



A Special Tribute Edition



Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter

14.8.51 – 3.9.2001

One of Australia's outstanding Aboriginal leaders

Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter

14.8.51 – 3.9.2001

One of Australia's most outstanding Aboriginal leaders, Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter devoted most of his adult life to improving the appalling state of Aboriginal health in this country. He took the fight for justice forward in government offices, in Parliamentary inquiries and at the grassroots level, and never gave up hope for achieving a better future.

Puggy was the elected chairperson of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, (NACCHO), which is the peak national advisory body on Aboriginal health. NACCHO has a membership of over 100 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and is the representative body of these services. Puggy was the inaugural Chair of NACCHO from 1991 until his untimely death aged 50.

Puggy was the vice-chairperson of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, the Federal Health Minister's main advisory body on Aboriginal health established in 1996. He was also Chair of the National Public Health Partnership Aboriginal and Islander Health Working Group which reports to the Partnership and to the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council. He was a member of the Australian Pharmaceutical Advisory Council (APAC), the General Practice Partnership Advisory Council, the Joint Advisory Group on Population Health and the National Health Priority Areas Action Council as well as a number of other key Aboriginal health policy and advisory groups on national issues.

Puggy had a long and passionate role in the struggle for justice for Aboriginal people. Born in Darwin in 1951, where his parents had fled Broome and Western Australian native welfare policies, Puggy trained as a boilermaker-welder and worked in the Northern Territory and South Australia. Throughout these years, he established an active involvement in Aboriginal affairs including youth sporting initiatives and housing.

As a result of a growing interest in Aboriginal community development and youth, he undertook studies through the University of South Australia in Aboriginal community development. He subsequently took up a position in Kununurra, Western

Australia, with the state welfare department and the Warringari Aboriginal Corporation. His many years of work in Aboriginal welfare -- with families in crisis, with child neglect, physical abuse and the consequences of poverty and exclusion -- provided him with powerful insights into the plight of his own people. He became increasingly aware that the best way to address these problems was through comprehensive Aboriginal community-controlled health services and resource agencies.

He was involved in the establishment of the East Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service in Kununurra, the Yuri Yungi Aboriginal Medical service in Halls



He fought uncompromisingly for the cause of Aboriginal health, yet was regarded respectfully, even affectionately, by his counterparts in politics and government.

Creek, the Kununurra Miriwung Construction Project, Warringari Arts, the Kununurra women's crisis centres, the Aboriginal radio station, Broome's youth centre and "modern dream-time dancers".

He worked with Homewest, the WA state housing authority, with responsibilities for assisting in redevelopment of Aboriginal housing throughout the Kimberley including the long-neglected state Aboriginal welfare reserves. He was an ATSIC regional councillor from 1993 to 1996.

Throughout his career, Puggy maintained an exhausting voluntary commitment to a large number of Aboriginal organisations.

He was an elected Committee member of the Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service and the Chairperson of the regional Aboriginal health resource body in the Kimberley -- the Kimberley

Aboriginal Medical Services Council.

He was elected the national Chairperson of NACCHO in 1991. As Chair, Puggy played a critical role in driving the Federal Government policy on Aboriginal health issues. Through his persistent efforts some of the recent advances to address the inequitable funding of Aboriginal health include:

- The Framework Agreements on Aboriginal health - designed to improve the co-ordination of health service delivery by all spheres of government and improve access to health programs. These were negotiated between NACCHO and each State and Territory.
- Medicare Agreements -- Puggy negotiated with the Federal Health Minister Dr Michael Wooldrige to give Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services the legal ability to bulk bill under Medicare. This measure has helped ensure that these services have a more sustainable funding base.
- Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme -- Puggy helped negotiate the Section 100 arrangements for supply of medicines through Aboriginal health services in remote areas.

Puggy was known for his colorful anecdotes, his generosity and his perceptive insights into Aboriginal affairs. He was a strong voice of commonsense, moderation and consensus in the Aboriginal political movement. He could sit in the dust and talk to his countrymen and also command an audience in Federal government. He fought uncompromisingly for the cause of Aboriginal health, yet was regarded respectfully, even affectionately, by his counterparts in politics and government. He experienced terrible racism, yet was devoid of bigotry. He demonstrated an unwavering commitment over many years to improving Aboriginal health in the face of hostility, disruption to his family, financial hardship and poor health.

He had a passionate commitment to Aboriginal community control and would often say that it is no longer acceptable to "do" Aboriginal health without Aboriginal people. Puggy was awarded an Honorary Doctorate in April 2001 from James Cook University of North Queensland in recognition of his exceptional contribution to the advancement of human well being.

Puggy is survived by his wife Blondie, and his children Emily, Renae, Troy and Amber.

I loved Puggy and I know we all loved him. There is no need to say more.
The words "Puggy Hunter" tell their own story.

Dr Naomi Mayers, NACCHO Deputy Chair, CEO Redfern Aboriginal Medical Service



Dr Naomi Mayers and Puggy

We will deeply miss this great man, known and respected the length and breadth of this country, by both in the Indigenous, and the broader White community. Not only a great leader for our people, but indeed a statesman in the manner that he was able to unify people, in the struggle for the health of our people.

The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

Without a doubt, the life of Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter had a profound effect on not only our people, but anyone who knew this man. Puggy was one of the most respected crusaders of Aboriginal health issues in Australia and will truly be missed.

The Management and Staff of the Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Services wish to convey their deepest sympathy to Puggy's family, our thoughts are with them all.

Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Services Inc, SA

Dr Hunter was a leading advocate and champion of improved Aboriginal health policy and service delivery. He was a highly respected leader in Aboriginal health who spoke from many years of experience of the plight of Aboriginal peoples and communities. He made an invaluable contribution to policy reform and program development across the Department of Health and Aged Care.

