



Joint media release
Tuesday 30 May 2017

Improving Indigenous health outcomes essential to true reconciliation

National Reconciliation Week
27 May — 3 June 2017

Vastly improving local access to culturally safe healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is a crucial part of closing the gap in health outcomes, and essential if we are serious about reconciliation, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) and Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) have urged during National Reconciliation Week.

RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said: "While Indigenous Australians continue to suffer from significant gaps in health outcomes compared with the rest of the Australian population, achieving true reconciliation will be incredibly difficult.

"In a country like Australia, in the 21st century, it is profoundly disappointing that, as a nation, we — governments, the health sector and the wider community — have not been able to deliver to Indigenous Australians the basic right of having adequate access to healthcare, and equitable health outcomes.

"That is not to say that we have not tried, and governments — including the Turnbull Government — have implemented a number of welcome initiatives.

"But achieving equitable health outcomes for Indigenous Australians needs a substantial escalation of effort. This is a significant blight on our community that needs urgent, massive and focused action, rather than worthwhile but piecemeal measures.

"While achieving true health equity for Indigenous Australians is a challenging path, it is one we need to walk.

"Going forward, it is critical that governments place more focus on significantly boosting access to local healthcare for Indigenous Australians.

"And it must feature models of healthcare that are designed by Indigenous Australians for Indigenous Australians — 'top down' approaches have been shown to fail time and time again. The types of healthcare models that work best for Indigenous Australians are those where Indigenous people have strong involvement in their design, and where the health service is truly responsive to the cultural needs and sensitivities of the population it serves."

AIDA President, Dr Kali Hayward, said: "It is also crucial that there continues to be a substantial focus on building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, including encouraging, mentoring and supporting more Indigenous people to train as doctors, nurses and allied health professionals.

"Currently there are about 300 registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors, meaning only 0.3% of doctors in Australia are Indigenous. Although the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors has more than doubled since 2004, about 2700 more are needed to reach population parity (approximately 3%).

"It makes sense that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians feel most comfortable with health professionals that are themselves Indigenous Australians. It follows that boosting the numbers and access to Indigenous health professionals, not only in rural and remote areas but also in the cities, can only make for a positive impact on health outcomes for Indigenous patients."

RDAA's Major MDO Insurer Sponsor, MDA National, provides an annual \$7000 Bursary to support an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander medical student in the cost of their medical studies and associated living expenses, or to undertake a clinical placement. RDAA and AIDA jointly select the recipient of the Bursary. Applications for the MDA National and RDAA Rural Health Bursary for 2017 will open next week, with the recipient being announced at the Rural Medicine Australia 2017 conference in October.

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