

Media Release

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Re: KAMS marks 40 years of Aboriginal leadership and community control

Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS) has marked its 40th anniversary, celebrating four decades of Aboriginal leadership, community control, and collective action to improve health and wellbeing across the Kimberley.

Held in Broome on Friday 9 October, the anniversary celebration brought together founders' families, Elders, Member Services, directors, staff, and partners to recognise the people who have built and sustained KAMS.

Established in 1986 as the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Council, KAMS began as a cooperative between Broome Regional Aboriginal Medical Service and East Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service, now Ord Valley Aboriginal Health Service. Representatives from Halls Creek and Fitzroy Crossing subsequently joined the regional effort.

Their leaders recognised the strength of sharing resources, expertise, and a unified regional voice while maintaining local community control.

KAMS Chairman Raymond Christophers said the anniversary recognised the determination of Aboriginal people to shape their own health services.

"KAMS is an organisation of Aboriginal people, for Aboriginal people, controlled by Aboriginal people," Mr Christophers said.

"Our founders understood that our communities needed a strong voice and genuine control over decisions affecting their health and wellbeing.

"Forty years later, that purpose remains at the heart of everything we do. Our Member Services and their communities are the foundation of KAMS."

The celebration honoured the contribution of Aboriginal health leaders, including Dr Arnold 'Puggy' Hunter, Maxine Armstrong, and Mr Christophers, alongside generations of Aboriginal Health Workers, community leaders, directors, and staff. It also remembered those who are no longer with us, whose contributions remain part of KAMS' story.

Today, KAMS supports and represents eight independent Aboriginal Member Services. Its work spans comprehensive primary health care, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, disability and aged care support, population health, research, workforce development, and accredited training. KAMS also delivers comprehensive primary health care in Balgo, Beagle Bay, Billiluna, and Mulan, and provides clinical and corporate support to strengthen services across the region.

Its wholly owned subsidiary, Kimberley Renal Services (KRS), delivers dialysis, prevention, and support through renal health centres in Broome, Derby, Fitzroy Crossing, and Kununurra, and a Mobile Dialysis Unit.

KAMS CEO Vicki O'Donnell OAM said the anniversary was an opportunity to recognise both the sector's achievements and its contribution to the Kimberley's future.

"When our communities need us, KAMS, KRS and our Member Services come together, work out the right approach, and support one another," Mrs O'Donnell said.

"We saw that strength during COVID-19, when Aboriginal leadership, local knowledge, and partnerships guided our efforts to keep our people safe.

"That commitment extends beyond health care. Together, we create jobs, train our workforce, support local businesses, and invest in services and infrastructure for our communities."

Collectively, KAMS, KRS, and their Member Services employ around 900 staff, have annual income of approximately \$200 million, and hold assets exceeding \$250 million.

As community-controlled, not-for-profit organisations, they reinvest revenue into services, infrastructure, workforce development, and community benefit. Their contribution also reaches local businesses through procurement and the everyday spending of staff and their families.

Mrs O'Donnell said partnerships between Aboriginal organisations would continue to be central to responding to community priorities.

"Our organisations are employers, trainers, researchers, and infrastructure partners. We are helping shape the future of the Kimberley," she said.

"To our directors, staff, Member Services, and partners, thank you for the commitment and care you bring to our people every day.

"As we look ahead, our focus remains on Aboriginal leadership, strong culture, and community control, so our people can live longer, healthier lives."

-ENDS-

Image:

KAMS Board and CEO (L-R) Timothy Garrett, Louie Bin Maarus, Edith Skeen, Diann Britton, Elizabeth Cox, Chicky Clements, Iris Prouse, Vicki O'Donnell, Raymond Christophers, William Bangu

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