

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement

Advocacy project  
August 2019

*the future of rural health*

The NRHSN is an initiative of the  
Australian Government  
Department of Health  
administered as a consortium by  
the Rural Workforce Agencies

## 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.

It is Australia's only multidisciplinary 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 as a consortium by the Rural Workforce Agencies. 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

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



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## Introduction

The NRHSN believes that all Australians have the right to quality and accessible health care. As such, we are committed to achieving health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and the Australian population. We support students in pursuing learning opportunities and experiences that will produce a generation of health professionals who are competent, confident and culturally safe in all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

As seen in the healthcare environment, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to access services or engage in events and workshops if there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved or engaged in these same activities. With the aim of trying to improve Indigenous student engagement within rural health clubs, this advocacy project was about initiating the conversation and trying to establish a relationship with the Indigenous student cohort at universities affiliated with rural health clubs.

In order to achieve these aims the approach was to:

- ▶ Contact Indigenous Health Representatives from each rural health club to ascertain how engaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are within each club.
- ▶ Encourage Indigenous Health Representatives to liaise with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Centres at the universities to establish a relationship and initiate engagement.
- ▶ In working with Indigenous Health Representatives, devise a list of recommendations and strategies for rural health clubs to improve engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## The current situation

Phone call conversations were conducted, and questionnaires were completed by Indigenous Health Representatives from 14 of the 29 rural health clubs. The titles of these representatives varied across rural health club committees and ranged from Indigenous Health Representative, Cultural Representative, Indigenous Community Engagement Activities Director, Close the Gap Representative, Indigenous Officer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Representative. The general consensus of their roles is only to organise the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander engagement events for each respective rural health club and does not have much of an advocacy role.

64.3% of these representatives do not identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, with the remaining 35.7% identifying as Aboriginal. The following report is a representation of the opinions and experiences of these representatives.

### Current engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

- ▶ It is often hard to determine who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students with no concrete data.
- ▶ Some students may not want to identify with the fear of being obligated to be a spokesperson for Indigenous events or issues.
- ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have many other opportunities to be engaged in Indigenous health within their university, with the rural health clubs not being the only option. It is difficult to provide unique opportunities and prove the benefit of the rural health club to these students.
- ▶ It is sometimes difficult to engage Indigenous students as they are generally only on campus for an intensive block.
- ▶ Some rural health clubs focus is on cultural education and awareness for non-Indigenous students as there is not a large cohort of Indigenous students.

### Engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres

- ▶ The only engagement for some universities is for advertising their Indigenous engagement events.
- ▶ Other rural health clubs are starting to collaborate and establish a working relationship with the Indigenous student associations.
- ▶ Some rural health clubs are engaged with the student centres and collaborate with some of their events.

## Recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student engagement

- ▶ Attend welcome events or the equivalent at the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centre or student association at the beginning of the year and advertise rural health club events for the year and explain how students can get involved.
- ▶ For rural health club events to be more culturally appropriate to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend and be more involved.
- ▶ Encourage an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander student to take on the role as the Indigenous Health Representative on the committee.
- ▶ Encourage Indigenous students who are actively involved in the rural health club to try and engage other Indigenous students.
- ▶ A cultural immersion camp organised by the rural health club may encourage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to attend and initiate engagement.
- ▶ For larger rural health clubs affiliated with more than one university, to target Indigenous students in specific courses rather than university centres may be more effective.
- ▶ Target Indigenous high school students at rural high school visits. This may involve creating a culturally appropriate handbook with information on the respective rural health club, application processes for university courses and information on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student centres.

Note: This report is a representation of Indigenous Health Representatives from 14 of the 28 rural health clubs across Australia