

Indigenous Health

Position paper
August 2017

the future of rural health

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 multi-disciplinary student health network, bringing together people studying medicine, nursing and allied health, encouraging them to pursue rural health careers.

The NRHSN has two aims:

- ▶ to provide a voice for students who are interested in improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians
- ▶ to 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.

The NRHSN is managed by Rural Health Workforce Australia (RHWA) with funding from the Federal Department of Health.

Rural Health Workforce Australia

Rural Health Workforce Australia is the national peak body for the seven state and territory Rural Workforce Agencies. Our not-for-profit Network is dedicated to making primary health care more accessible by attracting, recruiting and supporting health professionals needed in rural and remote communities. RHWA is also committed to the future workforce through our support of the National Rural Health Student Network.

Contact us

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Rural Health Clubs



- 1 **ARMS** - Australian National University, ACT
- 2 **AURHA** - Adelaide University, SA
- 3 **BREAATHHE** - 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 **SPINRPHFX** - Combined Universities of Western Australia, WA
- 24 **SIARRH** - Charles Darwin University, NT including Flinders University, SA
- 25 **TROHPIQ** - 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

The position of the NRHSN is that all Australians have a right to quality and accessible health care, and we believe that achieving health equality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the Australian population as a whole are a key priority. The education of our future health professionals needs to provide learning opportunities that will produce a health workforce that is competent and confident in all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. As such, the NRHSN advocates for a health system that will provide the best health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and provides opportunities for its members to learn about this vital element of healthcare in Australia.

Position

The NRHSN believes that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is an important aspect of healthcare in Australia and wishes to support development of health students who are passionate and competent in this aspect of healthcare. The NRHSN will use both the strength of its members and its relationship with stakeholders to implement this policy.

University Curriculum

The NRHSN recognises that a mandatory, effective and examinable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health curriculum with nationally standardised goals is important in providing health students with competency in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Such a curriculum includes¹, but is not limited to:

- **Recommendation 1:** Specific teaching about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander views of health and wellbeing.
- **Recommendation 2:** Cultural competency training that includes opportunities for students to learn and rehearse how to communicate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to ensure the provision of culturally safe health care.
- **Recommendation 3:** Teaching staff need to undergo training in order to be competent and confident in embedding perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples into health courses.²
- **Recommendation 4:** Recognition of the historical and socio-cultural context in which health issues occur, to ensure the students ability to practice in a culturally safe manner when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- **Recommendation 5:** Recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are highly diverse; and it is important to consider this diversity, rather than adopting a universal view of history, culture and health concerns.
- **Recommendation 5:** The provision of greater opportunities for health students to learn in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health settings.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Training and Experience

The NRHSN believes that working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities is an important way to develop understanding and experience the complexity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.³

- **Recommendation 5:** The NRHSN encourages Universities providing nursing, allied health and medical degrees to provide placements in Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations (ACCHO) and Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) as a core part of the curriculum.
- **Recommendation 6:** Health faculties should provide adequate preparation and support to ensure the best possible outcomes from a placement.
- **Recommendation 7:** Through the AIMED website and the Guide to Working in Indigenous Communities the NRHSN will provide support for students to organize placement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health organizations.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Student Recruitment and Support

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals have a key role in improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and providing a role model for future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students. Strategies to encourage the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students are an integral part of increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.³

- **Recommendation 8:** The NRHSN supports the creation of dedicated places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within health courses, as evidence correlates greater number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with greater number of dedicated places.⁴
- **Recommendation 9:** Method of entry into a health course should be kept confidential to avoid discrimination.
- **Recommendation 10:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should be welcomed, but should not be expected to take responsibility for the education of their peers with regards to Indigenous health, history and culture.
- **Recommendation 11:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should have the space to feel comfortable and participate in tertiary education without fear of discrimination.
- **Recommendation 12:** Bursaries and scholarships should be provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- **Recommendation 13:** The NRHSN recognises the need for a range of strategies, including bonded programs, to ensure a sustainable future health workforce in areas of need in Australia. The network believes these programs must be fair and reasonable in what they expect participants to agree to, and must ensure that participants are given reasonable support (financial or otherwise).
- **Recommendation 14:** Each university should have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, dedicated to

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student support and retention, academia and admission. These units need to be supported and have permanent staff.⁵

- **Recommendation 15:** The NRHSN will promote health careers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from, early high school to university level, both to metropolitan and rural students. The NRHSN will do this through the support of Indigenous Community Engagement Activities and our Rural High School Visit (RHSV) program. This may help university study as a whole seem more accessible in addition to promoting health degrees.

NRHSN Projects

The NRHSN supports the development of projects to improve the knowledge and skills of its members in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. The NRHSN aims to facilitate the development of ongoing respectful and trusting relationships of its members with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services, communities and patients.

To achieve this, the NRHSN will:

- Develop and improve networks with other organisations focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health such as IAHA, CATSINam and AIDA.
- Provide support for projects run by members in the form of Indigenous Community Engagement Activities and the Rural High School Visit (RHSV) program.
- Encourage a wider commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health through its relationships with stakeholders.
- The NRHSN will regularly update its members on new developments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and comment on new policy where appropriate.

References

- ¹ Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools. (2004). Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework. Melbourne: Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools, 2004.
- ² Meiklejohn B, Nash R, and Sacre S. (2006). The Yap unyah project: embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives in the nursing curriculum. *Contemporary Nurse: A Journal for the Australian Nursing Profession*. 22(2):296-316.
- ³ Medical Deans of Australia and New Zealand Inc., and The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association Ltd. (2012) National Medical Education Review: A Review of the Implementation of the Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework and the Healthy Futures Report within Australian Medical Schools.
- ⁴ MINNIECON, D. & KONG, K. 2005. Healthy Futures: Defining best practice in the recruitment and retention of Indigenous medical students Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association.
- ⁵ Medical Deans of Australia and New Zealand Inc., and The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association Ltd. (2012) National Medical Education Review: A Review of the Implementation of the Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework and the Healthy Futures Report within Australian Medical Schools.
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