Dr Hunter's passion and devotion to the advancement of Aboriginal health will be sadly missed. He was an extraordinary man whose presence loomed large to all who met him.

As the Chair of NACCHO, Dr Hunter played a critical role in contributing to Federal Government policy on Aboriginal health issues. He was also deputy chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, the Federal Government's main advisory body on Aboriginal health.

Dr Hunter was also a keen advocate for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services which he saw as central to achieving better health and culturally appropriate service delivery for Aboriginal peoples.

Despite recent ill health, Dr Hunter never gave up his fight for improved Aboriginal health funding and service delivery.

Federal Health Minister, Dr Michael Wooldridge

"As an Aboriginal man of my age, I've been saying for some time that I'm overdue for serious health problems. The sad truth is that what should be the prime of life for many of us, is often just the opposite."

Puggy, Feb 2001

Dr Hunter was a visionary, a gifted speaker and a passionate campaigner for recognition of the deplorable state of Aboriginal health standards in this country. His passing is a great loss and the battle to keep Aboriginal health on the national agenda will be even harder without him. Our thoughts and prayers are with you all at this time of grieving.

Mutitjulu Health Service, via Alice Springs, NT

Farewell from the NACCHO CEO

I count myself one of the privileged people who knew and loved Puggy. I worked with him both during my time as NACCHO Board member, and then over the past two years in my role as NACCHO CEO. During that time, we became close mates. I remember him telling me when I was new on the Board and a little hesitant about speaking up, “just jump right in, with this mob that’s the only way!” Puggy never made me feel as though my contribution was not wanted or valuable, and this ability to be inclusive was one of his great strengths.



Dr Naomi Mayers, Craig Ritchie and Puggy

For me, Puggy was an ever-present source of support, friendship, guidance and inspiration. He had an uncanny ability to absorb, integrate and analyse information across a huge range of complex subject areas. He would have complete command of the information and could cut through the rhetoric to the guts of the matter. I could ring him up anytime and, no matter how bad things looked, Puggy would always find a way to make me laugh. “There’s more than one way to skin a cat” he would tell me and we’d get through the issue. Of course it wasn’t all work. I remember him telling me that part of my joining the Board, and later the Secretariat, was to protect the integrity of the “NACCHO weight limit”. He also expressed his concern for my

horse’s back while watching me eat, and many people became aware of his interest in my physical “fitness”!

Puggy’s capacity for sheer hard work was awe-inspiring. His job entailed a staggering amount of travel, reading, negotiation, representation and communication. He took it all in his stride, and still made individuals feel he had the time to listen to their views. Even in the last few months of his life, he continued to juggle his work commitments so successfully that people from external organisations were often surprised to learn he was on dialysis. With a lot of finessing from Sherrin, Puggy’s Executive Assistant, somehow dialysis appointments throughout the country were squeezed in around his busy schedule.

Puggy had an ability to make Aboriginal health real to people. He told the story of injustice and inequity in words that cut through the walls of indifference and apathy. Puggy could make people see that shocking mortality statistics weren’t just figures on a page. They meant that ‘we’re always planning our lives around funerals’, and that targetting health measures for the over-55s was useless because ‘they’ll have to go and dig us up out of the cemetery to give us that.’

Puggy was a real leader. Someone has defined leadership as influence. If this is true, and I think it is, Puggy was one of the truly outstanding leaders of our time. Without being the slightest bit pompous or self-important, Puggy could move people in a way that is not



Puggy, Craig Ritchie and Dr Richard Murray

often seen. Often in ways that would shock me at the time, but later we would roar laughing about. I am thinking of course of some of his famous turns of phrase. I recall sitting with Puggy at a media launch in May 2000 and him delivering one of those

Puggy had an ability to make Aboriginal health real to people. He told the story of injustice and inequity in words that cut through the walls of indifference and apathy.

“one liners” and the entire front row of journalists looking at each other and asking “are you going to write that?” – they did – classic Hunter! He led in the sense of the example he provided, and the respect he earned, rather than demanded. He led also in the sense that he was a man of vision and even in our last conversation, just hours before his passing, he was telling me about the things he wanted to do in NACCHO, the upcoming meeting of the Board and his excitement about the proposals for reform that would come before this year’s AGM.

On a personal level I miss him terribly but am also aware that our greatest tribute to Puggy is to carry on his work, and I know that’s what he would have wanted.

Craig Ritchie
NACCHO CEO

“Puggy spent his life working to improve health conditions for Aboriginal people across this country. He took this battle to the meeting table with the leaders of this country, to Senate Inquiries, to communities at the grassroots level, and never backed down.

His determination and commitment to this difficult task inspired so many of us in the Indigenous community. Puggy will be mourned and missed by communities across Australia, but the legacy he leaves in terms of raising awareness of Indigenous health issues will last a lifetime.

Puggy’s colleagues in Indigenous health must now take up the fight to improve Indigenous health standards on his behalf, because that is simply what he would want us to do.

Senator Aden Ridgeway, Australian Democrats Deputy Leader

I had the greatest respect and affection for Puggy as a person with a passionate and abiding commitment to improving the health of his people. Puggy was enormously generous in the time he made available to me and many people across the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, providing advice and guidance on a wide range of issues about Aboriginal health and services.

Ms Helen Evans, Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health



Helen Evans and Puggy

With the death of Arnold “Puggy” Hunter Australia has lost a very special person and a dedicated advocate of Aboriginal Health. Under his leadership, the community controlled health movement made many significant advances. Because of his advocacy, Aboriginal medical services across the country can better meet the health needs of their people.

His commitment, extraordinary capacity for hard work and colorful turn of phrase were a constant, unifying force. He never let us forget the common goal - to improve the health of Aboriginal people, no matter where they lived.

