



IAHA Allied Health Definitions

Background

The wide-ranging and significant disciplines representing allied health constitute a large and rapidly growing healthcare workforce in Australia. In a political environment driven by healthcare reform, allied health professionals will need to call on their full scope of practice as part of a comprehensive health care team.

There is often a strong alliance between allied health professionals, involving an interdisciplinary relationship in provision of care to their clients and the communities they serve, an *inter-professional alliance*. They can be regarded as critical partners, or *allies*, to the more commonly identified doctors, nurses and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers/Practitioners in a health care team. Allied health professionals are also *allies* with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to whom they provide health care.

Allied health professionals are integral members of the health care team and make significant contributions to healthcare service delivery and management. These professionals are highly skilled and share in the delivery of health care services, including but not limited to services related to the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; and rehabilitation services.

Allied health operates in widely diverse settings, including but not limited to clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, laboratories, schools, long-term care facilities, Aboriginal Medical/Health Services, community health centres, and home healthcare agencies.

In Australia, there is no clear and consistent agreement on what comprises the allied health workforce¹. There is also a wide array of different interpretations of the occupations that comprise the allied health workforce by various government authorities and departments, health service providers, health funds and tertiary institutions. The very broad definition of allied health and the frequent changes in health care technology and professional standards make it virtually impossible to come up with an all-inclusive list of every allied health discipline practicing in Australia at any one point in time.

IAHA Endorsed Definitions

For the purpose of defining and supporting its membership, Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) endorses the following definitions:

¹ Australian Health Workforce Advisory Committee (2004), The Australian Allied Health Workforce – An Overview of Workforce Planning Issues, AHWAC Report 2006.1, Sydney.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

IAHA endorses the definition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health means “not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being, thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life. Health care services should strive to achieve the state where every individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being and this bring about the total well-being of their community.”²

Allied Health

IAHA defines allied health as a collective term used to refer to a variety of healthcare disciplines that contribute to a person’s physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing, excluding medicine, nursing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker/practitioner roles. Allied health functions include but are not limited to, services related to the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; and rehabilitation services.

Allied health course

IAHA defines an allied health course as field of study or branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at a tertiary level that equips a person with the skills and knowledge to work in allied health;

Allied health professional

An allied health professional is considered by IAHA to be a health professional who;

1. Has undertaken a tertiary qualification at Bachelor Degree (AQF Level 7) or higher in an allied health course; and
2. Has attained the necessary knowledge, attributes, attitudes and skills required to be an autonomous practitioner and practices in an evidence based paradigm using a recognised body of skills and knowledge to contribute to the physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of people so that each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being; and
3. Does not practise as a doctor, nurse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner.

² National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989



Indigenous allied health professional

An Indigenous allied health professional is considered by IAHA to be an allied health professional as defined above, who is an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person.

Indigenous Allied Health

Defined in consideration of the IAHA vision as a collective term referring to the delivery of culturally and professionally competent healthcare to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, by tertiary qualified health professionals other than a doctor, nurse or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner, often within an interdisciplinary healthcare team. This healthcare may be delivered by Indigenous and/or non-Indigenous health professionals and is characterised by a holistic and comprehensive approach, taking in to consideration the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and cultural well being.

Faye McMillan, IAHA Chairperson

Endorsed by the IAHA Board on 6 September 2012.