

Torres and Cape

Hospital and Health Service



Nurse-Led, Culturally Informed Management of Leprosy in Remote Northern Australia

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**Queensland
Government**



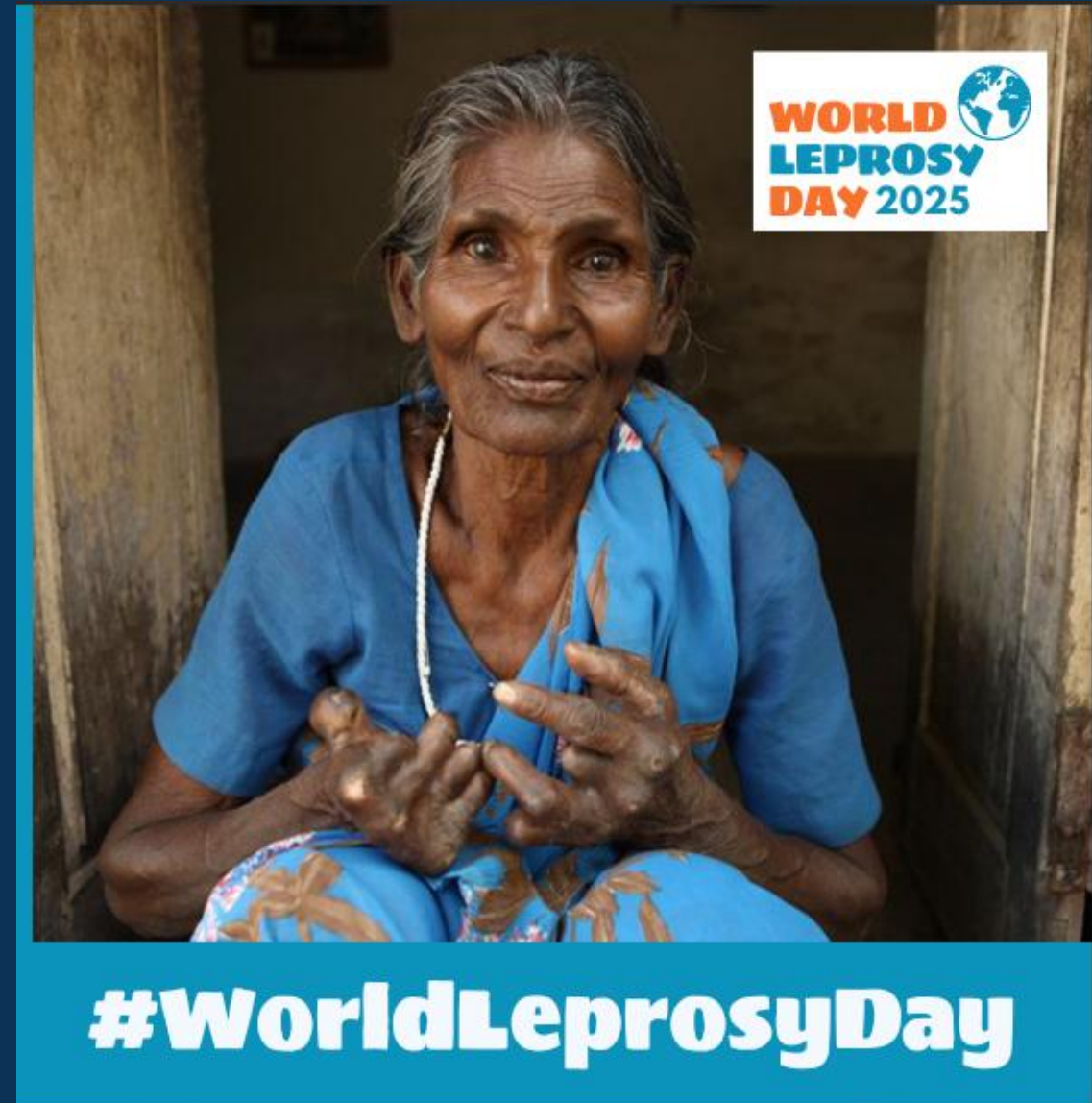
Health care in the Torres Strait (Zenadth kes)