Puggy was the voice of Aboriginal people who have been left behind by the Australian health system. His efforts were recognised at home and internationally and he never shirked his responsibilities even though it meant he was often away from his home community of Broome.

Bob McMullan MP and Jenny Macklin MP, Australian Labour Party

Puggy was a leader in every sense of the word. He was compassionate, dedicated, generous and worked tirelessly to improve Aboriginal health all over the country. His colorful and humorous phases will be forever etched in our memory.

You will be remembered as a proud Kimberley man, whose vision was an inspiration to Kimberley people.

Thank you for your guidance, support and encouragement. You will be sadly missed.

Derby Aboriginal Health Service Council Committee, members and staff, WA



Yvette Roe and Puggy

“My advice to the Minister was that he can talk to whoever he wants, but at the end of the day, if you want real advice about Aboriginal health issues, then speak to those who have been voted by Aboriginal communities to represent them on health matters. NACCHO has the mandate to do this. Don’t simply talk to individuals who will agree with what the government of the day wants. NACCHO’s role is to advocate for better outcomes for Aboriginal people, so there will be times when NACCHO and governments don’t agree.”

Puggy on: Community Controlled Health Service, May 2001.

Farewell to Puggy from the NACCHO Secretariat staff

Puggy was larger than life, and not just physically. Some of us knew Puggy for years and had lots of direct contact with him. Other staff may have only had a few face to face meetings with him. But somehow Puggy made an impact that cannot be measured in hours or minutes.

To many of us, he was more than just the Chairperson of NACCHO. He became a friend, a mentor and an unfailing source of inspiration.

More than most of us, Puggy had good reason to be frustrated and angry with the slow pace of change in Aboriginal health. But he wasn't a sad or bitter person. He never failed to lighten tough moments with a joke. Even though he sometimes must have felt he was bashing his head against the same brick wall, he never gave up hope of changing life for the better.

Puggy never expected or demanded any trappings of his position. You could sit down and talk to him without feeling overawed, and he was always approachable. In spite of this, or maybe partly because of it, the respect people had for Puggy was immeasurable. People stopped and listened when he talked.

Over the past week there have been moments of laughter, as well as tears, as we remember the Puggy who could have us in fits of giggles one minute, and fired up for action the next. Our thoughts are with Puggy's family, as we can only imagine their loss.

Puggy, your inspiration will live on in our work.



Kirsty Glanville

So many words to describe such a great man - mentor, friend, inspiration, true leader, fighter, believer. A source of never ending dedication. You touched my heart and you will live on forever in my memory.

It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived.

-George S. Patton, Jr.

"Some are born great, some achieve greatness and some have greatness thrust upon them"

-William Shakespeare

With love

Kirsty Glanville

Puggy Hunter was one of the greatest men of our time. He was an Aboriginal leader who inspired thousands to question and reform the efforts of this nation to improve the health of Aboriginal peoples. His moderate voice of influence over the political agenda and witty intellect will continue to echo in the hearts of all those who could see the wisdom in his words. It is a very strange thing that this nation appropriates Aboriginal virtues and the gift of such culture, yet tears the heart out of Aboriginal peoples and their self-determined future. It does this covertly - a defunct force of inaction and rhetoric. To expose this takes great patience, compassion, and strategy. Puggy was able to move the nation and the will of the people to improve Aboriginal health because it takes a great leader like him, but the challenge must be met by Ministers even if they only have half the courage that Dr Hunter had.

Dr Sophie Couzos
NACCHO Public Health Officer



Richard Murray, Sophie Couzos, Puggy, Lexie and Henry Councillor.



NACCHO Secretariat, AGM 2000

“God’s Garden”

God looked around his garden
And found an empty place
He, then, looked down upon the earth
And saw your tired face.

He put His arms around you
And lifted you to rest,
God’s garden must be beautiful
He always takes the best.

He knew that you were suffering
He knew you were in pain,
He knew that you would never
Get well on earth again.

He saw the road was getting rough
And the hills were hard to climb,
So he closed your weary eyelids
And whispered, “Peace be thine”.

It broke our hearts to lose you
But you didn’t go alone,
For, part of us went with you
The day God called you home.



Puggy and Troy



HealthWorker graduation at the KAMSC school of health studies, 1999. Didi Cox, Puggy and Ubbie Clifton.



Puggy with his four children, Renee, Amber, Emily and Troy



Puggy with his wife Blondie



Professor Ian Wronski, Puggy and his mother, Dora Hunter, celebrate Puggy's honorary doctorate from James Cook University

A Personal Tribute

My association with Puggy began many years ago through family and community links. Puggy's family, like mine, are long-time members of the Darwin Aboriginal community. It's fair to say that I had more to do with Puggy's younger brothers, Kim and Troy (also deceased) as I was growing up given that Puggy was in an older age group.

Following my move to Canberra to take up employment with the Australian Medical Association, I became re-associated with Puggy in his role as NACCHO Chair. Soon after, I commenced as the inaugural CEO of NACCHO and began a close working relationship with him. Puggy became not only a valued leader and colleague to me, but as our relationship progressed, he also became a mentor and close friend.

We did all the things you would expect a national chairperson and CEO would do – we shared views and opinions, planned and problem solved, shared the frustrations and disappointments, and celebrated the wins and successes. We used each other as sounding boards and confided in each other when things weren't going well or when we were confronted with the numerous challenges working in Aboriginal health provides. I can tell you that this process continued even after I left NACCHO up until the time of his death. He would always ring me when he came to Canberra and on the last occasion that I saw him, I attended a dinner here in Canberra with a small group of close friends to celebrate his 50th birthday and as usual, we were entertained by Puggy and his incredible sense of humour!

