



World Federation of Public Health Associations

Fédération Mondiale des Associations de Santé Publique

Federación Mundial de las Asociaciones de Salud Pública

Всемирная Федерация Ассоциаций Общественного Здравоохранения

世界公共卫生联盟

الاتحاد العالمي لجمعيات الصحة العامة

Press release: International Year of Indigenous Languages and beyond

Language is important to Indigenous people around the world and plays an important role in culture and cultural expression. With culture playing a central role in Indigenous people's health and wellbeing, the Indigenous Working Group (IWG) of the World Federation of Public Health Associations (WFPHA) recognizes the significance of the United Nations decision to declare [2019 Year of Indigenous Languages](#).

The IWG encourages the over 90 countries around the world, where the 3000 million Indigenous people have called home before colonization, to invest in Indigenous language maintenance and revival.

Adrian Te Patu, Co-chair of the IWG a Maori from New Zealand has seen first-hand how the investment in the Maori language called te reo Māori has strengthened his people. Te reo, due to colonisation was threatened however due to investment in te reo revival many more Maori and Pākehā now speak the language.

"Language is the glue to all cultures and offers insight to traditions, rituals and the past. It is the vessel for healing, growing and redefining the identity and direction of indigenous peoples. Language and the native tongue of indigenous folk is a pathway to well-being, it is a significant determinant of health of all our peoples, and by association effects the wellness of all others in our communities and nations", said Mr Te Patu.

The Action plan for organising the 2019 International Year of Indigenous Languages ([Language Action Plan](#)) is guided by a number of principles. The IWG would like to highlight the importance of two of the principles. The first the principle of centrality of Indigenous peoples (nothing about us without us) enacted through self-determination and the second the synergy among different international development frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals. These two principles in particular are significant because to date, the United Nations and other international bodies such as the World Health Organisation have not had a specific focus on Indigenous people and role we play in achieving Sustainable Development Goals.

Associate Professor Carmen Parter, Co-chair of the IWG an Aboriginal woman from the Darumbal and Juru Clans of the Birra Gubba Nation in the Australian State of Queensland, believes that Indigenous centrality in language maintenance and revival is just one area Indigenous people can be specifically included in frameworks such as the Sustainable Development Goals.



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Ms Summer May Finlay, an Aboriginal woman from the Yorta Yorta Nation and Co-Vice Chair of the IWG agrees.

“The significance of 2019 being named as the Year of Indigenous Languages can not be understated, nor can the principle of Indigenous centrality. To do that, Indigenous people need to be leading their own solutions. The benefits of including us in decisions on language maintenance and revival is the first step to us being included in all decisions, programs and policies affecting us. If we are to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals we need to see a significant improvement in Indigenous peoples health,” Ms Finlay said.

The IWG welcomes the Year of Indigenous Languages is buoyed by the recognition that Indigenous people need be front and centre of language maintenance and revival. We applaud the inclusion of Indigenous people in United Frameworks and challenge international bodies and their members states to include Indigenous people in all aspects of the work they do.

The Indigenous Working Group looks forward to progress being made against the Language Action Plan for the benefit of Indigenous peoples culture, spirituality and health and wellbeing. And we encourage all member states and other organisations to apply the Language Action Plan principles beyond language to see greater improvement in Indigenous peoples health and wellbeing.

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