

Uluru Statement from the Heart

Position paper
August 2018

the future of rural health

About us

National Rural Health Student Network

The National Rural Health Student Network (NRHSN) represents the future of rural health in Australia. It has more than 9,000 members who belong to 28 university Rural Health Clubs from all states and territories.

The NRHSN is Australia's only multi-disciplinary student health network, bringing together people studying medicine, nursing and allied health, encouraging them to pursue rural health careers.

The NRHSN aims to:

- ▶ provide a voice for students who are interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians; and
- ▶ promote rural health careers to students and encourage students who are interested in practising in rural health care.

The NRHSN and its Rural Health Clubs offer rural experience weekends, career information sessions and professional development activities as well as providing a social base for students at university and when on rural placement.

The student network leaders also advocate on behalf of health students of all disciplines - including opportunities for more rural placements and training support.

Rural Workforce Agencies

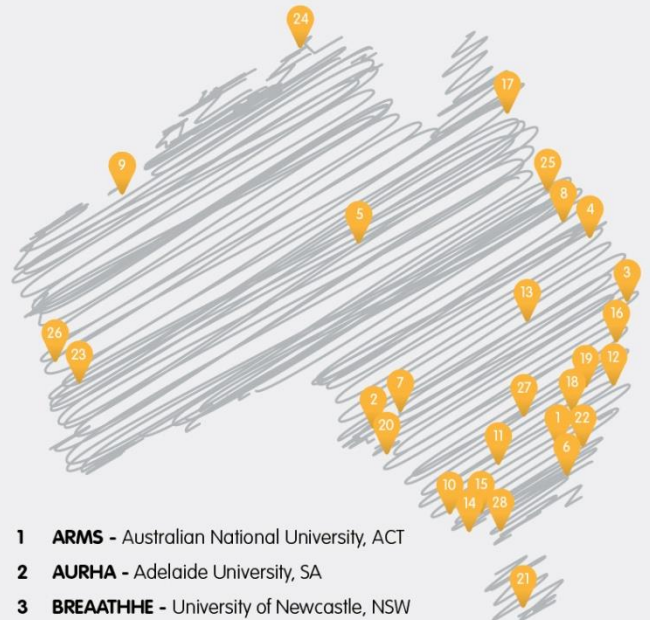
The NRHSN is an initiative of the Australian Government Department of Health, administered by the Consortium of Rural Workforce Agencies (RWAs). The NSW Rural Doctors Network is the RWA managing the NRHSN on behalf of the Consortium.

Each Australian State and the Northern Territory is served by a government-designated RWA that works to improve access to high-quality healthcare for people in remote, regional and rural Australia. RWAs do this through a range of programs, services and initiatives that attract, recruit, retain and support GPs, nurses and allied health professionals in rural and remote communities.

Contact us

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Rural Health Clubs



- 1 **ARMS** - Australian National University, ACT
- 2 **AURHA** - Adelaide University, SA
- 3 **BREAATHE** - University of Newcastle, NSW
- 4 **BUSHFIRE** - Bond University, QLD
- 5 **CARAH** - Charles Darwin University, NT in assoc with Flinders University, SA
- 6 **CRANC** - University of Canberra, ACT
- 7 **FURHS** - Flinders University, SA
- 8 **HOPE4HEALTH** - Griffith University, QLD
- 9 **KRASH** - Notre Dame University, Broome, WA
- 10 **LARHC** - La Trobe University, Bendigo, VIC
- 11 **MARHS** - Charles Sturt University, Albury, NSW including La Trobe University Wodonga campus
- 12 **MIRAGE** - University of Sydney, NSW
- 13 **NERCHA** - University of New England, NSW
- 14 **NOMAD** - Deakin University, VIC
- 15 **OUTLOOK** - University of Melbourne, VIC
- 16 **RAHMS** - University of New South Wales, NSW
- 17 **RHINO** - James Cook University, QLD
- 18 **RHUUWS** - University of Western Sydney, NSW
- 19 **ROUNDS** - Notre Dame University, Sydney campus, NSW
- 20 **ROUSTAH** - University of South Australia, SA
- 21 **RUSTICA** - University of Tasmania, TAS
- 22 **SHARP** - University of Wollongong, NSW
- 23 **SPINRPHX** - Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
- 24 **STARRH** - Charles Darwin University, NT including Flinders University, SA
- 25 **TROHIQ** - University of Queensland, QLD
- 26 **WAALHIIBE** - Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
- 27 **WARRIAHS** - Charles Sturt University, Wagga Wagga, NSW
- 28 **WILDFIRE** - Monash University, VIC

Background

What is the Uluru Statement?

The *Uluru Statement from the Heart*¹ (the Uluru Statement) forms part of a consensus resolution passed at the First Nations National Constitutional Convention in May 2017. The Convention was a historic meeting of over 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders held on the traditional lands of the Anangu people at Uluru. The meeting was a culmination of six months of consultation at regional dialogues held across the nation, where numerous options for constitutional recognition were considered and discussed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This consultation process was the most proportionally significant ever undertaken with Australia's First Peoples, engaging a greater proportion of the relevant population than the constitutional convention of the 1800s².

The Uluru Statement sets forth two broad objectives for constitutional recognition agreed to by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders present at the Convention:

First Nations Voice

The Uluru Statement calls for the '*establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution*'. While the Uluru Statement does not outline the exact form a First Nations Voice would take, it is anticipated that this constitutionally enshrined institution would provide an avenue for formal consultation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on legislation and policy that affects their communities³.

