

October 2012 HIC Meeting - Summary of Key Outcomes and Action Items

Senior representatives from PNG National Department of Health, Western Province Health Administration, Australian Department of Health and Ageing, Queensland Health, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Department of Immigration and Citizenship, the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) and Australian Customs and Border Protection Service joined the Torres Strait Cross Border Health Issues Committee (HIC) meeting on 30-31 October 2012 in Cairns. The Committee provides a communication and discussion forum for addressing cross-border health issues.

HIC members noted the final successful handover of PNG TB patients from clinics in Torres Strait in June 2012 which was reviewed by PNG and Australian clinicians on 30 October 2012.

HIC members commended PNG on progress made in implementing programmatic management of TB in Western Province and improvements in treatment success and decline in mortality rates. PNG's approach comprises key elements as detailed in the WHO Stop TB Strategy and is being supported by AusAID and other partners. The implementation of a high quality DOTS program is the cornerstone of this strategy.

As part of the Australia-PNG Partnership for Development, Australia is also providing broader support to strengthen health services and systems, through the provision of essential medical supplies, training health workers, and development of infrastructure with other partners in Western Province. Australia's development assistance program in Western Province also provides support for education and law and justice.

There was broad in-principle commitment to maintaining the momentum of technical collaboration through the establishment of a joint PNG-Australia clinical collaborative group commencing in early 2013. At the first meeting the specific objectives, intent and scope of the group will be clarified and a workplan developed.

HIC members noted that a cross-border communications protocol is now in place. PNG and Queensland Health representatives will continue working together with a view to finalising a template and process to facilitate the referral of PNG patients from Torres Strait to PNG as clinically appropriate.

HIC members also agreed on the importance of promoting and facilitating better information sharing between PNG and Australian clinicians. There was also broad agreement on the importance of a joint approach to surveillance for a range of infectious diseases in the Torres Strait cross border region. This includes reasons for presentations and admissions of PNG nationals to Queensland health facilities to inform health interventions and the effective targeting of health resources. HIC

members supported the development of improved governance between PNG, Queensland and Australian health agencies on cross border disease monitoring arrangements. This will involve agreed surveillance arrangements and clinical protocols for infectious disease control including TB, for this region.

HIC members welcomed the epidemiological study report: ***Evaluation of Risks of Tuberculosis in Western Province PNG***, commissioned by GoPNG and conducted by Associate Professor Emma McBryde. The report presents data and analysis which provides a better understanding of risks related to transmission and management of TB at the PNG-Australia border region.

HIC members also supported AusAID's proposal to host a round-table in Brisbane by the first week of December (2012) to promote discussion and consensus between key stakeholders on best practice approaches to supporting effective TB management in Western Province, PNG. This would be informed by the McBryde report and the World Health Organization's upcoming assessment mission to PNG. The round-table could consider and endorse or moderate key recommendations, propose key elements of an implementation plan, and consider an appropriate mechanism for future monitoring and reporting against this. Any future research priorities identified through this process would be subject to PNG and Australia ethical standards for research.

The HIC noted the concerns of traditional inhabitants expressed at the 2012 Traditional Inhabitants Meeting (TIM). The HIC reaffirmed its commitment to working with traditional inhabitants through GoPNG, to ensure development assistance programs continue to address priority needs. HIC however noted that integral to the partnership for development between PNG and Australia, all consultations on development assistance to PNG is conducted between the provincial and national level Governments and GoA. Consultation with communities in PNG remains the responsibility of local, provincial and national PNG governments.