

Twice as many Indigenous doctors

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The number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical doctors continues to increase, doubling since 2004. And, the number of Indigenous medical students has increased three-fold, with the first group of intergenerational Indigenous doctors now emerging.

In 2004 there were 90 Indigenous medical doctors and 102 Indigenous medical students. Today, there are 204 Indigenous medical doctors and 310 Indigenous medical students. However, to reach population parity, which is currently 3%, there needs to be 2,895 Indigenous doctors in Australia.

Dr Tammy Kimpton, President of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) and General Practitioner said, "It's great to see our numbers grow, but we need more than ten times this amount. An increase in Indigenous doctors, along with a focus on Australia's Indigenous health workforce, will help address the ill health and burden of disease in our communities, and respond appropriately to the continuing crisis in Indigenous health."

"What's really exciting for AIDA, is that we now see the first wave of intergenerational western-trained Indigenous medical doctors. This year at AIDA's 2014 Conference, we celebrated the graduation of two special Indigenous doctors; Dr Rebecca Hutchens, daughter of Professor Helen Milroy (Australia's first Aboriginal doctor) and Dr Gemma Hayman, daughter of Associate Professor Noel Hayman (One of AIDA's founding Members and Queensland's first Aboriginal doctor). Last year, we saw Dr Robert Grant graduate, son of Dr Simon Grant (Indigenous specialist physician)."

In this context, another amazing Aboriginal family is the Kong Family; Dr Marilyn Clarke is Australia's first Indigenous Obstetrician and Gynaecologist, her twin sister Dr Marlene Kong is a GP, while their brother Professor Kelvin Kong is the first Indigenous surgeon in Australia. All three siblings have had incredible journeys into medicine and have had a long association with AIDA, having served on AIDA's Board and fulfilling an array of representational commitments. Professor Kelvin Kong was also heavily involved in AIDA's publication *Healthy Futures (2005)*.

AIDA's Chief Executive Officer, Ms Kate Thomann said, "Presenting our Indigenous medical graduates and fellows with their stethoscopes (painted in the colours of the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flag), is a tradition that AIDA has held for many years. This acknowledgement honours their cultural connection, the time taken to fulfil their western academic study requirements, and allows each individual Indigenous medical graduate and fellow, to celebrate this significant achievement with their own mob, family and a network of peers."

"It has taken anywhere from four to sixteen years for these new Indigenous doctors and fellows to complete their studies. They have shown an enormous amount of commitment, dedication and resilience to get to where they are today," Ms Thomann said.

AIDA's 2014 Conference, themed *Science and Traditional Knowledge: Foundations for a Strong Future*, was held between the 2-4 October in Melbourne. This event was an opportunity for AIDA's Indigenous medical graduates and students, associate members and key stakeholders to share knowledge, be it scientific or traditional, celebrate achievements, and come together in a collegiate and supportive way.

"There is a vital need for the Australian health system to be culturally safe, high quality, reflective of need, and one which respects and integrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values. This can only be increased by the employment of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals, including Indigenous doctors, throughout the healthcare system," Dr Kimpton said.

AIDA also held its Annual General Meeting (AGM) alongside the conference whereby the newly passed Constitution guided proceedings. AIDA farewelled Directors Dr Tanya Schramm, Dr Alicia Veasey, Dr Catherine Engelke and Mr Ben Armstrong, and welcomed Dr Kiarna Brown, Dr Dana Slape and Mr Artiene Tatian to the Board. Dr Tammy Kimpton congratulated the Board, Secretariat and all the AIDA members for their efforts over the past twelve months and looks forward to working with the Board to in making progress toward achieving AIDA's vision; for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have equitable health and life outcomes.