



## **Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs**

### **Indigenous Allied Health Australia NT Workforce Development submission to the Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in Northern Australia**

#### **Background**

Indigenous Allied Health Australia NT Workforce Development (IAHA NT WD) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in Northern Australia.

Indigenous Allied Health Australia is a national not-for-profit, community controlled and member-led, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation. IAHA NT WD is a wholly owned subsidiary company, based in the Northern Territory, leading in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education, training, and employment across both the Northern Territory and Northern Australia more broadly.

IAHA NT WD affirms the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access culturally safe and responsive social systems that are accessible, affordable, appropriate, and free of racism. IAHA NT WD works generationally, building on the legacy of our ancestors, Elders, and old people, toward a future where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and future generations are thriving in ongoing connection to self, spirit, culture, and place.

IAHA NT WD is committed to promoting cultural safety and responsiveness across all sectors and settings, with a particular focus on our health, education, and training systems, employment, as well as working to ensure that IAHA role models cultural safety through our own work, governed by the [IAHA Cultural Responsiveness in Action Framework](#). We recognise that increasing cultural responsiveness is essential to improved outcomes across the social and cultural determinants of health. We believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing can influence and transform systems through collective action and partnership.

IAHA NT WD's submission to the Inquiry into Community Safety, Support Services and Job Opportunities in Northern Australian is focussed on the following matters identified in the terms of reference:

- (b) Community safety;
- (c) Job opportunities and Community Development Program reform.

## **(b) Community safety**

### *Rights-based policy development*

The ongoing impacts of racism, colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and past and current government policies and practices, and the resultant inequities across the social determinants of health, health and wellbeing and other outcomes are well documented. New ways of working, centring the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is important to achieve better outcomes and is consistent with governments responsibilities under the UN Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Emerging literature on the cultural determinants of health is further strengthening the evidence base for the role of culture in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families, and communities. While reaffirming what is intrinsically known by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, research such as that of the Mayi Kuwayu National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing are demonstrating the importance of culture to wellbeing, across six broad domains:

- Connection to Country
- Cultural Beliefs and Knowledge
- Language
- Family, Kinship and Community
- Cultural Expression and Continuity
- Self-determination and Leadership

In the context of community safety, IAHA NT WD asserts that strengthening pathways to personal, family and community wellbeing is a universal and fundamental intervention that promotes upstream protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While governments are investing in services, such as policing and schools, significant challenges remain in making sure that these are reaching the community and responding to their needs and aspirations, particularly for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, in a culturally responsive and safe way.

There are also significant gaps in existing investment, with access to appropriate housing - affordable, safe, climate suitable, appropriately designed and maintained housing - a notable issue both for community safety and a barrier to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participation in education, training and employment. The housing crisis in Northern Australia has a significant impact on the ability of the future and current workforce to perform their duties, with housing insecurity and personal safety, overcrowding, and the relationship between housing and wellbeing key challenges. In many sectors, including health, subsidised housing is made available to professionals arriving from elsewhere in Australia, to the detriment of a sustainable local workforce and to the further pressure of local housing markets. Collectively housing issues minimise workforce participation and increase uptake of social supports.

Noting alcohol management is an area identified in the terms of reference, IAHA NT WD strongly encourages community driven solutions, acknowledging that while it was difficult to establish that the legislative alcohol restrictions were either culturally responsive nor proportionate to the objective of reducing alcohol related harm<sup>1</sup>, the impact of the sunset of the Stronger Futures Legislation needs to be understood from community perspectives and localised responses developed.

To see a shift in the health system from an illness and crisis-driven lens to a more health enabling and preventative model, investments should be directed toward keeping people well and empowered and out of hospitals. Potentially preventable hospitalisations are an indicator that is well adopted as a measure of primary care effectiveness that explores conditions that could have been prevented through the provision of appropriate preventative health interventions and early disease management in primary care and community-based care settings.