I want to state on the record that I was very proud to have had the privilege to work alongside Puggy. I cannot remember the amount of times that I felt reassured by the fact he was sitting next to me at the table in the vast number of meetings we attended together. It was my observation that others often underestimated Puggy. I knew better and Puggy read everything that he was sent and had an extraordinary understanding of the issues and the health system. Puggy always fought to achieve an outcome for the member organisations of NACCHO quite often in complex and protracted negotiations. I can personally attest to his resolute determination to achieve something better for our people.

He was also more politically astute than many gave him credit for. He had insights into people and their behaviour that were usually accurate and precise. I came to trust his judgment completely.

I'm convinced that Puggy's greatest strength lay in his leadership. This was, of course, underpinned by his warm and friendly personality. It was difficult to not

like Puggy. He was inclusive of everyone, rarely was anyone excluded either personally or professionally. He never expressed hate in my presence or carried a grudge – he was more disappointed with some and expressed the hope that they might change.

He was a very generous person and would do all he could do assist when a request was made of him. I can count on one hand the number of times when I saw him really angry and lose his temper – it took a hell of a lot to make him feel this way.

Puggy's death was sudden and quite a shock. It was no secret that those of us who were close to him had always been worried about his health and well-being but there was a belief we shared that he would hang in there. Sadly, he has now gone and has left an enormous void in Aboriginal health leadership in this country. I don't think we will fully realise the enormity of his contribution to the field for some time. I have no doubt that another Aboriginal person will step up into this role but whoever it is, they'll need to realise that Puggy set the bar very high and the same standard will be expected from them.

Personally, I have a great sense of loss that has followed me around from the time I was informed of his death. I can't seem to shake this feeling just yet. I find myself thinking about Puggy occasionally each day particularly about the many great times we had together. I'm especially reminded of his sense of humour and the all of the funny things he used to say (!) and this has been a useful way for me to deal with his passing.

When my time comes, I'm sure I'll meet up with Puggy yet again, we'll share a Bundy and Coke and start planning about how we will fight the fight, whatever that might be 'up there'.

In the meantime, I miss my dear friend very much and wish he were back.

*Steve Larkin
NACCHO CEO
1997-1999.*

Puggy Hunter was a very special person, the kind of person you are lucky to meet even once in a lifetime. Though he had experienced great hardship and struggle, he was a happy and optimistic person who made the most of each day. Though he had experienced racism, he never showed any bad feeling towards non-Aboriginal people. He made us all feel welcome and part of his life and work.

I was fortunate to work with Puggy over the last four or five years. I saw him in action at many meetings and gatherings, and saw the huge impact he had on so many people. He could attend any committee meeting and fire people up with a real concern and desire to make a contribution to Aboriginal health. He would also be the person who could pull people together in tense and factionalised gatherings, and get everyone to remember that we were all working for the same thing.

One of the extraordinary things about Puggy was that he was always the same person no matter who he was with, whether it was a group of VIPs, two hundred NACCHO members, or a few close friends and colleagues. He connected with people in a special way, and had the gift of being truly himself – funny, warm and genuine with everyone he met. A great number of people all over Australia will miss Puggy, but his memory will live on through his many achievements, and through the way he taught and inspired so many of us.

Kathy Bell



Ian Ford, Jodie Lew Fatt, Puggy, Henry Councillor, Kathy Bell and Steve Larkin on a cold and snowy day in Canberra.

We would like to express our deepest sympathy at the passing of our dear brother and friend Puggy Hunter. Although no words can take away the sorrow that you bear, may it be comforting to you all to know that others care. May this message of hope bring you peace and comfort at this difficult time.

Duruk Aboriginal Community Controlled Medical Service, Sydney, NSW

Dr Hunter made an invaluable contribution to policy reform and program development across the Department of Health and Aged Care. He was a key adviser

to the Federal Government and directly to the Minister for Health, Dr Michael Wooldridge. Over the last five years I got to know Puggy very well personally. As Deputy Chair of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health Council, he worked very closely with me.

Passionate as his advocacy was for Indigenous health and wellbeing, he was also able to work with governments and bureaucrats. He spoke plainly and directly, but he also put a lot of emphasis on friendly personal relationships. He was always good company, full of stories.

Mr Andrew Podger, Secretary of the Department of Health and Aged Care

“Puggy has been a strong advocate for Aboriginal people over many challenging years. His tenacious determination to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was reflected in the energy and vibrancy that he brought to every forum of his work. He will be greatly missed by all who have worked with him.

Australian Division of General Practice



Kevin Cox and Puggy

Dr Hunter devoted his life to raising awareness about the complex issues surrounding Indigenous health both at the national level and in his home region, the Kimberley. He never missed an opportunity to point out that life expectancy for Indigenous people at the beginning of the 21st century is comparable to that for the total Australian population in the early years of the last century.

He will be remembered as a dedicated, articulate and forceful advocate for his people who like so many of his friends and constituents, relied on kidney dialysis treatment. Tragically his life ended far too early. He will be sorely missed.

ATSIC

We here at Awabakal have been saddened to hear of such a great loss. Please pass on our sincerest condolences to the Hunter family, our fellow affiliate members, your staff and the Board of NACCHO, on behalf of the Board, Management, Staff and Community of Awabakal Newcastle Aboriginal Co-operative Ltd.

Awabakal, Newcastle Aboriginal Co-operative, NSW

I respected and admired Puggy's passion and concern for Aboriginal Health and wellbeing. Such was Puggy's passion, that he put the needs of his people before his needs. It has been a privilege and pleasure to know him.

*Gloria Khan
South West Aboriginal Medical Service
Community, Bunbury, WA*

Over the past eight and a half years I have held a number of positions on Board's of Management and Committees, and in this time I have never seen such respect held by anyone as I have seen held for Puggy in his own right as a man and a chairperson, leader and voice of Aboriginal people.

