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MEDIA RELEASE

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Redoubled efforts to save First Australians from syphilis

The Morrison Government has more than doubled funding to combat the syphilis outbreak in northern, central and southern Australia, with a further \$12.4 million to extend and sustain instant testing and treatment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Our Government's commitment is now \$21.2 million, through until June 2021, aiming to cement the success of the enhanced syphilis response.

The Point Of Care Test and Treat model has already been successfully rolled out to eight Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across Townsville, Cairns, Darwin, the Katherine region, East Arnhem Land and the Kimberley.

So far, almost 120 local health professionals have been trained to use the test kits and more than 4,000 people have been tested by health services funded by Phases One and Two of the program, with the immediate diagnosis and treatment promising a critical breakthrough in curbing the spread of the disease.

This funding boost will mean more Test and Treat services will be deployed in Phase Three - across the Northern Territory, Western Australia (West Kimberley and Pilbara) and South Australia (locations to be confirmed).

It includes a \$1 million fund to allow for rapid responses in any other areas where an

emerging syphilis outbreak is detected.

We are making progress but the fact that this preventable and treatable yet deadly disease is rampant in some First Nations communities is a tragedy that should never have been allowed to happen.

Since the commencement of the syphilis outbreak in 2011, there have been approximately 2,400 cases of infectious syphilis and 15 congenital syphilis cases in northern and central Australia.

Seven young deaths have occurred and this is absolutely unacceptable.

Our Government has stepped in with a funding commitment and we urge the States and Territories to increase their commitment at a local level.

Our Government is working closely with State and Territory health departments, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to drive this rapid response.

I am writing to all Health Ministers, reiterating that effective deployment of additional resources - in what is primarily a State and Territory responsibility - is fundamental to stopping the syphilis outbreak and saving lives.

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