



IAHA

Indigenous Allied
Health Australia

POLICY POSITION STATEMENT

HEALTH LEADERSHIP

Background

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), a national not for profit, member based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation, describes leadership as having the ability to inspire, unite and mobilise others to influence change¹. Health leaders do this by striving to 'improve clinical and quality of life indicators and the wellbeing of the health system'².

Within the health context, leadership has been shown to directly and indirectly impact the quality of patient care³. IAHA asserts that culturally responsive health leadership is essential to eliminate racism, transform the health system and improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and all Australians.

IAHA asserts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing can be transformed through collective action lead by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. This is supported by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan which states *"Improving the health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people can be achieved by local Aboriginal people determining and owning the process of health care delivery. Local Aboriginal community control in health is essential to the definition of Aboriginal holistic health and allows Aboriginal communities to determine their own affairs, protocols and procedures"*⁴.

The strength and foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leadership is cultures. This has been demonstrated by the visionary leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who lead the creation of Aboriginal community health services. The establishment of these services implicitly included several important concepts: the importance of cultural holism in health, non-racist and culturally safe healthcare as essential for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and community development (understanding the social determinants of health and that locally driven initiatives are more likely to be successfully utilised).

This work meant that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were envisioning and implementing something that is akin to what is now commonly known as comprehensive primary health care, of which allied health is an essential component. The contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in this space deserves full acknowledgement by the broader Australian public.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leaders recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures and ensure strategies and initiatives are locally relevant and are a cultural match. They are able to operate and walk between multiple cultures and multiple 'worlds', incorporating and adapting new knowledge to develop strong and effective leadership strategies⁵. This is demonstrated in the work of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals who, in addition to discipline-specific capabilities, draw upon cultural knowledge, practices and holistic views of health to provide a high standard of culturally safe and responsive care for their clients.

IAHA affirms that good leadership practices can be learned and understood by all who are willing to take a strengths-based approach to action⁶. To promote and sustain the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce IAHA asserts that allied health professionals and students must be empowered with opportunities to grow and develop their leadership abilities.

All health leaders have an important role in ensuring culturally safe and responsive care is accessible for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the broader Australian community. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leaders can be effective conduits of change by advocating for and supporting non-Indigenous health practitioners to build culturally responsive practices, and create culturally safe health systems.



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Effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health leadership, and health leadership more broadly, is essential to building and sustaining the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce. It can empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to determine and control their healthcare delivery and transform the broader Australian health system to be culturally safe and responsive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

With the ultimate aim of achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality, IAHA asserts that culturally responsive health leadership will improve the effectiveness of the Australian health system and in turn benefit all Australians.

Nicole Turner, IAHA Chairperson

Endorsed by the IAHA Board on 23 February 2017.

¹ IAHA Cultural Responsiveness in Action: An IAHA Framework, 2015.

² Health Workforce Australia, 2013, Health LEADS Australia: The Australian health leadership framework.

³ Ibid, 2013.

⁴ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013 - 2023

⁵ AIATSIS (1998), A Concept Study Into an Indigenous Leadership Program: Research Report.

⁶ Ibid. 2015.