I will miss his text joke messages, which could arrive at any time of the day or night. These little mentions help me through some very rough times. As I always said when we parted, love you babe take care.

Florence Williams, CEO, Kambu Medical Centre, Ipswich, QLD

“If you want to be involved in Aboriginal health, my best advice honestly is to involve Aboriginal people in a true partnership. And when I say true partnership, I tell people don't come to us asking what colour car we want after you bought it. Come to us when we talk about what sort of vehicle we need to actually get to where we want to go. Let's sit down and talk from there because we can work that out with you.”

Puggy on: Partnerships

Puggy's lighter moments...

“I went to the Committee for Fat people and they were all skinny! I was the only person who could speak from experience.”

In reference to attending the National Obesity Prevention Group (1999) on NHMRCs Strategic Plan for the Prevention of Overweight and Obesity.

“The bottom line is no matter how good our intentions are, or how hard we work, and how much we concentrate on best practice, ACCHSs can't do all they need to do without adequate resourcing.”

Puggy on: Resources Feb 2000.

Puggy's lighter moments...

Doctors are like ticks around a dog's arse in the city, but out in remote areas, you need to go out spot lighting to find them!

Puggy was an exceptional person who was always fighting for the betterment of our people. He took up the difficult challenge of changing the system to improve Aboriginal health and achieved many important things. He was much loved and respected and it is a sad loss for all of us here at Winnunga Nimmityjah.

Julie Tongs, CEO, staff and Board of Winnunga Nimmityjah, Canberra, ACT

My memories of Puggy include growing up in Parap Camp (Darwin) at the age of nine years he won a pie-eating contest. I also remember him trying to convince a nun, by stating that he only threw the stone into the tree, and the bird just fell down dead himself. And the memories of his fights and demand for the betterment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Sadly missed my brother. My love to Blondie, Aunty Dora and family.

*Mick Adams
Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Forum*



Puggy and Dr Kerryn Phelps

Puggy Hunter was an inspiration to everyone involved with or interested in Indigenous health. He was admired and respected by the AMA.

Puggy was a tireless worker for his people. Plagued by ill health for much of his adult life, he always put the health of others ahead of his own. He travelled the country championing the cause of Indigenous Australians with some of the worst health outcomes in the world. He was a fearless advocate, not afraid to take on politicians and bureaucracies. And he was a man of great compassion and commitment to improving the health of Indigenous Australian.

Puggy Hunter leaves an important legacy that must be carried on if Indigenous Australians are to ever enjoy health services and standards that other Australians take for granted.

Dr Kerryn Phelps, president of the Australian Medical Association (AMA)

The example set of Puggy has been an inspiration to both the Board of Management and staff of Goondir Health Services. He was well respected by all Australians. To us he was a great ambassador, a fighter for Aboriginal Health and a person who related well on a social level. We will mourn his passing.

Brian Riddiford, CEO, Goondir Health Services, Dalby, Queensland

From the start of his career in Aboriginal affairs, Dr Hunter played an energetic and passionate role in the struggle for Aboriginal rights. The contributions he has made to Aboriginal affairs, and in particular Aboriginal health have inspired a generation.

During the years that Dr Hunter worked in Aboriginal affairs, he became increasingly aware that the way to address the many challenges our people face is through Aboriginal community controlled health services and resource agencies.

In the last few years of his life, Dr Hunter's commitment to his people remained unwavering, despite his struggles with illness.

He was much loved by his family and friends. In fact, it is a testament to Dr Hunter's caring and inclusive personality, that a wide circle of people can rightfully call Dr Hunter their friend. I know I speak on their behalf when I say that it was truly a pleasure and a privilege to have known this exceptional man.

Dr Hunter will be remembered for his warmth and generosity and for his perceptive insights into the complex and challenging field that is Aboriginal affairs.

ATSIC Kullarri Chairperson, Rosetta Sahanna-Pitt, on behalf of the ATSIC WA Commissioners and Chairpersons.

Ian Ring

As a man and a leader, Puggy was a towering figure. I last spoke to him when he phoned me in Moscow about a soon to be released report, and had no inkling then that this immensely likeable man with great warmth, charm and wit would be taken from us so soon.

As a leader, he was a voice of moderation and wisdom. He had a unique way of expressing controversial and complex ideas with great simplicity and humour. People turned naturally to him for direction and advice on the contents and politics of Aboriginal health. He gave unstintingly of himself and till the end made the trip across Australia to Townsville to chair our James Cook University Indigenous Health Advisory Committee – a function which he filled with great distinction.

He was loved as a man and his passing leaves a huge void that will be hard to fill.

Farewell and God bless Puggy Hunter.

Professor Ian Ring

He has been such a strong and articulate advocate for Aboriginal community control in Aboriginal health matters and will be sorely missed. This man's death will not pass unnoticed. His struggles against those in political power who have continued to resist Aboriginal peoples rights to community control and self determination will have a continuing influence on Aboriginal-non Aboriginal relations into the future. His contribution to strategies that will lead to the eventual attainment of equity in health in Australia is immeasurable.

Some may not have acted on the messages he so forcefully put but few could say that they had not heard him. I look forward to the time when the actions that he has called for are implemented in more substantial ways than has occurred in the past.

David Paul, University of Western Australia

The Board, management and staff of Pika Wiya sincerely extend our condolences to the family of Puggy and to all the NACCHO staff who had the privilege of working with such a determined advocate for the betterment of Aboriginal health.

Pika Wiya Health Service Incorporated, Port Augusta, SA

Puggy Hunter I am a better person for knowing you.

Thank you for teaching me so much, your patience and inspiration.

We always demanded so much from you.

That bloody mobile of yours would ring constantly. (I remember frustration at trying to get through to it!)

