

Declaration from the Symposium on Indigenous people and cancer: a shared agenda for Aotearoa, Australia, and Pacific nations, 19-20 February 2018

In February 2018, around 150 people from Australia, Pacific and Aotearoa (New Zealand) met to share insights, to learn from each other and to bring together our collective strength to build a shared agenda for addressing cancer among our Indigenous peoples.

We heard from Indigenous cancer survivors, their families, practitioners, support services, policy makers, researchers and key international agencies who recognise the substantial impact of cancer on Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Islands, Australia and Aotearoa. Whilst there has been tremendous progress in preventing, diagnosing and treating many cancers, the potential of this progress has yet to be fully realised by the Indigenous peoples in our region.

The United Nations supports the rights of Indigenous peoples to self-determination and the right to good health. Article 24 of the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous Peoples (2007) states that *“Indigenous individuals have an equal right to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health. States shall take the necessary steps with a view to achieving progressively the full realization of this right.”*

There are clearly identifiable issues across the cancer continuum, from lack of effective cancer prevention strategies, unequal access to and through cancer treatment and support services, and variable monitoring of cancer outcomes for Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples of the Pacific, Australia and Aotearoa have the right to participate in developing and determining cancer control priorities and strategies that affect them.

The principles under which actions should be taken include:

- Indigenous peoples have the right to the highest attainable standard of health as articulated in Article 24 of the UN Declaration of the rights of Indigenous Peoples. Governments and NGOs have an obligation to take affirmative action to improve cancer outcomes among Indigenous peoples in the region.
- Actively identifying and rectifying social and political structural barriers which hinder the attainment of equitable cancer health for Indigenous peoples in the region is a priority.
- Indigenous peoples have rich, holistic, complex and heterogeneous world views which are central to their health and wellbeing.
- Indigenous leadership, participation and decision-making must be at the core of all processes.
- The voices of those most affected by cancer, survivors and their families, must be heard.
- Through partnerships and collaborations between Indigenous peoples from around the region the benefits of mutual support, responsibility, inspiration and shared resources can be realised.
- *Whakapūpūtia mai ō mānuka, kia kore ai e whati.* (Cluster the branches of the mānuka, so they will not break). Working together, with a shared vision, our collective impact on cancer among Indigenous Peoples of our region will be amplified.

What are we calling for?

We call on the Governments of our region, the World Health Organization, the Pacific Community (SPC) and other regional organisations to recognise the importance of cancer control in supporting the health and well-being of Indigenous peoples in our region by developing, implementing and maintaining cancer control plans, which include monitoring and reporting on progress relating to these plans and that are grounded in the principles articulated in this declaration.