



## IAHA Media Release

### IAHA concerns about changes to government support for the humanities

Available for Immediate Release

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Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), the peak organisation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce, is deeply concerned about elements of the proposed amendments to Commonwealth contributions to university qualifications.

Under proposed changes, student fee contributions would decrease for most allied health qualifications, however costs for students in the humanities and some other disciplines would increase.

Reductions in course fees for most allied health disciplines are welcomed and are a timely recognition of both the need for the allied health workforce and strong employment outcomes in allied health. However, IAHA are concerned about targeting of proposed increases and impacts on social work, Indigenous studies, and other important areas of study in the humanities. This contradicts the overwhelming need to build the mental health workforce and provide support for other professional pathways important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, such as rangers and cultural advisors.

IAHA represents a diverse membership of allied health professions, understanding health and wellbeing as a holistic concept and the importance of multidisciplinary teams and services to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Social workers play an essential role in helping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access and navigate what is, often, a culturally unsafe health system. They play a central role helping people in need to deal with complex systems when they and their families are at their most vulnerable. Social workers provide essential care and expertise in mental health, which is an identified need in our communities both now and into the future.

IAHA member and Social Worker, Celeste Brand, when profiled on her work in the Australian Nurse Family Partnership Program with the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress, said of her work supporting women to stay healthy during pregnancy and their baby's formative years:

*"We work with pregnant mums right through until the child's second birthday. I work alongside nurses, midwives, and Aboriginal community workers. Some of my work includes advocacy, assessment (safety, risk and psychosocial), referral and liaising with community services... Social Work allows me to work and make a difference in the Aboriginal health and wellbeing space."*



This is just one example of the difference IAHA social work members are making daily, in a diverse range of settings and contexts. IAHA Chairperson, Nicole Turner, said of the role of social workers:

*“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social workers play a vital role in supporting the health and social and emotional wellbeing of our families and communities. IAHA are concerned that the proposed changes will disincentivise people to pursue a career in social work. We know that, on the back of several Royal Commissions, the need for social workers continues to rise and that the demand for the vital services they provide is strong.”*

IAHA are also concerned about the impact of student fee increases on Indigenous studies and similar qualifications. While these are generally considered outside of the health remit, the preservation and rejuvenation of culture and cultural practices is a protective factor for good health and wellbeing. IAHA Chief Executive Officer, Donna Murray, said:

*“IAHA advocate for a social and cultural determinants approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and social and emotional wellbeing and this is being increasingly recognised in national policy. Culture helps keep us well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and Indigenous-led teaching and qualifications in the humanities space supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nation building. These changes have the potential to undermine some of the progress in this area.”*

More broadly, greater appreciation and respect for culture and valuing and developing more sophisticated ways of understanding and working with difference can be among the greatest assets a society can have. These attributes help build social capacity and cohesion and check the erosion caused by racism, and other forms of ignorance and complacency. While Australia is a sophisticated nation, we cannot take such attributes for granted.

IAHA call for appropriate amendments to the proposed changes to address these issues and to ensure that students are supported to undertake these valuable qualifications.

## END MESSAGE

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