Whether you were giving a keynote at a conference or at yet another meeting, during the breaks people would clamour to speak with you, eager to discuss what you were saying. You were always so giving of your valuable time.

I remember being with you at Parliament House and on the way out you'd always call in on MPs or Senators (without an appointment) who'd drop whatever they doing for the chance to ask you what the real problems and solutions were.

When you were in Canberra, a few of us from the Secretariat would go to where you were dialysing, papers in hand. You'd pass me over your sunglasses – teasing me for not being good around blood. I'd only be wanting you to clear a media release or article – but I would get much more than that. Laughter, encouragement, awareness, outrage, friendship. And I'd head back to the office full of ideas.

I'm angry you died at just 50 years of age.

Australia has much to answer for.

*Kirstie Hansen
Media Officer, NACCHO*



Puggy and Kirstie Hansen

The North Coast Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health (NCACCH) on the Sunshine Coast of Queensland would like to pay special tribute to Puggy for all the hard work he put in to improving the health of all Indigenous people across the nation. He will be sadly missed and is a great loss for our people. Our thoughts are with his family at this time and he will be remembered always.

The North Coast Aboriginal Corporation for Community Health Committee and members, QLD

He was a very dedicated man regarding the improvement of health outcomes for his people. He will be sorely missed.

Centre for Rural and Remote Oral Health

“Everybody feels a bit sad and sorry for the status of Aboriginal health. It's like a trophy that you pull down once a year and polish it up and then you put it back in a glass cabinet because you don't want to do anything with it, but you still own it.”

Puggy on: Statistics and Reports

Puggy's lighter moments...

‘like pissing on a bush fire’

Referring to incremental increases in funding for Aboriginal health.

“What Aboriginal health means to Aboriginal people is being sick and disabled is normal. We are constantly losing family and friends. Our young people are losing hope. We are constantly planning our lives around funerals. We are tired of burying our people.”

Puggy on: The urgency for action, July 1999

Puggy's lighter moments...

‘one meeting, people!’

In Board meetings, when more than one conversation was happening.

‘hug a blackie courses’

Referring to superficial cross-cultural training programs.

You talk about funding holistic health. You’ve got funding for the kidney, funding for the eye, funding for the ear – tell me have you got funding for the arsehole?

The Board of Management and staff of the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia pays tribute to the late Dr Puggy Hunter for his dedicated efforts to work

towards an improvement in Aboriginal health status. Puggy had a keen interest in the affiliate organisations and was a frequent guest at meetings of the AHCSA. He contributed greatly and will be sadly missed by all.

*Les Kropinyeri, Acting Chairperson
Aboriginal Health Council of South
Australia, WA*

Puggy was a vital force in placing Aboriginal health high on the College agenda. He worked tirelessly with the RACGP Aboriginal Health Training Working Group, providing inspiration and direction in developing our Aboriginal health training program. His wisdom and advice enhanced the College’s understanding of the complex issues surrounding Aboriginal health and ensured our Aboriginal health training was delivered in partnership with Aboriginal community controlled health organisations.

Puggy also assisted us with the development and launch of our policy on Aboriginal health and it was under his leadership that we established an effective working partnership with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) on Aboriginal health. We will miss Puggy’s keen insight, his courage and determination and most of all his ability to “tell it like it is.”

*Dr Paul Hemming, President, The Royal
Australian College of General Practitioners*

Our thoughts and hearts go out to the family of the later Dr Arnold (Puggy) Hunter both at a personal level and as an ardent fighter for the cause of Aboriginal health in this nation. He will be sadly missed.

*Ceduna/Koonibba Aboriginal Health
Service, Ceduna, SA*

The first time I brushed shoulders with Puggy was at the Cairns NACCHO meeting in 1993. He was up on the dais; there was a couple of us and I was chairing the meeting too, we’d had a series of national workshops on the NACCHO secretariat – anyway there were microphones with a sound base on the table, because it was a fair sized room and he pointed to the bottom and on it someone had written a joke. It goes something like this.

Q. How can you tell how many Aboriginals there are in the pub?

A. Drive past it and count the number of red Falcons.

That is my first memory, my last contact was when he was in the Canberra hospital (having dialysis) just prior to my going to New Zealand and Kirstie Hansen put him on the phone and I had the chance to have a laugh with him. He wanted me to bring him back a Maori woman and I said to him what would I do with a woman? Then I said that well, he could have a Maori woman then I could have a man and we had a good old laugh together. Well you could always get a laugh out of Puggy. And when he got sick after the cat scratched him -- you could just imagine the ‘pussy’ jokes!

There are so many things I want to say but I just wanted to share these memories with you all.

To me you were kind and gentle and sincere and I shall miss you Puggy.

*Mary Martin
Co-ordinator Workforce Issues
QAIHF*

If it wasn’t for Puggy Hunter, Jurrugk Health Service would not be where it is today. He was able to get better health services for our people along the Gibb River Road.

Puggy understood and worked in a truly Aboriginal community controlled way. He was really good at talking to people on the ground in remote communities.

In this sorry time, we are thinking about his family.

*Jurrugk Health Service
Committee, members and staff.*

*Kupungarri, Ngallagunda, Dodnun and
Imintji Communities*

Gibb River Road, WA

The Governing Committee and Staff of the Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal Corporation Wagga Wagga NSW, take this opportunity to convey their deepest sympathies to the family and friends of the late Dr Puggy Hunter. Dr Hunter will be remembered for his tireless commitment to advancing the cause of Aboriginal people. His motivation and resolve remain an inspiration.

With deepest respect.

*The Governing Committee and Staff,
Riverina Medical and Dental Aboriginal
Corporation, Wagga Wagga, NSW*

Puggy was from our nation, the nation of survivors in Australia. He worked tirelessly and relentlessly to make a change. You would call him a 'catalyst', maybe he wouldn't approve of that word, he probably described himself differently. As one of our great leaders the thing which made him different to others was how he worked. He had an ability to make us laugh at himself, ourselves and at others. He gave us those moments of laughter when we most needed them.

