



Reaching out again

Following on from last month's cover story, there's plenty more good news happening in the field of indigenous health.

At the end of last month, a formal alliance was announced between the federal government and indigenous groups aimed at bridging the gap in health status and life expectancy between indigenous and non-indigenous people. And around the same time, the Filling The Gap Volunteer program (see March *Bite's* cover story) called for hygienists to help out in Far North Queensland communities.

The government and indigenous health leaders signed a Statement of Intent in the Great Hall of Parliament House at the end of March to work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians by the year 2030.

"This partnership means we are well on the road to making health equality a reality for Indigenous Australians by 2030," said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social justice commissioner Tom Calma.

"Since 2005, the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC) has been working with indigenous health bodies and the non-government sector to achieve commitment from Australian governments to achieving equality of health and life expectation between



They're all sorry: Jenny Macklin, Kevin Rudd and Tom Calma.

indigenous and non-indigenous people within 25 years. It means these fundamental human rights are not only possible but are now firm commitments."

Mr Calma said the \$19 million over three years announced by the government to tackle high rates of smoking in indigenous communities, and \$14.5 million over four years to fund a national indigenous workforce training plan, was a concrete example of the Statement of Intent in action. This was in addition to the \$261 million in indigenous health initiatives already promised.

Meanwhile, the Filling the Gap Volunteer program has called for expressions of interest from hygienists to work in Far North Queensland following the first

successful trial last year with hygienist Cathryn Carboon.

"There has been widespread interest from hygienists around the country," said program co-founder Gael Kennedy. "Now that we have had a successful trial we will be following it up with further visits from hygienists—I believe dental hygienists have a lot to offer the program, especially in the areas of preventive oral healthcare and periodontal therapy".

Carboon agreed, saying, "The team at Wuchopperen were fantastic, very professional and very welcoming. They were all happy to be involved in this new initiative." □

To find out more about Filling the Gap, go to www.fillingthegap.com.au