



AIDA Research Agenda

Purpose

The AIDA Research Agenda:

- Sets out AIDA's research principles and priorities relevant to medical education, medical workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health; and
- Outlines activities that contribute to building the research capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors.

Aim

The AIDA Research Agenda aims to facilitate the creation and application of a strong evidence base to inform research, policy and programs that impact upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors, as well as health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

To do this, AIDA commits to understanding and building upon the existing evidence base and partner with others as necessary.

Principles

AIDA believes that research should:

- Be oriented to improve health outcomes in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Be driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and provide benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved in, or who may be affected by research;
- Affirm social justice and human rights, including the right to self-determination;
- Protect Indigenous knowledge and maintain the integrity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures;
- Foster the highest ethical and scientific standards and apply best-practice guidelines;
- Build on the success and lessons learnt from previous research, evaluations and reviews;
- Be consultative and collaborative, including listening to and acting on priorities identified by Indigenous communities; and
- Build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, organisations and communities.

These research principles align with AIDA's Values and Code of Conduct and are consistent with existing frameworks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

Priorities

The priorities of the AIDA Research Agenda are:

- Health Service Delivery;
- Chronic Diseases and Cancer;
- Social and Emotional Wellbeing;
- Mental Health;
- Indigenous Community-driven Research; and
- Indigenous Medical Workforce.

1. Health Service Delivery

AIDA advocates for improvements in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and central to this is increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to health care services, and improving the quality of the services provided. It is well known that culturally safe health services achieve better health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as Indigenous people are more likely to feel comfortable in accessing and utilising these services. Crucial to achieving this is growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and increasing the cultural competence of the entire health workforce in working effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. AIDA asserts that health services must adapt their practices to be culturally safe for Indigenous people and their families by having structures, policies and programs in place that strengthen cultural safety.

2. Chronic Diseases and Cancer

Chronic diseases, such as respiratory disease, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, kidney disease and cancer contribute to two-thirds of the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians¹. Many chronic diseases are preventable, therefore, AIDA asserts that approaches to prevent the incidence and progression of chronic conditions must be based on strong evidence and be culturally safe. It is important to identify strategies that work effectively to address chronic disease and deliver optimal health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

3. Social and Emotional Wellbeing

To Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the concept of health means not just the physical well-being of an individual, but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being². AIDA advocates for improvements in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and given that social and emotional wellbeing is an important aspect of the overall health and wellbeing of Indigenous people, this is an important research priority for AIDA. AIDA would like to see all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the best social and emotional wellbeing.

¹ Australian Government, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023*, [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/2B39FA14C286E3EECA2579E800837B5F/\\$File/health-plan.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/2B39FA14C286E3EECA2579E800837B5F/$File/health-plan.pdf) (accessed 22 August 2013)

² National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). 2013, *Investing in Healthy Futures for Generational Change, NACCHO 10-Point Plan 2013-2030*, http://www.naccho.org.au/download/naccho_health_futures/NACCHO%20Healthy%20Futures%2010%20point%20plan%202013-2030.pdf

4. Mental Health

Mental health is a significant health issue that affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Documents such as the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2030* recognise the impact of mental health conditions on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and have articulated key strategies for addressing this important area. AIDA sees mental illness as being distinct from social and emotional wellbeing issues, much as the two interact and influence each other. Even with good social and emotional wellbeing, individuals can still experience mental illness and individuals with a long-term mental health conditions can live and function at a high level with adequate support¹. AIDA asserts that the mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be improved.

5. Indigenous Community-driven Research

It is widely recognised that a substantial amount of research has been undertaken on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with little benefit returned to those affected by research activities. AIDA's work is underpinned by the pursuit of social justice and human rights for Indigenous people, and therefore believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the right to be in control of, and benefit from, research that directly affects their lives. AIDA asserts that research must be driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, address the priorities of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, and be based on culturally safe research methodologies.

6. Indigenous Medical Workforce

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors have a distinctive and central role in improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through advocacy and in many circumstances, the provision of medical and health care. It is well known that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are under-represented in the medical profession, with Indigenous doctors comprising only 0.3% of the total medical workforce in Australia³. As the peak organisation representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and medical students, AIDA's core business is about growing the Indigenous medical workforce. AIDA asserts that having an understanding of the following areas is important to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors:

- The retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students in the academic pipeline into health and medical careers;
- The demographic profile and trends of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and graduates;
- The importance of access to culturally specific information on pathways into medicine and alternative entry programs;
- Strengthening the Indigenous health curriculum across the medical education and training continuum; and
- Factors that support Indigenous medical students and doctors to graduation and fellowship
- The unique medical and cultural perspective of Indigenous doctors.

Building the Research Capacity of Indigenous Medical Students and Doctors

AIDA sees it as important to increase the pool of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors undertaking research, both within their medical professions, and as

³ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2013. *Medical Workforce 2011*, National Health workforce Series No. 3, Cat. No. HWL 49, AIHW, Canberra.

researchers. Building the research capacity of Indigenous medical students and doctors will also contribute to a growth in the number of Indigenous medical academics and proposed strategies to support this include:

Drawing on Member Expertise

AIDA will aim to support and facilitate research opportunities for Indigenous medical students and doctors and continue to draw on the expertise, experience and networks of our members to build the research capacity of Indigenous members. This could include identifying members experienced in research to deliver presentations at our annual membership gatherings or facilitate workshops on research opportunities and processes at our annual Symposiums.

Mentoring is an intrinsic part of AIDA's role and has been identified as an important strategy to support our Indigenous medical student and graduate members. Mentoring is one strategy that can be applied to build the research capacity of individuals, where those with significant experience in Indigenous health research will be matched with potential and early career researchers.

The concept of mentoring as a strategy to build the research capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors is further supported by the 2012 report, *Building Indigenous Medical Academic Leaders*⁴, which recommends that mentoring relationships be fostered between experienced researchers/academics with those interested in choosing this pathway or those early on in their research or academic career.

AIDA also plans to develop specific opportunities for members such as offering Research Master Classes, in collaboration with peers in research institutions.

Partnerships and Collaboration

Drawing upon existing partnerships and collaborations is a mechanism for building the research capacity of Indigenous medical student and doctors. This could include, but is not limited to:

- Partnering with universities, medical schools, research institutes and other relevant organisations to facilitate research opportunities for Indigenous medical students and access to research scholarships;
- Partnering with medical colleges and research institutes to facilitate research and teaching opportunities linked to clinical practice for Indigenous doctors;
- Partnering with universities, medical schools, medical colleges and research institutes to articulate a clearer pathway into research and academia, such as research fellowships and advocate for designated places for Indigenous medical students and doctors to undertake research; and
- Draw upon our existing connections with national funding agencies to advocate for increased support for research scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors and advocate for increased support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research projects.

Next Steps

A work plan to support the implementation of the AIDA Research Agenda will be developed in early 2014.

⁴ AIDA & Medical Deans of Australia and New Zealand. 2012, *Building Indigenous Medical Academic Leaders*, <http://www.aida.org.au/pdf/meddeans/Forum%20Report.pdf> (accessed 22 August 2013)

Review

The AIDA Research Agenda will be reviewed on an annual basis to assist in determining:

- The Research Agenda's effectiveness in guiding AIDA's research activities;
- The effectiveness of the strategies outlined in the Research Agenda to build the research capacity of Indigenous medical students and doctors; and
- The level of take up by universities, medical colleges, research institutions and funding bodies in undertaking activities to support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors to undertake research.