Makarrata Commission

The Uluru Statement calls for the establishment of '*a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history*'. 'Makaratta' originates from the language of the Yolngu people of Arnhem Land and conceptualises the coming together and reconciling of two parties following a struggle⁴. Instatement of a Makarrata Commission is unlikely to require any constitutional change itself, however, the Commission would be in a position to inform potential constitutional and legal changes³.

Constitutional reform and health

The poorer health outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians when compared to their non-Indigenous contemporaries are well known. This gap in health outcomes runs in contradiction to the many outstanding achievements made in Australia in public health, health service delivery, and medical science. It is this outstanding deficit experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians within Australia's health care system that has led to the establishment of initiatives such as the 'Close the Gap' campaign. The National Rural

¹ Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017. Available at: www.referendumcouncil.org.au/final-report#toc-anchor-ulurustatement-from-the-heart

² Referendum Council, 2017, *Final Report of the Referendum Council*, Ch.2, pp9-16, Commonwealth of Australia

³ D. McKay, *Uluru Statement: a quick guide*, 2017. Australian Parliamentary Library, Canberra. Available at: www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_Departments/Parliamentary_Library/pubs/rp/rp1617/Quick_Guides/UluruStatement

⁴ N. Pearson, 2017, *Uluru Statement practical on Indigenous recognition*, *The Australian*, 27th May 2017. Available at: www.theaustralian.com.au/news/inquirer/uluru-statement-practical-on-indigenous-recognition/news-story/05c70bfe1c91efb7504d70d386687400

Health Student Network (NRHSN) recognises the pursuit of 'health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander [peoples] and the Australian population as a whole' as a key priority⁵.

Inequity in the social determinants of health is a key driver of the persistent differences observed in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and non-Indigenous Australians⁶. These inequities arise from the intergenerational effects of Australia's colonial past, and in some ways are supported by structures that have their basis in the Constitution; a document that was developed through a process that was exclusionary to Australia's First Peoples. Evidence shows that a connection to the broader community, having a strong sense of identity and feeling socially supported all have powerful positive impacts on health⁷. In addition, recognition of the unique and diverse tapestry of identities and cultures of Indigenous Australia is critical to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples⁸. This relationship between social connection, recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique identity, and their health is recognised by over 125 leading organisations across the Australian healthcare system⁹. The objectives of the Uluru Statement are practical steps to implement the evidence and build on the important reforms in health that followed the 1967 referendum¹⁰.

The Uluru Statement outlines a clear framework for substantial structural reform which would augment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's influence over the social and economic factors that shape their wellbeing. Historically in some ways, the Constitution, combined with state and federal legislation, has functioned to support the inequitable provision of health and social services¹¹. However, development of a more centralised institutional structure over the past three decades has clear potential for a more equitable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare system that has not yet been fully realised¹². Implementation of the Uluru Statement objectives would empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians to self-determine this process in order to lead us towards a healthier, more equitable and prosperous future.

⁵ National Rural Health Student Network, 2017, Indigenous Health Position Paper. Available at: www.nrhsn.org.au/advocacy/position-papers/

⁶ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, *Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2018*. Available at: <https://closingthegap.pmc.gov.au>

⁷ R. Mokak, 2015, *The link between health and wellbeing and constitutional recognition*. Medical Journal of Australia, 203 (1):1, Available at: www.mja.com.au/journal/2015/203/1/link-between-health-and-wellbeing-and-constitutional-recognition

⁸ The Lowitja Institute, 2015, Why constitutional recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples matters for health. Available at: www.lowitja.org.au/recognisehealth/why

⁹ The Lowitja Institute, 2015, Recognise Health: Signatories. Available at: www.lowitja.org.au/recognisehealth/signatories

¹⁰ I. Anderson, W. Sanders, 1996, *Aboriginal health and institutional reform within Australian federalism*. Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research, Australian National University, Canberra.

¹¹ G. Howse, 2011, *Legally Invisible: How Australian Laws Impede Stewardship and Governance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health*, the Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.

¹² I. Anderson, J. Whyte, 2006, *Australian federalism and Aboriginal health*. Australian Aboriginal Studies, (2), p.5

Position

The NRHSN recognises that addressing the gap in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and non-Indigenous Australians is a key priority in Australia's healthcare system.

The evidence clearly shows that pursuit of practical and substantial constitutional reform and recognition of Australia's First Peoples is a critical step in developing a system that better addresses the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. As a representative body of future Australian healthcare professionals, the NRHSN supports the pursuit of such a system.

The Uluru Statement and its objectives are a powerful call to the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians; a human right recognised by the Australian State through the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights¹³ and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples¹⁴. The Uluru Statement lays out a clear strategy for Australia to strive to meet its obligations under these important international conventions. Further, implementation of these objectives would bring Australia into congruence with international jurisdictions that have established formalised treaty and constitutional recognition (Canada, New Zealand, Norway, USA).

The NRHSN acknowledges the broad political spectrum that exists within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The NRHSN recognises that the Uluru Statement is not supported by all members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. However, The Uluru Statement is a historic consensus statement of a diverse and complex network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as represented by the First Nations National Constitutional Convention.

In light of these considerations, the NRHSN endorses the Uluru Statement from the Heart and the recommendations contained within it. The NRHSN is committed to inform and advocate for its members in support of any proposed changes arising from consideration of these recommendations.

¹³ United Nations General Assembly, 1966, *International covenant on economic, social and cultural rights*. New York, Treaty Series, 993(3).

¹⁴ United Nations General Assembly, 2007, *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*. New York.