He has left a "space" which may not be filled. Maybe his funny side of things will help us to keep up the fight for better health and conditions, for our mob and those 'busted-arse clinics'.

*Western Australian Aboriginal
Community Controlled Health
Organisation*



Puggy and Henry Councillor

Dr Arnold "Puggy" Hunter had a significant impact on the response of the National Public Health Partnership Group to the health issues of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Puggy's involvement in the Partnership began with representation of NACCHO on the Partnership's Advisory Group. A substantial Issues Paper from NACCHO in 1999 influenced the Partnership Group's decision to establish the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Working Group. The Working Group was Chaired by Puggy and had recently obtained endorsement for a work program looking initially at injury prevention; public health law; oral health; public health workforce; and environmental health.

The support given by Puggy Hunter has been invaluable in the development and implementation of a more strategic focus in the Partnership on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander public health issues. It is a credit to Puggy and the NACCHO that this work can be progressed through both the formal and informal networks that are part of his legacy.

National Public Health Partnership



Puggy with two of his children Amber and Troy

"Getting the Framework Agreements signed was like pulling teeth. We are not holding our breath that they will suddenly solve all the problems, but they are a step in the right direction. We hope the benefits will flow through to communities – racism and lack of national political leadership on Aboriginal issues means it is often two steps forward, one step back."

*Puggy on: Framework Agreements,
Sept 1998*

Puggy's lighter moments...

The least they could do is ask us before they jump in bed with us. Instead we wake up with them screwing us.

Referring to organisations that don't properly consult with Aboriginal people.

I'm going to get gudyas to sit on the NACCHO Board – at least those gudyas come to meetings on time!

“We are still waiting for the day when there are ACCHSs in all communities that need them. Many of us are growing tired of waiting, sitting in meeting after meeting trying to get politicians, bureaucrats and health professionals to see the light can be discouraging.”

March 1999

Puggy's lighter moments...

‘We're the two fat bastards of Aboriginal health!’

Talking about himself and Louis Peachey, President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association

My staff and I wish to express our deepest condolences to Puggy's family, the NACCHO Board and Secretariat.

Puggy was an inspiration to us all. Our memories are of a great man, a friend, a big heart and a huge agenda for Aboriginal people. His work and achievements have benefited us all and will not be forgotten.

We will strive forward in Puggy's memory.

*Basil Sumner, Chief Executive Officer
Aboriginal Sobriety Group Inc, Adelaide,
SA*

Dr Hunter represented NACCHO in a number of different HIC forums over the years, most recently on the HIC Consumer Advocacy Committee. He provided invaluable insight as a member of the Steering Committee for the Keys Young report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access to HIC programs including Medicare and the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme. Dr Hunter continued to provide support to HIC in implementing initiatives to address the report's recommendations.

Dr Hunter's passion for health issues for Aboriginal people and community control of Aboriginal Health Services has had a positive influence and will long be remembered.

*Dr Geoff Harmer, Health Insurance
Commission*

Puggy was nearing a half-century – the time of life when most non-Indigenous males are at the peak of their career, with two or three decades at least to look forward to.

Although he was the first to acknowledge that the statistics were not on his side, his passing is a great loss, especially in the field of Indigenous health.

I have known and worked with Puggy over a number of decades now and although we didn't always see eye-to-eye on issues, I had considerable respect for him and the amount of work he undertook in Indigenous health and community affairs right up to the present.

Puggy was not one to let his own health shortcomings stop him.

He was, as his name suggests, a pugnacious and forceful advocate on the need to address Indigenous health issues.

*Philip Ruddock
Federal Minister for Reconciliation and
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Affairs.*

Puggy – a friend and supporter of all Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, big or small, he extended a helping hand to all of us. He will remain in our hearts and lives forever. We share the sorrow.

Puggy, a man of vision and depth who achieved his goals, how honored we are to have known and been inspired by you.

Our deepest expression of sympathy is extended to Puggy's family and friends.

*The mob from the Bourke Aboriginal
Health Service, NSW*

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation extends our deepest sympathy to the families of Dr Arnold "Puggy" Hunter.

Puggy was a close friend to many of the Board and Staff of Miwatj and his contribution to Aboriginal Health will be sorely missed.

Puggy, we will miss your good humor and wonderful personality. It was a privilege and an honor to work with you.

We will miss you mate.

Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, NT



NACCHO Executive Committee Members, February 1999

To reflect on the impact of the life of our dear brother has made to us as individuals, members of our community and more importantly working in an AMS, leaves many of us at a loss for words to describe the most important feature or memory that we have.

I clearly recall his quick wit, having an answer for whatever issue was being discussed. This often calmed any tension that may have existed at the time, but also gave all of us the opportunity to have a good belly laugh. This skill is rare and us in AMSs often waited for the comment that would bring us back to the issue being discussed.

His view on all health and social issues, finger on the pulse with everyone and everything, and his utmost commitment to the progress of Aboriginal affairs is equal to and above what average people can achieve in their lifetime.

The memory of Puggy will remain in our hearts and in our minds. Our sincere thoughts are with the family, relatives and friends of a man who meant so much to all of us in the fight for access to health services for our people.

To our brother and friend
‘Though life’s journey is at end
Your humour and smile
Will be with us each mile
As you are now at rest
We have lost one of the best

*Christine Corby
CEO, Walgett Aboriginal Medical Service
Co-operative Ltd, NSW*

Monday 3rd September marked a huge loss in the national cause for Aboriginal health.

It was on that day that our dear friend and colleague, Dr Puggy Hunter, passed away.

