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## **Preventative health essential to closing the gap**

The National Preventative Health Strategy foreshadowed today by Health Minister, Nicola Roxon could play a major part in closing the 17 year life expectancy gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, according to Indigenous rights organisation, ANTaR.

Welcoming the discussion paper released by the Minister, ANTaR National Director, Gary Highland said that tobacco, alcohol and obesity were all significant factors contributing to the poor health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“Tobacco use and obesity are the two greatest contributors to the burden of disease for Indigenous people,” Mr Highland said.

“We won’t defeat the diabetes and cardiovascular disease suffered by Aboriginal people unless we prevent obesity and tobacco use.”

Mr Highland said that tackling alcohol was also crucial to overcoming Indigenous disadvantage.

“The discussion paper points out that although Indigenous people are twice as likely to abstain from alcohol as other Australians, those who do drink are up to six times more likely to do this at high-risk levels,” Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said the discussion paper was clear, comprehensive and refreshingly frank when it came to the dangers posed by vested interests such as big tobacco.

“It’s pleasing to see that closing the gap is a high priority in the discussion paper, just as it appears to be in the work of the Government’s Health and Hospitals Reform Commission,” Mr Highland said.

Mr Highland said that Minister Roxon’s personal commitment to Indigenous health is commendable and the policy settings she has set in place are sound.

“However, it remains to be seen whether sufficient resources will be made available in next year’s budget to enable these positive commitments to translate into the action needed to close the gap,” he said.

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