



**IAHA RELEASE:  
IAHA supports Coroners call for greater cultural safety in healthcare.**

**Available for Immediate Release  
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*Advice: This article contains the name of an Aboriginal person who is deceased and may cause sadness or distress to readers.*

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), the national organisation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce, welcome calls for greater cultural safety in the health system as a result of the Coronial Inquest into the death of Naomi Williams. IAHA's own member survey reveals that, far from being an isolated incident, racism is rife in the sector with 80% of members reporting experiencing racism in the last year.

IAHA CEO Donna Murray said *"racism has a direct impact on the health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and presents as a barrier to accessing care and diminishes quality of care. The impact of racism within the health care system was highlighted in the tragic and preventable death of Wiradjuri woman Ms Naomi Williams, with the coronial inquest calling for changes to be made, to ensure culturally safe access to healthcare."*

The Coronial inquest into the death of Ms Williams recommended that immediate action is taken in order to embed values and promote culturally safe healthcare for Aboriginal people. This included calls to strengthen the cultural safety of services in the Murrumbidgee Local Health District through policies to ensure awareness and utilisation of Aboriginal Health Liaison Workers, establishing targets for the employment and retention of Indigenous health care professionals (in numbers at least equivalent to the number of Indigenous residents in the local area), and assessing and auditing implicit bias in the service.

However, IAHA advocates for these changes to be transformational, recognising culture is at the centre of safe care. Ms Murray said *"there needs to be serious recognition and understanding of racism, not only in the health and related sectors, but in our communities. Policies and employment strategies alone will not work, a collaborative and action orientated approach to change at all levels is required."*

In order to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, change within the environments in which they learn and work is essential. The experience of IAHA members speaks to the breadth and size of the issue. When Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals enter training and workplace environments which are culturally unsafe and in which racism is seen as accepted or the norm, the recruitment, retention, effectiveness and wellbeing of this workforce is compromised. IAHA recently conducted a survey with members to identify their experiences of racism, discrimination and lateral violence and to seek effective strategies to support members and lead change.



The *2019 Cultural Safety and Racism* survey highlights the extent to which racism, bias and discrimination remains a pervasive issue in our health, education and training sectors. Some of the key findings included that:

- 88 percent of respondents experienced racism in a public setting.
- 80 percent of respondents experienced racism in the workplace this last year.
- Of those who experienced racism in the workplace, the primary sources were not members of the public or patients, but rather supervisors, colleagues and peers, including other health professionals;
- 54 percent of students experienced racism within an educational setting;
- Just 49 percent of respondents believed that the leadership in their workplace were committed to addressing and eliminating racism and racial prejudice.
- Despite over 70 percent of respondents experiencing lateral violence, less than a third of workplaces had policies and procedures in place to address this.

IAHA leads and supports cultural safety and responsiveness through its *Cultural Responsiveness in Action Framework*. The Framework focuses on action oriented and strength-based approaches, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and community led practice crucial for addressing racism within our systems.

IAHA asserts that to address racism, individuals are required to undertake critical self-reflection to understand how their own culture influences their practice and has a real impact on the quality of therapeutic relationships. Cultural safety is about treatment which supports needs and aspirations from the perspective of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person and/or family. For our health and related sector institutions, this requires shifts in values and cultures that move away from those that solely reflect the social and political values of mainstream and privileged groups.

Actions such as those recommended by the NSW Coroner will help to eliminate institutional racism, prevent avoidable deaths and ensure that we respond to the trauma and pain experienced by Ms Williams, her family and the community. IAHA envision a future in which all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and future generations are; healthy, strong, thriving and self-determined. Eliminating racism is essential to achieving this.

### END MESSAGE

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*Advice: Issues related to this article may be overwhelming to some people. If you need to talk to someone, support is available. Please contact: [Lifeline](http://www.lifeline.org.au) 13 11 14; [MensLine Australia](http://www.mensline.org.au) 1300 78 99 78; or [Beyond Blue](http://www.beyondblue.org.au) 1300 22 46 36*