- 17 PHCC's
- 1 Hospital

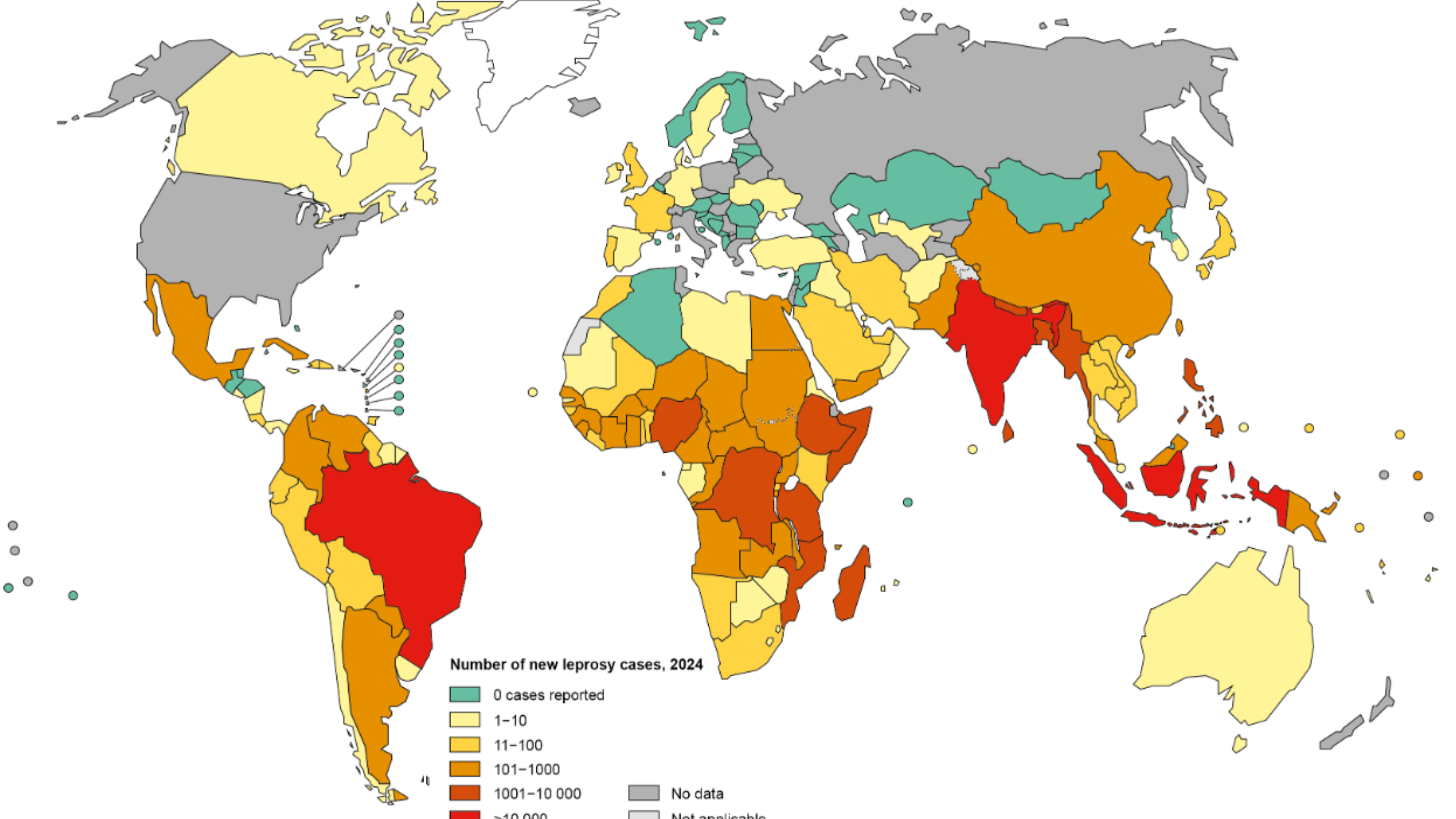
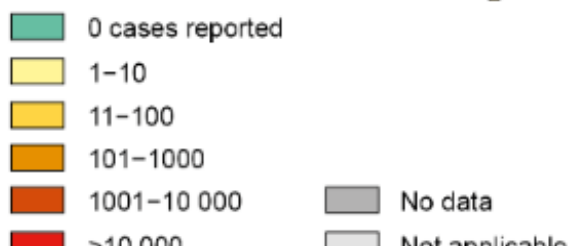


