



AIDA

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association
ABN: 84 131 668 936

26 March 2020

Indigenous Doctors warn that racism will cost lives

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients must be treated ethically and equitably in relation to testing and treatment for COVID-19.

The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) was very disturbed to receive feedback that, in a New South Wales regional hospital, a patient who identified as an Aboriginal person was denied testing because priority treatment would only be offered to “real Aborigines”. AIDA has also received a message that in a Western Australian hospital, a comment was made that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients “...only get it because they don’t wash their hands”. Such blatant racism can never be tolerated - least of all at this crucial time.

The Commonwealth’s Australian Health Sector Emergency Response Plan for Novel Coronavirus (COVID-19) clearly acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a vulnerable, at-risk group for this virus. It also calls for provision of “*care in an equitable manner, recognising special needs, cultural values and religious beliefs of different members of the community. This is especially important when providing health services to vulnerable individuals, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and people who are culturally and linguistically diverse.*”

AIDA constantly, and particularly so during this critical health crisis, calls for culturally safe care for our people. Cultural safety addresses racism in our health system. Ultimately it is about ethical practice. AIDA fully appreciates that the Australian medical workforce is facing exceptional challenges right now. However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ lives, health and wellbeing cannot be put at risk because of underlying racism and prejudice.

AIDA is very pleased that steps have been taken to protect remote communities throughout Australia from the virus. However, it is vital that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the cities and regions receive the medical attention that all Australians are entitled to.

AIDA urges all medical and healthcare professionals, medical colleges and health and medical and healthcare organisations— indeed all health workers – to commit to ethical and equitable testing and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients during this critical time.

END MESSAGE

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