

ALLIED HEALTH DEFINITIONS

Background

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), a national not for profit, member based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation, recognises the wide-ranging and important disciplines that constitute allied health.

Allied health, as defined by IAHA below, represents a large, essential and rapidly growing healthcare workforce in Australia. With major shifts in the nature and burden of disease, including rapid growth in chronic disease, evolving practice and community and political drivers; healthcare reform needs to embed a stronger focus on preventive and therapeutic health care. An allied health workforce is crucial in addressing these changing demands and will need to call on their full scope of practice, as part of a comprehensive health care team, to improve health and social and emotional wellbeing.

There is often strong collaboration between the allied health workforce, involving an inter-disciplinary relationship in the provision of care to their clients and the communities they serve. The allied health workforce provides important health services, complementing and enhancing the work of other health professions – and one another – through collaborative, inter-professional care. The allied health workforce is essential in providing holistic health care to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families and communities.

IAHA recognises, values and respects the diversity of the allied health sector from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective and supports a collective of disciplines. The allied health workforce are integral members of the health care team and make significant contributions to healthcare service delivery and management. They are highly skilled and share in the delivery of health care services, including but not limited to, the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; rehabilitation services; oral health and dental services; mental health and wellbeing services; support and assistance roles; and non-clinical roles such as public health policy.

Allied health operates in widely diverse settings, including but not limited to, health, mental health and wellbeing clinics, dental health clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, laboratories, schools, long-term care facilities, Aboriginal Medical/Health Services, community health centres, research institutions, sector service providers, private practices, emergency care, pharmacies, alcohol and other drug services and home healthcare agencies.

ALLIED HEALTH DEFINITIONS

In Australia, there is no strict, agreed definition of the professions that make up the allied health workforce, with different interpretations used by various government authorities and departments, health service providers, health funds and tertiary institutions. The 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 objective, all-inclusive list of every allied health discipline practicing in Australia at any one point in time.

IAHA endorsed definitions

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

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health includes “not just the physical wellbeing 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

Allied health is 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.

Allied health functions include, but are not limited to, the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; rehabilitation services; and non-clinical roles such as public health policy.

While medicine, nursing, midwifery and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health worker/practitioner roles are crucial and discrete disciplines, they are not classified as allied health disciplines. However, IAHA recognises the work of allied health graduates in these fields, as well as in occupations such as, but not limited to, health research, policy, education and academia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health

Defined in consideration of IAHA’s vision as a collective term, referring to the delivery of quality, culturally safe and responsive health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, by the allied health workforce, often within an interprofessional healthcare team.

ALLIED HEALTH DEFINITIONS

Care may be delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and/or non-Indigenous allied health professionals, support and assistant workers, and/or other allied health contributors. Care is characterised by a

holistic and comprehensive approach, taking into consideration the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's physical, sensory, psychological, cognitive, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing. Care identifies, respects and values cultures, both group and individual, as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.

While not considered as allied health, IAHA celebrates, respects and values Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, including recognising the important role of traditional medicines and healing alongside the biomedical model.

Allied health course

An allied health course is a field of study or branch of knowledge that is taught and researched at a tertiary/university level that equips a person with the skills and knowledge to work in allied health.

Allied health student

An allied health student is a someone currently enrolled in an allied health course, as defined above.

Allied health graduate

An allied health graduate is someone who has successfully completed a tertiary level allied health course and obtained a recognised qualification.

Allied health professional

An allied health professional is a health professional who;

1. Has graduated from 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 practice as a medical practitioner, nurse or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/ Practitioner in the absence of personal and current allied health practice.



IAHA

Indigenous Allied
Health Australia

POLICY POSITION STATEMENT

ALLIED HEALTH DEFINITIONS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professional

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professional is considered by IAHA to be a qualified allied health professional as defined above, who is also of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent, identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person and is accepted as such by their community.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce

IAHA is committed to developing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce, which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working as allied health professionals and the broader allied health support and assistance workforce.

Nikki Turner, IAHA Chairperson

Originally endorsed by the IAHA Board on 6 September 2012. Updated and Re-Endorsed by the IAHA Board on 19 February 2019.

References

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

² National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989