Leprosy

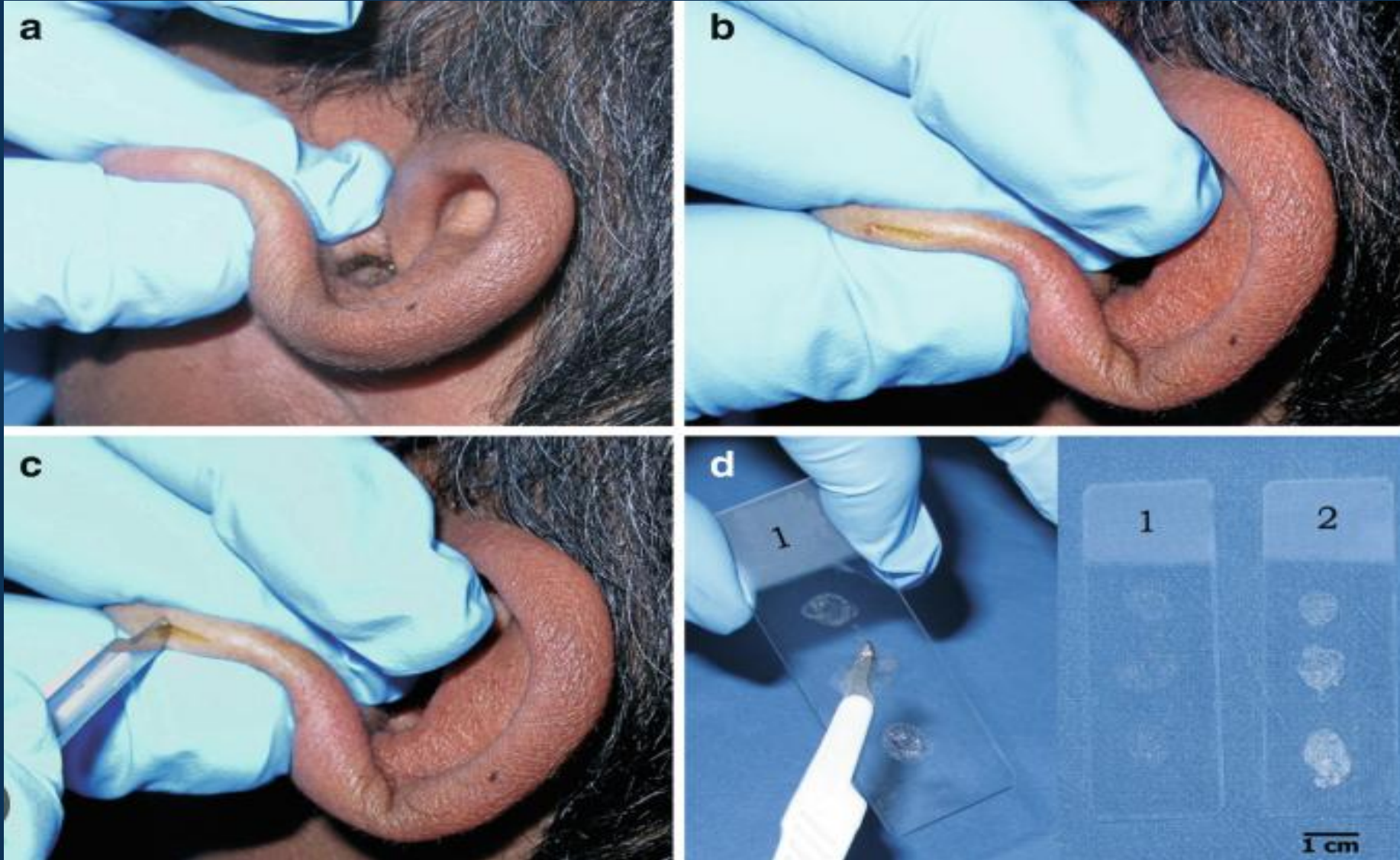
- Chronic infectious disease
- Mycobacterium Leprae
- Affects skin, nerves, upper respiratory tract and eyes
- Physical deformity
- Treatable and curable
- WHO neglected tropical disease



