



NATSIHWA

Indigenous Jobs and Training Review
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National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association (NATSIHWA) welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Review of Indigenous Training and Employment.

As the National Professional Association for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers (ATSIHWs), NATSIHWA is well placed to provide comments regarding training and employment of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers (ATSIHWs) as the emerging new professional health workforce, even though they have been in existence for many years. NATSIHWA has 600 registered members which is under 50% of the current ATSIHW workforce of 1255 and registration numbers are growing steadily. Our current prediction of 800 in 2017 could well be under-estimated.

As part of our national role in supporting and advocating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, NATSIHWA considers that this workforce is a critical component of a wider workforce to make major contributions to the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Without ATSIHWs delivering effective, front line, culturally and holistic safe, comprehensive primary health care services, Australia will fall short of "Closing the Gap" on health inequities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Over the past two years, workforce development momentum has been building and this is demonstrated through a number of projects around developing the ATSIHW workforce profession. Projects such as:

- registration and accreditation of the ATSIHW health worker profession similar to other health professionals such as nursing, allied health and GPs;
- measures to predict future workforce estimates to ensure there is a continual and competent ATSIHW health workforce available to providing quality outcomes and reduce the prevalence of disease amongst the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population; and
- an increased engagement of partnerships and collaborations with health institutions such as other health professionals, hospitals, research institutions, clinical leaders, Education and VET sector, and Registered Training Organisations particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RTOs, and other primary health care organisations.

With the recent focus in 2012 for ATSIHWs to become registered practitioners and which embarks them on a continuing professional development process similar to GPs and Nurses, this leaves a huge gap for entry into the health workforce at the primary health care level in all sector environments.

NATSIHWA recommends that the training and employment strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly in the health sector, should continue in the lines of accredited training towards qualifications that lead to sustainable employment.

The inclusion of health topics in the high school curriculum would ideally expose students towards a health career. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Peak Bodies welcomes the opportunity to partner with education institutions to promote health careers. Models of mentoring through these partnerships would ensure that there is a natural pipeline from schools to training and careers. NATSIHWA recommends the model already piloted by the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association which led to students taking up health roles. Increased funding would support the variety of health roles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce at the primary health care level, in particular the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Services and other primary health care services with a cultural framework in place. It is recommended that Higher Education institutions and Universities utilize the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Leaders to train and mentor the younger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce.

Barriers to employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce still exist and there is a strong need for mainstream organisations to recognise and accept that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce are a professional workforce at the primary health care level and to offer equal opportunity to employment. The ability to work together as health professionals to achieve better health outcomes can make a huge contribution to reducing health inequalities. Currently strong partnerships are demonstrated within the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Sector, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Registered Training Organisation Network (ATSIHRTONN) and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Bodies who advocate and support the need to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional workforce. NATSIHWA supports those training institutions that have a cultural framework in place.

NATSIHWA supports the efforts of the Jenny Mason Report on ***“Addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes”*** to strengthen the capacity of the health workforce. The Jenny Mason reports goes on to say ***“The provision of safe and appropriate health care to the Australian community is dependent upon ensuring a capable and qualified health workforce. This is supported by the delivery of high quality education and training, and the application of consistent professional standards.***

NATSIHWA also supports the statement in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, ***“The Performance Framework identifies that increasing the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently in the health workforce is essential to closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life expectancy.***

NATSIHWA are keen to continue to work with government, HWA, Education Institutions and key stakeholders to advocate for greater support for training and development on career pathways for ATSIHWs that lead to higher employment rates.

Regards

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Chairperson: Jenny Poelina
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