Aboriginal men, from seeking medical assistance. "When men get sick they prolong it, they don't go and seek help," Norman Allan of WACHS said. "It's getting the message out there that if there's something wrong with you, go. Don't muck around."

Luke Allan of Hunter New England Health said many barriers prevent men from accessing services, and sometimes men themselves were their biggest enemies. "A lot of men have

thoughts like, 'she'll be right', and put things off to the last minute or until they can no longer ignore the issue," he said.

"And the fact is, there probably hasn't been a lot of focus on including men into services in the past – it's more targeted at a family perspective to mum and bub."

A 10-man steering committee made up of prominent Aboriginal community members, including Gary Creighton, Geoffrey Suey, Shane Salvador, Shane Reid, Joe Miller, Jay Ramirez and Norman, Luke, Bill and Glenn Allan, has worked tirelessly to prepare the week's activities, which they say will be both informative and fun.

"We're going to have two activity days," Mr Reid of Anglicare Northern Inland said.

"A 20/20 cricket match with four teams on the Wednesday with a lot of health care service providers on the sidelines promoting their goods and resources. "And on Friday we finish with the 18-hole golf day and healthy meals."

Funding from Hunter New England Health will provide expo-goers with a myriad of hassle free on-the-spot health checks ranging from cancer council checks, diabetes and cardiovascular checks, sexual health tests and hearing and dental checks. "Checks happen in-house and results are all back without having to go anywhere, which is a big bonus so people can say, 'that's not too hard'," Mr Salvador of Tamworth Family Support Service said.

The steering committee has also secured as a special guest Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda who is renowned for empowering indigenous communities. Hundreds are expected to attend the expo, with free fitness programs, anger management courses, gambling and mental health workshops and healthy food provided throughout the week.

Non-aboriginal men are also welcome to attend.