



JOINT SARRAH – IAHA MEDIA RELEASE

TIME TO ENSURE FULL ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE AND EVERYONE LIVING IN RURAL AND REMOTE AUSTRALIA

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If you live in rural or remote Australia your chances of accessing allied health services if and when you need them are much worse than for other Australians. If you are Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, your chances are even worse.

Many of our health and social service systems work well, but there are persistent gaps and systemic shortfalls. These have real impacts on people. For many their quality of life, health and recovery from illness or accident is compromised because of who they are and where they live.

“If you need help to speak, swallow or walk again after a stroke, if you have experienced family trauma and need mental health care, if you have problems with your teeth, hearing, eyesight, have a debilitating back injury, or a thousand other conditions, you probably need help from an allied health professional”, said Cath Maloney, SARRAH’s acting CEO.

“If you need allied health services, whether it’s through the health system, aged care, other community services or the NDIS, it shouldn’t make a difference if you are Indigenous or not. It shouldn’t make a difference whether you live in Meekatharra, Rockhampton or Toorak, but it does”, said Nicole Turner, IAHA Chairperson.

Services that many people, especially in our major population centres, expect are available can be rare, impossible to access or simply do not exist in many communities. These communities also tend to be where the rates of chronic disease, premature deaths and avoidable hospitalisations are highest, and where preventive health care is low or non-existent.

The evidence is there. It gets reported regularly. But being used to hearing about a problem does not make the impact any less for those who experience it, does not make it normal or justify it continuing.

National Reconciliation Week, which closes today, is a time to reflect on the serious disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other Australians, the causes that have led and continue to reinforce that disparity. More importantly, it’s time to address it. Our commitment needs to be tangible. IAHA and SARRAH together are committed to address systemic problems and promoting innovative sustainable models that:

- Improve access to reliable, affordable, culturally safe and responsive allied health services and reducing the disadvantage experienced by people living in rural and remote communities, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Promote the funding and program coherence needed to ensure allied health services are able to establish and operate sustainably in rural and remote communities; and
- Recognise the improved outcomes in health and wellbeing available through allied health inclusive, person and community-centred primary health care services.

The new Federal Government and all governments across Australia have the opportunity to work together, work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and for rural and remote communities across Australia to ensure fair access to the health services all Australians need. This would be a real step in respecting the intent of Reconciliation week.

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About SARRAH: Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH) exists so that rural and remote Australian communities have allied health services that support equitable and sustainable health and well-being. Formed in 1995, SARRAH is the peak body representing rural and remote based allied health professionals, providing individual rural and remote allied health professionals with opportunities to inform and influence governments by contributing to policy and planning processes that govern service delivery to rural and remote communities with the ultimate goal being enhanced community health outcomes.

About IAHA: Indigenous Allied Health Australia Ltd. (IAHA) is a national not for profit, member based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation. Formed in 2009, IAHA is built on the principle that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals play a vital role in addressing the health and wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples. In order to close the gap in health outcomes, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be encouraged to consider, pursue and succeed in allied health careers. In addition, IAHA has a significant role in building and promoting the cultural safety of the health workforce and service system as a whole.

