Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Position Paper:

A Rights Approach to Allied Health

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), the national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals and students, asserts that in order to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, they have the right to access allied health services that are available, affordable, acceptable and appropriate. This is consistent with UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR) General Comments on article 12 of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR) . Historically, allied health has not been well defined either nationally or internationally and access to it is not often seen as a right, but rather a luxury for those who can afford it.

IAHA acknowledges Article 24(2) of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (the Declaration) which recognises the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples "to the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health ". This right is in addition to the basic right to health for all described within the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948).

Taking into consideration the widely accepted Aboriginal definition of health it is clear that good health is not just the absence of disease. An interdisciplinary, holistic approach to healthcare delivery is necessary in order to achieve this high standard of physical and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as stated in the Declaration.

Poor Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes are often the result of complex and interrelated factors including social, historical, political and cultural determinants. CESCR states "the right to health embraces a wide range of socio-economic factors that promote conditions in which people can lead a healthy life, and extends to the underlying determinants of health, such as food and nutrition, housing, access to safe and potable water and adequate sanitation, safe and healthy working conditions, and a healthy environment. "

Allied health professionals are ideally placed to impact on these determinants as they operate within widely diverse settings, from clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, laboratories, schools, long-term care facilities, Aboriginal Medical/Health Services, community health centres to home healthcare agencies. A multi-faceted approach that includes allied health professionals as key players across health, education and community sectors will be essential.

A holistic approach that includes allied health care allows the recognition of the multiple determinants of health that are experienced daily by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. An interdisciplinary approach, including allied health services related to the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; and rehabilitation services, can be a means of addressing seemingly isolated factors as interconnected determinants of health.

If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are to achieve the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health as stated in The Declaration, then they must have the right to equitably access allied health services. Optimal health is a basic human right and also a right as the recognised first peoples of Australia, and equitable access to culturally responsive allied health services can help achieve this.

Faye McMillan, IAHA Chairperson.

Endorsed by the IAHA Board on 14 October 2013.

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[1]UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12 of the Covenant), 11 August 2000, E/C.12/2000/4, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838d0.html [accessed 11 September 2013]

[2]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.

http://iaha.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2013/09/Position_Paper_IAHA_Allied_Health_Definitions.pdf'

[3]http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf accessed 11 September 2013

[4]"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." - National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989

[5]UN Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (CESCR), General Comment No. 14: The Right to the Highest Attainable Standard of Health (Art. 12 of the Covenant), 11 August 2000, E/C.12/2000/4, available at: http://www.refworld.org/docid/4538838d0.html [accessed 11 September 2013]

[6]NHLF Position Paper – The right to health http://www.iaha.com.au/IAHA%20Documents/000176_nationalhealthleadership.pdf