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# Townsville Bulletin

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Thursday, August 25, 2011

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# Sacked



Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Service director of operational services Angie Akee has been dismissed

## Major changes at indigenous body

by Kathleen Skene

EXECUTIVES of the Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Service have been sacked following months of speculation over their management of the government-funded centre.

The *Bulletin* understands director of operational services Angie Akee, chief executive director Tanya Akee and director of corporate services Dorothy Erichsen were dismissed yesterday following a meeting of board members the previous night.

The health service issued a statement yesterday saying the decision had been made "to dismiss certain staff and engage suitably qualified personnel" after receiving legal advice.

They also faxed a copy of the members' register which the *Townsville Bulletin* has been trying to access since May.

The statement, attributed to director Donald Whaleboat, said the board had been "finding it difficult to make certain critical decisions because of conflicts of interest that exist within the board and throughout the management structure".

"Further to this, the board received legal advice and other information that suggests that management processes within the organisation are not in line with reasonable business standards," he said.

"Therefore, it was resolved that the board take immediate action."

Security guards were called to the centre yesterday after some people reportedly "caused a disturbance" in response to the decision.

A source at the centre said things there were "tense" but that most staff fully supported the move.

"It's all going to be worth it if the centre stays open," they said.

Continued page 4



**TOMORROW: 130 years of headlines 1960-1989**



# TAIHS executives sacked

## Board takes action, calls for sign-up

From page 1

The register reveals a steady decline in members from 243 in 2006-07 to 49 in 2011-12, with the percentage of identifiable family members increasing annually from 21 per cent in 2006-07 to 59 per cent in 2011-12.

Mr Whaleboat's statement called on people to sign up now as members to help secure the centre's future.

"Building membership is paramount at this stage, and we would urge all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members to consider joining the company as members," it said.

"Interested persons should contact the Executive Secretary on 4759 4027."

A special general meeting, which could remove some or all TAIHS board members, is likely to be called once memberships improve.



SHAKE-UP: Security guards were called to the centre after a reported "disturbance" in response to the decision

A local health worker with former connections with the health service said it used to be a benchmark for community-controlled services

Australia-wide. "It needs to be given back to the community now, and stopped from ever being destroyed again - it has so much

potential," she said. "The Government is pouring millions into closing the gap and it hasn't been reaching the rest of the com-

munity." Federal Herbert MP Ewen Jones, who has pushed for an investigation of the service for several months, said the dismissals were "the first step of many" to returning the service to its former standards.

"TAIHS once was a great organisation, and it can be again," he said. "But I still call for an investigation or administration of all the organisations that the family are involved with that receive government funding.

"It needs to be swept clean." Townsville MP Mandy Johnstone said she had alerted the State's auditor-general to the situation, while Communities Minister Karen Struthers said she was pleased the board was "doing the right thing".

Ms Johnstone said that new accountability laws were going through the parliament and once they were fully approved she would lodge an application for these serious claims of nepotism and mismanagement to be investigated.

"The Townsville Aboriginal and Islanders Health Service cannot flourish into the future with a cloud of doubt hovering ominously above it. This latest development will come as a relief to those who have persevered for so long," she said.

## Support needed to return service to former glory

YESTERDAY'S events at Townsville's Aboriginal and Islanders medical centre mark the beginning of what will be a hard but necessary road for our indigenous community.

There is no joy in seeing what was once a national benchmark for community-controlled health services in such turmoil - but at least now it will be possible to restore both its reputation and the community's faith in it.

We hope in future, other local organisations will also have this cloud of suspicion and uncertainty lifted from them. Only comprehensive investigations of these organisations will achieve this.

Scores of indigenous community members from a variety of backgrounds have contacted the *Bulletin* since we broke this story, each with their own stories about



How we have reported the TAIHS saga

their dealings with the centre and its management.

These people, who have stood up for themselves and their communities have exemplified the resilience and passion of the indigenous community in the North. Their courage and persistence has been commendable.

TAIHS has a lot going for it - many dedicated and talented staff, great facilities and healthy government backing. With the right support, it is well-placed to make significant and lasting positive change in our community. Now is the time for people to step up, sign up as members and have their voices heard. If someone asks for your vote - take an interest - ask them why, and consider casting that vote yourself. Community control cannot work without community involvement.

Kathleen Skene



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