



## **IAHA MEDIA RELEASE**

### **Australian Universities Accord Final Report: an opportunity for more culturally safe and responsive educational pathways**

**27 February 2024**

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation, welcomes the release of the [Australian Universities Accord Final Report](#), marking a significant opportunity for meaningful higher education reform in Australia. The Report includes 47 recommendations to reform higher education, and among the areas included within the report are aims to improve access, opportunity, and experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, educators and researchers.

IAHA acknowledges the financial burden that higher education can have for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and families, particularly for students undertaking unpaid placements in their studies. IAHA supports the Report's recommendation to introduce payment for mandatory placements. It strongly urges the government to ensure allied health is included alongside education and nursing peers in government-supported placement opportunities, recognising the essential, collective role they play in our communities.

IAHA Chairperson, Nicole Turner, said, "It is welcome to see initiatives designed to improve equity of access, *including for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and addressing placement poverty will both enable more people to pursue health degrees and experience meaningful clinical placement opportunities in their studies. An ongoing concern for IAHA is the shift in the delivery of allied health degrees toward, increasingly, postgraduate programs. We know the additional time, financial commitment, and impact on scholarship eligibility is another access barrier, which hasn't been highlighted adequately in the Report.*"

IAHA recognise the critical importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance and supports a First Nations Commissioner to lead a First Nations Council to oversee core elements of review and reform, policy, and funding. IAHA view this role as an important driver for change within higher education, ensuring better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff, in line with the recent findings of the Productivity Commission Report on the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, if properly empowered to drive change.

IAHA Chief Executive Officer, Donna Murray, said, "As a community-controlled organisation, IAHA has *several examples of successful, culturally responsive, and place-based programs which support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on their education and training journeys. This includes initiatives that build aspirations to health careers and develop effective pathways and supports for students, including transitioning between the vocational education and training sector and university studies. There is an opportunity to expand these works with the support of local communities. However, coordinated cross-sectoral investment is needed from all governments.*"

It is critical that higher education must address and eliminate racism and discrimination to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff have access to safe learning and working environments. IAHA members have shared their experiences of racism within education, training and employment, and a national study into the prevalence and impact of racism across the tertiary education system would both further validate the experiences of IAHA members and add to the drive for real change.

IAHA also supports a First Nations-led Review, which would include national system changes and strengthening First Nations knowledge and research. In reforming the higher education system, embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing in curriculum, teaching, practice, and research will benefit all students and all Australians through access to knowledge and understanding from the world's oldest continuous cultures.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce has a significant leadership role in transforming our systems, and growing this workforce will provide widespread benefits. If meaningfully and appropriately implemented, the nature of reforms presented in the report provides an opportunity to drive change and develop a better and fairer university education sector.

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