



The Hon. Greg Hunt MP

Minister for Health

The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP

Minister for Indigenous Australians

The Hon Mark Coulton MP

Minister for Regional Health
Regional Communications and Local Government

JOINT MEDIA RELEASE

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**Rapid COVID-19 testing to protect
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

The Australian Government is investing \$3.3 million to establish a rapid coronavirus (COVID-19) Remote Point of Care Testing Program for remote and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Under the program, people will benefit from testing times being cut to around 45 minutes. This will be a game-changing improvement for areas such as the Kimberley where receiving a test result can currently take up to 10 days.

Once fully rolled out, there will be 83 testing sites in place across Indigenous communities most at risk, and most in need.

The sites are being carefully selected, in partnership with key stakeholders including services and state and territory authorities, to ensure there is coverage across remote Australia.

Sites will be confirmed rapidly as part of the rollout over coming weeks, with the aim to finalise rollout by mid May.

The test, called the Xpert SARS-CoV-2 test, uses rapid technology to detect COVID-19 infections at the point-of-care by using a nasal swab polymerase chain reaction (PCR) test in the early phases of the illness.

Minister for Health, Greg Hunt, said that the program would allow local health services to respond quickly and decisively if COVID-19 was identified in their communities.

“It’s vital we do all we can to protect our rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This world first testing response means we can continue to stay ahead of the curve when it comes to fighting this virus,” Minister Hunt said,

Authorised by Greg Hunt MP, Liberal Party of Australia, Somerville, Victoria.

“If an outbreak is detected, local health services can move quickly to protect the community and activate established evacuation procedures.

“The rollout of program will include funding for the purchase of machines, as well as the logistics, transport, training, software support, quality assurance, data reporting and communications for all 83 sites.”

Minister for Indigenous Australians, Ken Wyatt, said the new testing program would help keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities safe during the pandemic.

“Sadly, Indigenous Australians are more likely to suffer from a serious illness if they contract COVID-19. There are higher rates of chronic conditions and other health issues in these communities and it can be hard to access health care,” Minister Wyatt said

“This means that an outbreak of COVID-19 in an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community has the potential to be very serious. This testing program will help protect Indigenous Australians against the virus.”

“The program is an initiative of the Kirby Institute, in partnership with the Flinders University International Centre for Point of Care Testing.”

“It has been developed in close consultation with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and states and territories, which are actively involved in site selection and assessment to ensure no community is more than two to three hours’ drive from a testing facility.”

Minister for Regional Health, Mark Coulton said the program complements a range of new initiatives the Australian Government has put in place to help protect all rural and regional Australians during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Already there are over 260 respiratory clinics across Australia,” Minister Coulton said.

“We have also rapidly expanded access to telehealth, providing more than 3.3 million services to over 2.5 million patients since mid-March 2020 and provided infection control eLearning to close to 500,000 people.

“We are urging people with chronic health conditions to not neglect their regular health care and to continue to see their GP or specialist about the management of their conditions. This is now easier and can be done from home via the phone as part of the new telehealth measures.”

In addition, the Government has invested in Community Preparedness across 110 communities to ensure all Aboriginal community clinics are ready to respond in the face of this pandemic.

This response is part of the Australian Government’s fast tracked \$2.4 billion COVID-19 National Health Plan announced by the Prime Minister on 11 March 2020.

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