No one was more highly regarded in NACCHO than Puggy. He was our undisputed leader; a man who not only guided the organisation with a firm and caring hand, but who was there for each and every member on an individual basis whenever he saw the need. Nationally, there was no one more respected for his honesty and unique negotiating style. He would chip, chip away at the politicians and, slowly and surely, over time, he would move mountains. There is not one Aboriginal Medical Service that has not benefited from his tireless efforts. There is not one Aboriginal Medical Service who will not feel his loss.

It is with the greatest regret that we mark the passing of Dr Puggy Hunter. Our hearts go out to all his family members in their loss, and also to his many friends and associates at the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service.

... a generous heart feels others’ ills as if it were responsible for them.

*Rachel Atkinson, Director NACCHO
Board of Directors, and staff
Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health
Services Limited, QLD.*

To Puggy's family, the NACCHO Board and Secretariat.

My staff and I are greatly saddened by the passing away of our friend and respected leader, Puggy Hunter.

We were privileged to enjoy his company on numerous visits to Nunkuwarrin Yunti. Whilst I will miss him as a colleague on the NACCHO Board, my staff will miss him for the friendship he bestowed to all. Puggy always took the time to say hello to everyone.

Puggy, we at Nunkuwarrin Yunti intend to make your spirit live on in our endeavour to ensure the delivery of equitable health services to Aboriginal people in a culturally appropriate and community controlled manner. Your tireless empathetic and strategic disposition will be our guiding light.

*Polly Sumner, Chief Executive Officer
Nunkuwarrin Yunti of South Australia
Inc, Adelaide, SA*

“The Australian thought of giving a fair go to everybody seems to fall away when we’re talking about Aboriginal people.”

Puggy on: Human Rights

Puggy’s lighter moments...

Lee Anne Daley, the former CEO of the Wellington Aboriginal Corporation Health Service (WACHS) recalls when Puggy visited Wellington, NSW, with the House of Representatives Standing Committee Inquiry into Indigenous Health.

“The Committee arrived at WACHS in several limousines, the next stop was Nanima Village. Outside of WACHS there was much discussion with Puggy and myself about who was going in what car. Puggy was quick to jump in one of the WACHS vehicles. I asked Puggy how was it driving around in the big flash limos? He said, ‘it makes you shamed, like I am Elvis Presley, I sit up front and make out I am the body guard’. That was Puggy, never any airs and graces.”

A last message

The following 'Message From the Chairperson' was written prior to Puggy Hunter's untimely death, it was intended for publication in NACCHO News.

Bi-partisan approach needed

In a year where six elections will be held throughout Australia, including the Federal election, we urgently need all political parties to commit to bi-partisan support for Aboriginal health.

We've all experienced it, a program – say a men's health program to deal with anger management – gets up and running but all too soon a new government comes to power. That service is then dumped in favor of something the new government thinks will work. The resources or tools for the program are left to gather dust or rust, and the expertise and skills developed by those running the program wasted. As for the clients – we do our best to continue to provide that same care within our existing services.

Of course this scenario does not just occur when new governments win office, but it is also often the case when pilot projects are run but get no ongoing funding, or successful programs are cut because the purse strings are pulled closed after 12 months.

But in a year when so many elections will take place, we need to put an end to the zigzagging and change in the direction of Aboriginal health that goes on every time our governments change. We urgently need cross party commitment to long term strategies that will improve our people's health.

Earlier this year, the Federal Shadow Defence Minister Dr Stephen Martin said, "if there is one issue which generally enjoys something like 97% or 98% bi-partisan support in this Parliament it is Australia's National Defence".

So when it comes to policy direction in Defence, as Dr Martin says, it continues to be reflected "over a long period of time through a number of different governments of different political persuasion".

This approach needs to happen in Aboriginal health. We can not afford to reinvent the wheel every time a new party wins government. The Maori, American and Canadian Indian experience has shown that – with the political will – significant improvement in life expectancy rates can be achieved in just a few decades. For this to happen in Australia, we need our politicians to think beyond three-year elections cycles and adopt a bi-partisan

approach to Aboriginal health, which ensures long term strategies and funding for improvement.

We must also lock in mechanisms to 'keep the bastards honest'.

In the past 20 years, there have been countless inquiries and reports into Aboriginal health.

The recommendations they make time



and time again are about the need for self-determination and community development for Aboriginal people at all levels of health service delivery, and to stop the buck passing between the Commonwealth and State governments. The problems in Aboriginal health are well known and there is widespread agreement about what needs to be done. What we need now is for our politicians to start acting.

Take for example the Health is Life Report on the Inquiry into Indigenous Health, which was conducted by a House of Representatives Committee comprising members of both major parties. The Government responded to the report in May this year, on the same day that the Federal Budget was handed down. (What better way to avoid media scrutiny of its response than to release it when the press was focused on reporting Budget news).

One of the key recommendations of the Health is Life Report was that:

"The Commonwealth accept it has the major responsibility for the provision of primary health care to Indigenous Australian".

The Government's response:

"The Government accepts this recommendation but notes that this responsibility is shared with State and Territory Governments."

Another key recommendation was that:

"Consistent with international experience Australian governments must recognise the need to commit

adequate resources, including to community controlled primary health care and environmental health services."

The Government accepted the recommendation.

But when the Budget was announced later that night, there was no new funding for Aboriginal community controlled health services, despite the overwhelming need.

Our sector must meet six monthly performance indicators in order to get funding – where are the penalties for governments not meeting performance indicators and implementing agreed plans and recommendations?

AMs need to be able to get on with what we do best, providing culturally appropriate primary health care to our people.

What we need from our parliamentarians is long term certainty, accountability and the political will to bring our health status in line with the rest of Australia.

*Puggy Hunter,
NACCHO Chairperson*