Number of new leprosy cases, 2024



Split skin smears



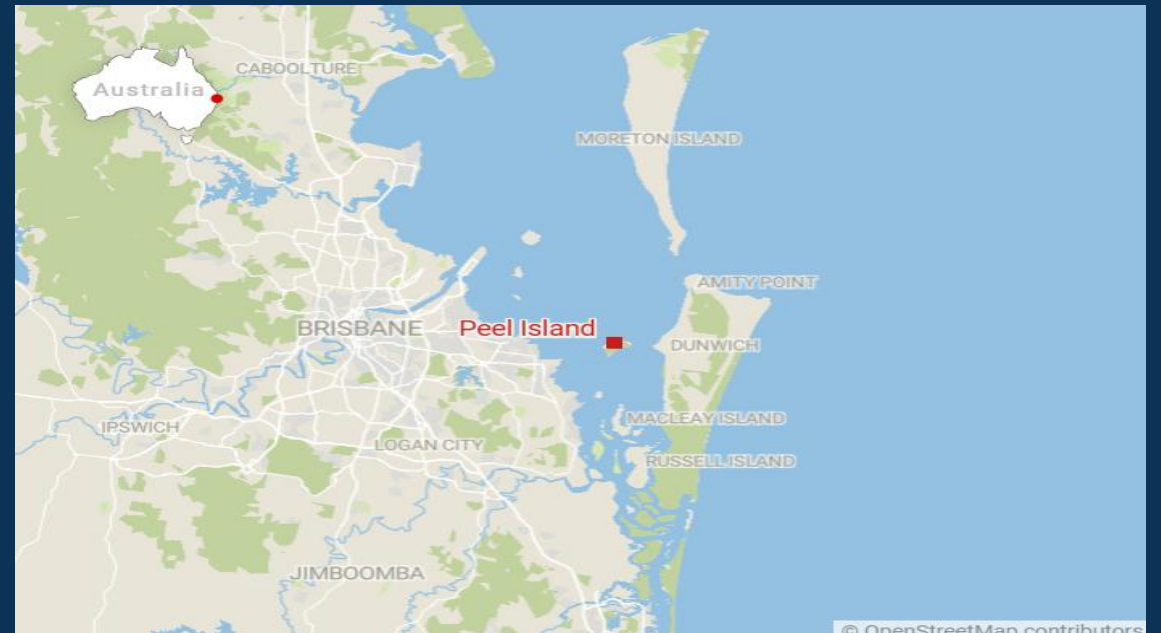
BCG Vaccine

- Protects against Tuberculosis
- Leprosy
- X1 birth dose



History of Leprosy management

- QLD Leprosy act of 1892
- Friday Island
 - 1892-1907
- Peel Island
 - 1907-1959
- Segregation, poor living conditions
- No cure until the 1940's