Managing and supporting the increasingly complex and unique care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, requires access to a multidisciplinary team. IAHA argues that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health workforce are well placed to provide culturally responsive and safe care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is holistic and trauma-informed to meet local community needs. IAHA believes growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participation and leadership in these professions would achieve real gains across the social system. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031 provides an Indigenous led framework to achieve this and requires investment (see also response to item c below).

#### *Strengthening co-design with Government and ways of working*

IAHA NT WD affirms that partnerships must foster broader cross-sector action, determined by the needs of communities, as consistent with cultural and social determinants of health approaches. Community Development and Nation Building approaches are essential, and align with the commitment of government to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities voice in decision making.

In recognition of the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, IAHA asserts the stronger need for strengthened partnerships with governments at all levels to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations' voices hold equal weight with governments when driving solutions. While the four priority reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap seek to reinforce the opportunities through a deliberate dialogue and engagement with reforms on formal partnerships and shared decision making, IAHA's experiences reflect ongoing concerns about the willingness and understanding of governments to work differently.

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-16-risky-alcohol-consumption#:~:text=AIHW%20analysis%20of%20National%20Hospital,%25\)%20and%20withdrawal%20\(9%2](https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/2-16-risky-alcohol-consumption#:~:text=AIHW%20analysis%20of%20National%20Hospital,%25)%20and%20withdrawal%20(9%2)

From IAHA's experience this has included issues of fragmentation and siloing, both between portfolio responsibilities to which IAHA's work contributes, and between the Commonwealth and jurisdictions, requiring organisations to incur significant administrative, reporting, compliance, and other burden, detracting from the ability to progress priorities. The uncertainty of funding for our organisations, through short-term agreements and political cycles, further inhibits the ability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to implementing solutions and build on successes with long term, generational thinking.

### **(c) Job opportunities and Community Development Program reform**

A strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is a powerful driver of change, and evidence clearly shows that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce delivers better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The health care and social assistance workforce is the largest and fastest growing, with significant employment opportunities available within the sector in Northern Australia. Growing and empowering this workforce will not be achieved in the absence of dedicated and coordinated investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

IAHA NT WD, in close partnership with its members and key stakeholders, operate to have more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people considering, pursuing, and succeeding in education, training, and employment. IAHA NT WD achieves this through workforce reform, development, and support, with particular focus on the opportunities available in health and related sectors, centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and worldviews.

The IAHA National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academy (IAHA National Academy) is an example of an innovative, community-led learning model. The model re-shapes and re-designs how training and education are delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in high school, embedding the centrality of culture and a holistic approach to health, and includes wraparound supports.

The IAHA National Academy works collaboratively across disciplines and organisational sectors (health, education and training, employment) to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school student engagement, retention, and successful completion of Year 12 alongside a Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance. The IAHA National Academy keeps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people who would otherwise disengage with education in a learning environment, and trainees undertake a work placement in a health or related sector to gain on the job training and experience in their preferred career pathway. The Certificate III qualification provides trainees with direct employment opportunities and articulation into further education and training, through both the vocational and university sectors.

The success of the IAHA National Academy in the NT since 2018, which has seen increased enrolment, retention, and graduations year to year, has seen the program expand to South-East Queensland in 2020 and recently the establishment of new locations in the ACT, Northern Rivers NSW, and Greater Western Sydney. IAHA continues to engage with and strengthen relationships in other regions, with conversations to expand the Academy program to support education, skills, workforce development, employment, health, and wellbeing priorities in new jurisdictions in Northern Australia.

There are significant learnings from the IAHA National Academy which need to be considered in the redesign of the Community Development Program, particularly principles around quality training leading to real opportunities and jobs. Additionally, IAHA's High School to Deadly Careers (HS2DC) is another program which IAHA NT WD has successfully been operating in the NT since 2019, showcasing education, training and employment pathways to local young people and the broader community, to engage in conversation about health, wellbeing, and aspirational thinking, while IAHA NT WD also work to establish the pathways to pursue these outcomes. Access to on country training, however, remains a significant challenge.

To support the successful expansion and continuous development of programs such as the IAHA National Academy and HS2DC requires Governments and Departments to make genuine commitment for appropriate and sustainable resourcing, as discussed above.