Launch of the First Peoples Disability Network Australia:
Bridging the Disability Gap

Friday 30 March 2012 marks the launch of the First Peoples Disability Network (FPDN). This national peak organisation will represent 37% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia who are living with a disability and also their families and carers.

‘This is a historic occasion, we now have a strong voice at a national level for our people with disability’ says Aunty Gayle Rankine, founding member of the FPDN.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities are amongst the most disadvantaged Australians, yet the vast majority remain at the periphery of the disability service sector.

The focus on Aboriginal people with disability has been from a health perspective. Whilst primary health care is essential, it has come at the cost recognising the social aspects of Aboriginal disability. This has meant that discrimination against Aboriginal people with disability remains firmly entrenched. The general wellbeing of Aboriginal people with disability has not improved in any meaningful way. It is time to bridge the disability gap in Australia.

“FPDN will advocate robustly for the promotion and protection of the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities to ensure their equal participation within their own communities and the wider Australian community” says the FPDN Executive Officer Damian Griffis.

“We are also developing a ten point plan for the implementation of the National Disability Insurance Scheme for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities to ensure this policy meets the unique needs of indigenous Australians.”

Please join FPDG members, guests and Senator Jan McLucas, Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities to celebrate the launch of the FPDN.

LAUNCH EVENT: This Friday, 30 March, 2012

When: Fri 30 March, 10am - 12 noon
Where: Yaama Dhiyaan, 255 Wilson St, Chippendale (Sydney), NSW
RSVP: damiang@adnnsww.org.au

Damian Griffis and Gayle Rankine are available for media interviews: 0412 979 857

THE FACTS

* 37% of indigenous Australian (15 years+) live with a disability.
* This does not include people with a psychological disability.
* This prevalence of disability is nearly twice that of the non-indigenous Australians.
* The time for this to change is now.
About the First Peoples Disability Network (Australia)

The First Peoples Disability Network (Australia) is the national peak organisation representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities, their families and carers.

The FPDN will be a strong voice of and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities, their families and carers. We will provide advice to government on issues that affect the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities. We will educate both the government and non-government sectors about the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander with disabilities.

By any measure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities are amongst the most disadvantaged Australians yet the vast majority remain at the periphery of the disability service sector.

This continues to occur for a range of reasons including the fact that the vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities do not identify as a person with disability. This is because in traditional language there was no comparable word for disability. The vast majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities are reluctant to take on a further negative label – particularly if they already experience discrimination based on their Aboriginality. ‘Disability’ is a new conversation in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, despite the high prevalence of disability (at least twice that of the general population).

In the experience of the FPDN and its members ‘disability’ tends to be discussed from impairment based perspective. For example; ‘does aunty or uncle have trouble getting around’ or ‘does cousin have trouble understanding’ or ‘my brother doesn’t hear properly’. This way of describing disability is not done in an offensive way but more as a reference to the way in which that person interacts with their family and community. The FPDN believes there is much that the wider Australian community can learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities about the ways in which people with disability are valued members of their communities.

The FPDN is uniquely placed because of its membership structure and uses a federation type model for its membership. Its founding members are networks of Aboriginal people with disability from NSW, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria. Each network has as its full members Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islanders with disabilities or family members supporting a person with disability or any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander carer of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person with disability. This perspective is unique in that it comes directly from those that have a personal lived experience of disability.

One of the FPDN priorities over the next several years will be to support the development of networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities in jurisdictions where they do not currently exist.