Notification received



Notified of a Leprosy case on a Torres strait Island June 2025



Case required treatment



Screening required for household contacts living with the case over 3 months



Initial contact made with family via phone

Initial face to face visit



Met with clinic staff



Met with family

Discussed what we needed to achieve from a disease response perspective

Listened to their prior experiences, fears and concerns

Discussed the disease, the misconceptions, stigma

Meeting With the Experts

- Health centre manager
- Operations Manager PHCC's
- Cluster Coordinator
- Norther Director PHCC Leadership
- Public Health Operational Director
- Infectious disease Physician



#WorldLeprosyDay

Meeting with the experts

Education provided to
Councillors

Emphasised Leprosy is
treatable, curable

Discussed fears of exile

Discussed proposed plan
and requested feedback



Developing resources

3 MYTHS ABOUT Hansen's Disease

ALSO KNOWN AS LEPROSY

MYTH 1. Hansen's Disease does not exist anymore

FALSE

Around 200 000 new cases of Hansen's Disease are reported by more than 120 countries worldwide.

MYTH 2. Hansen's Disease is a very contagious disease

FALSE

Hansen's Disease is one of the least contagious diseases. It is spread through long term close contact with an untreated case. Casual contact like shaking hands does not lead to transmission.

MYTH 3. Hansen's Disease is incurable and invariably leads to disability

FALSE

Hansen's Disease can be cured with antibiotics given over 6-12 months.

EARLY DIAGNOSIS HELPS TO:

ENSURE COMPLETE CURE

PREVENT DEFORMITIES

STOP TRANSMISSION

Contact your Primary Health Care Centre for more information.

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FAST FACTS ABOUT Hansen's Disease

ALSO KNOWN AS LEPROSY

HANSEN'S DISEASE IS CURABLE

Hansen's Disease can be cured with antibiotics given over 6-12 months.

HANSEN'S DISEASE IS PREVENTABLE

A single dose of antibiotics (rifampicin) prevents Hansen's Disease among contacts.

COMBAT STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION

No blame, no shame, Hansen's Disease is curable!

BEAT HANSEN'S DISEASE, END STIGMA!

Contact your Primary Health Care Centre for more information.

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WHAT IS Hansen's Disease?

ALSO KNOWN AS LEPROSY



CAUSED BY A GERM

WHAT TO LOOK FOR...

Patches of discoloured, pale, red, thick, hard, swollen or numb skin



Loss of eyebrows or eyelashes



Numbness and or sores on the bottom of your feet



Red or purple lumps

Weakness in muscles



Changing vision



HANSEN'S DISEASE IS CURABLE WITH ANTIBIOTICS

ANTIBIOTIC

Contact your PHCC or the TB control unit for more information

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Community event

- Barbeque and yarning session
- Healthy meats and salads
- Topics included
 - Hansens Disease
 - Immunisation- Flu and Polio vaccines offered
 - Tuberculosis
 - Cross border



