

THE IMPORTANCE OF ACCESS TO ALLIED HEALTH

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) is a national not for profit, member based Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation.

IAHA acknowledges and values the critical role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, and the allied health workforce more broadly, in efforts to reform the health system and improve health outcomes for all Australians, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. IAHA assert that equitable access to high quality, culturally safe and responsive allied health is essential to achieving improved health and wellbeing outcomes.

The allied health workforce is highly skilled and lead the delivery of health care services related to the identification, evaluation, management and prevention of disease and disorders; dietary and nutritional services; and rehabilitation services; and public health. The disciplines constituting allied health comprise a large and rapidly growing healthcare workforce in Australia.¹

As one of the largest and most diverse professional health workforce cohorts, the allied health workforce is well placed to ensure people receive treatment in the most appropriate setting, stay well for longer and avoid unnecessary deteriorations in health and wellbeing which may lead to preventable hospitalisations. The cost-effectiveness of prevention, early intervention and management through allied health has

increasing value as growing demands place greater strain on the healthcare system.²

The workforce contributes within widely diverse settings, including but not limited to clinics, hospitals, rehabilitation centres, laboratories, schools, long-term care facilities, Aboriginal Medical/Health Services, community health centres, and home healthcare agencies. The increase in numbers of people living with complex and chronic conditions across both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and the wider community has resulted in a greater need for a diverse allied health workforce to be working within primary and preventative health care settings.

It is essential that individuals, families and communities have access to the diversity of allied health in order to meet their holistic health and social and emotional wellbeing needs. The diversity of need and contribution of allied health across sectors provides opportunity to address the maldistribution issues which exacerbate access issues, particularly for those in rural and remote Australia. Innovative employment models which support workforce planning and development across sectors and funding streams will support sustainable, meaningful employment.

Access to services and care is more than just physical or geographical access and includes the cultural, economic and social factors which impact on whether Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can utilise allied health

services.³ The level of cultural safety and responsiveness of individuals, practitioners, services and systems is a major contributing factor to access.

The health and wellbeing inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities demands a coordinated interdisciplinary approach in order to improve health outcomes. Health service delivery must consider the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander holistic view of health and use an interdisciplinary approach to deliver comprehensive care that addresses the whole of the person.

The allied health workforce is an essential element in a responsive and equitable health system able to accommodate the varying and personalised needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including those with chronic and complex conditions. Importantly, allied health can help keep people well, and includes the significance of the cultural determinants as protective factors that support and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's ways of knowing, being and doing, enabling them to drive and lead better models of care that are culturally safe and responsive.

IAHA asserts that the allied health workforce plays a crucial role in shaping the future of the Australian health system, ensuring its long-term sustainability⁴, and positively impacting on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for current and future generations.



Nicole Turner, IAHA Chairperson

Re-endorsed by the IAHA Board on 5 December 2019.

1 Department of Jobs and Small Business, 2018, 2018 Employment Predictions for the five years to May 2023 <http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>

2 Thomas, S., McLean, L., Debnam, A. (2012) The Role of Allied Health in Health Care Reform NCMJ 72, 5.

3. Davy, C., Harfield, S., McArthur, A. *et al.*, (2016) Access to primary health care services for Indigenous peoples: A framework synthesis. *Int J Equity Health* **15**, 163 doi:10.1186/s12939-016-0450-5

4. Philip Kathleen (2015) Allied health: untapped potential in the Australian health system. *Australian Health Review* **39**, 244-247. <https://doi.org/10.1071/AH14194>