

Free medicine scheme hailed



ABORIGINAL and Torres Strait Islander people are being urged to take advantage of a scheme allowing them to get free or heavily discounted

medicine. The Federal Government has contributed \$805.5 million for the Indigenous Chronic Disease Package, part of which allows for free or subsidised medicines. All it takes is for a doctor to write the letters CTG (Close the Gap) on a patient's prescription, and pharmacists are legally compelled to provide the medicine either free or heavily discounted.

NSW Aboriginal Land Council Chairwoman Bev Manton said the agreement was valid for all prescriptions for any illness, treatment, ailment or disease. She said managing disease and illness was often very expensive and simply not an option for many Aboriginal people.

"This Government package is designed to reduce the risk factors for chronic disease in Aboriginal communities, improve disease



BEV MANTON

management and improve follow-up treatment," she said.

Ms Manton said the letters CTG signified that the medicine was to be dispensed under the arrangement.

Aboriginal people suffer under the weight of chronic disease at a rate

two-and-a-half times that of other Australians.

Some of these illnesses are killers and include cardiovascular disease, diabetes, cancer, respiratory disease and chronic kidney disease

"It's important to note that all pharmacists are compelled legally to comply with the CTG arrangements, and cannot adjudicate on individual patients," Ms Manton said.

"We all know medicine is extremely expensive, and that's often the reason disease goes un-treated in many Aboriginal families. This has to stop.

"I can only hope that armed with this information, Aboriginal families will have access to the medicine they need, and enjoy a quality of life they deserve."

The package is part of the COAG National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes.

The package has three main elements: Tackling chronic disease risk factors; improving disease management and follow-up care; and expanding and supporting the primary care workforce.