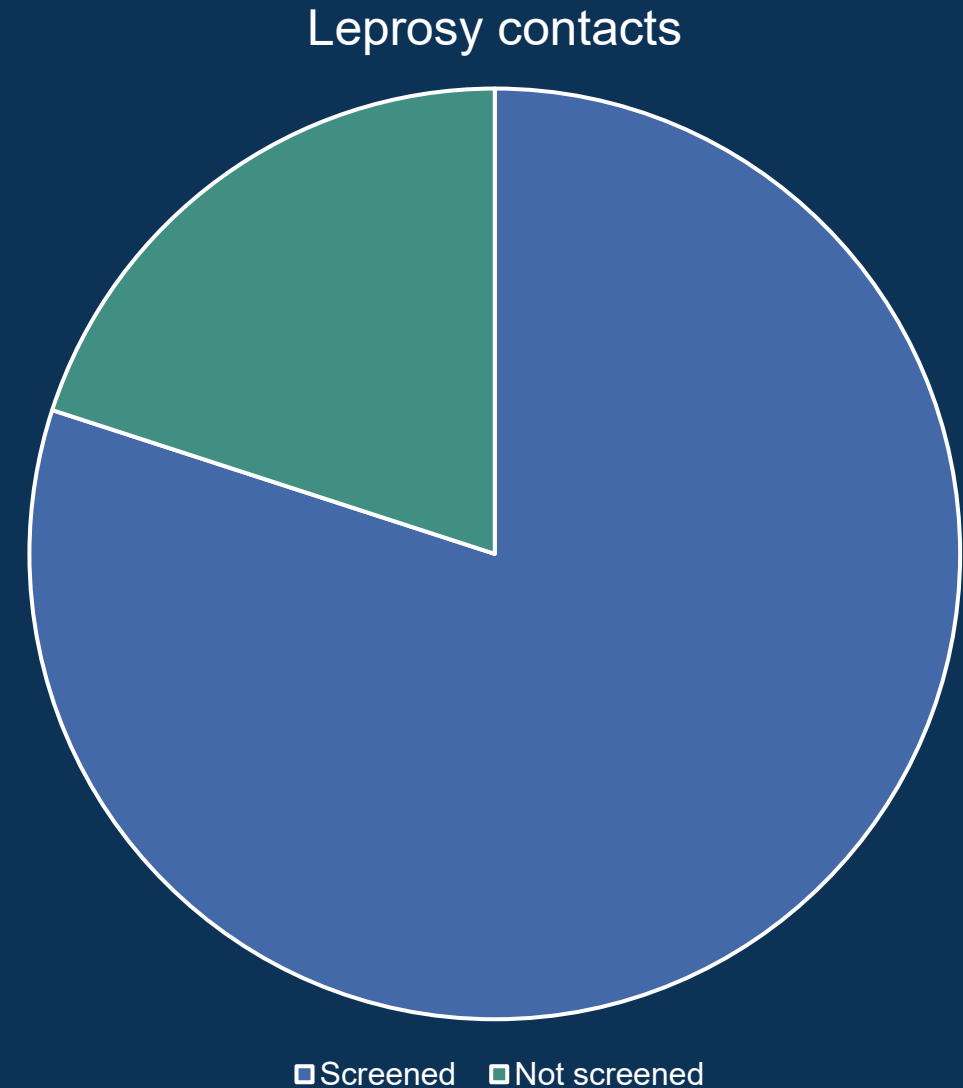
The screening

- Occurred in September 2025
- Follow up visit Nov 2025
- 10 contacts screened
- X 3 split skin smears taken
- All samples returned a negative result



Outcomes

- Screening well received
 - 10 out of 14 contacts screened
- No negative impacts for the family
- Knowledge about Leprosy improved in community



Learnings

- Disease guidelines inform our clinical response
- Communities and leaders guide culturally safe practice
- Families offer personal insight
- Listening leads to shared outcomes
- Risk extends beyond disease
- Each community needs an individualised response











A scenic view of a harbor at sunset. In the foreground, a metal dock with a chain-link fence runs across the frame. Several small motorboats are moored at the dock. Two prominent black pilings with white conical tops stand in the water. The water is calm, reflecting the vibrant orange and yellow colors of the setting sun. The sky is filled with large, dark clouds, some of which are illuminated from below by the sun. In the background, a low-lying shoreline with some buildings and trees is visible under the twilight sky.

Questions??

References

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- [NT Health \(2024\) Leprosy Management in the Northern Territory Guideline {ONLINE} Accessed at health.nt.gov.au/media/pdf/phu/leprosy-management-nth-guideline.pdf](http://health.nt.gov.au/media/pdf/phu/leprosy-management-nth-guideline.pdf)
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- WHO, Neglected Tropical Diseases {ONLINE} www.who.int/data/gho/data/themes/neglected-tropical-diseases
- World Health Organization. (2026, January 23). *Leprosy*. <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/leprosy>