

'Our Story. Our Future.' was created by proud Wiradjuri, Wotjobaluk, Yuin and Gumbaynggirr artist Luke Penrith and Maluiliilgal people, Badu Island artist Naseli Tamwoy.

Census data helps First Nation's surgeon understand patient needs



First Nations surgeon and Worimi man, Professor Kelvin Kong, uses Census data to help him better understand areas of need and target efforts to improve community health across Australia.

As an ear, nose and throat surgeon at the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle, Professor Kong said Census data is vital for his work.

"Good hearing is essential for our mob, our culture and our way of life. We are the world's oldest surviving culture with such a rich and vibrant oral history. But we are enduring hearing loss and its consequences for learning and social development in epidemic proportions," said Professor Kong.

"Census data helps me understand areas where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live, their ages and other basic demographic information.

"We can combine this with other data to see which areas have better access to hospital treatment, for example, and also see the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in treatment rates.

"I overlay the Census data with Health Survey data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) to understand the health needs of the population in a community.

"This helps us target our efforts to improve health services by facilitating better access to quality care where and when it is needed."

A particular focus of Professor Kong's work is ear and hearing health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. An analysis of recent hospital data combined with Census data showed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kids were 1.2 times more likely than non-Indigenous kids to be hospitalised for ear disease. This was highest in remote and very remote areas. The Menzies Hearing for Learning program was then developed to address this disparity.

Professor Kong said the chronic health conditions question added to this year's Census will make background research easier.

"This will allow us to develop a more comprehensive and co-ordinated approach to service delivery that is both timely and appropriate for different areas and communities. It will help us know things like how many people have diabetes, asthma, heart disease, reduced kidney function and other chronic conditions, and where to establish or boost services.

"Our communities rarely have an opportunity to provide feedback on health services so, I encourage all our mob to make sure they are included in this year's Census. It's the best way to let policy makers know what services are needed, and where, to help us grow and be healthy," Professor Kong said.