



IAHA RELEASE

IAHA welcome the release of the National Rural Health Commissioners final report – implementation needed.

Available for Immediate Release

24 June 2020

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), the peak organisation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce, calls on governments to work with and support the Minister for Regional Health, Regional Communications and Local Government, the Hon Mark Coulton MP, in implementing the recommendations of the *Improvement of Access, Quality and Distribution of Allied Health Services in Regional, Rural and Remote Australia* as recommended by the National Rural Health Commissioner.

We applaud Minister Coulton's work to continue the Office of the National Rural Health Commissioner and increase its capacity to focus more substantially on nursing, allied health and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Implementing this Report should be a priority. Allied health plays a vital role, across a range of settings and sectors, in supporting the best possible health and wellbeing outcomes. Yet we know the distribution and availability of allied health services and workforce in rural and remote Australia is a serious concern, particularly as need in these areas is high and often unmet.

These shortages are longstanding. They have serious impacts on peoples' lives and IAHA, among others, have raised these issues for years. The Commissioner's work has shone a welcome spotlight on the issues and proposed a practical and collective way forward to address them. However, resourcing the implementation is critical to moving this work forward. These recommendations would provide some solutions to increasing preventative health care, prevent avoidable hospitalisations and contribute to the Closing the Gap reform priorities.

The report recognises the efforts of IAHA in establishing our National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Academy and the need for local and scalable workforce development solutions. It reads:

"The expansion of IAHA's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Academy model across and into all states and territories of Australia would reshape the way education and training pathways are designed and delivered for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students. By embedding culturally safe learning environments, culturally relevant curricula, wrap-around mentoring and links with local health services and training providers, appropriate, safe and supported pathways will be available to Indigenous Australians to participate in the allied and broader health workforce."



IAHA Chairperson, Nicole Turner, welcomed the release of the report stating:

“It is important that allied health is recognised as an essential service in regional, rural and remote Australia and that a coordinated, concerted and Indigenous-led effort is made to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce. Culturally informed solutions, such as the Academy, provide a supported pathway for young people to pursue and succeed in health careers. The lack of services exacerbates inequities in health and social and emotional wellbeing. Growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce will support better access to culturally safe and responsive care.”

In addition to the Academy, the report recommends a coherent package of reforms which are needed to grow and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce, improve access to care, and ultimately to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Other important reforms in the report, which IAHA will continue to pursue and we consider to be complementary and reinforcing, include:

- community driven determination of health service needs, co-designing services which build community capability and skills and increase employment opportunities from within the local region;
- innovative and integrated models of service delivery, which are able to access diverse funding streams, for example across sectors such as primary care and disability services, to enable viable and local services for smaller and/or more isolated communities.
- increased access to local training opportunities to support individuals to study closer to where they live; and
- inclusion of cultural capabilities within education curricula and clinical placement settings, to support the development of more culturally safe and responsive environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

IAHA thank outgoing National Rural Health Commissioner, Professor Paul Worley, for his engagement with the sector and work in the role. IAHA look forward to working with the new Commissioner and other key stakeholders to implement the recommendations and reforms outlined in the report.

END MESSAGE

Enquiries:

Paul Gibson

P: (02) 6285 1010

E: paul@iaha.com.au