



Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs

Indigenous Allied Health Australia submission to the Inquiry into the Application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) is a national not-for-profit, community controlled and member-led, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health organisation. IAHA affirms the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to access culturally safe and responsive systems, including health care, that is available, affordable, acceptable, and appropriate. IAHA 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.

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, 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 achieves this through workforce reform, development, and support, with particular focus on the opportunities available in health and related sectors. IAHA is committed to promoting cultural safety and responsiveness across all sectors and settings, with a particular focus on our health, education, and training systems, 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 of our systems is essential to improved outcomes across the social and cultural determinants of health; to support our workforce to sustain their efforts and support positive and equitable health and wellbeing outcomes; and to improve the capability of the entire health workforce to provide culturally safe and responsive care in all settings and to the benefit of all Australians.

IAHA's submission to the Inquiry into the application of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in Australia is focussed on the following two matters identified in the terms of reference:

- ii. options to improve adherence to the principles of UNDRIP in Australia
- iii. how implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart can support the application of the UNDRIP

ii) options to improve adherence to the principles of UNDRIP in Australia

Rights-based policy development

IAHA, alongside other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations were heavily involved in leading the development of three significant national policy commitments designed to improve the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – the National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020, *the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait*

Islander Health Plan 2021-2031 (Health Plan), and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031 (Workforce Plan).

The Health Plan is the product of a long journey of advocating to have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices heard in all policies, programs, and services, including through the elimination of racism, developed in true partnership between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health experts and governments. The refresh of the Health Plan could not have been achieved without Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people standing up for their self-determined needs, aspirations, and goals, further reinforcing the importance of strengths-based and human rights approaches that embed the cultural determinants and social determinants of health.

While we recognise this Health Plan represents governments' ongoing commitment to lead the systemic change needed to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we also advocate that a accountability framework is critical in ensuring governments, community stakeholders and implementation partners understand the implementation of the Health Plan, including how well it is progressing towards intended outcomes in order for it to be the benchmark for policy, program and service design across all sectors.

Co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Workforce Plan sets a clear target for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are appropriately represented across the health workforce by 2031. It commits all governments to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to grow and strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, and ensure a culturally safe and responsive health system, free of racism and inequity. 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, however this outcome will not be achieved in the absence of dedicated and coordinated investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

IAHA recently developed position statements affirm the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in aged care and disability settings to access culturally safe and responsive allied health care that is available, affordable, acceptable, and appropriate. These statements are provided as [Attachments A and B](#) to this submission. Successful implementation requires the recognition that policy making does not occur in the absence of culture. A cultural determinants approach must seek to address structural inequity by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and voices throughout the policy process, we can't continue to do what we've previously done.

Programs and practice

IAHA approaches program development and delivery through genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, our organisations, education providers, mainstream service providers, governments, and others, centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and worldviews.

The IAHA National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Academy (IAHA National Academy), for example, is 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 with an additional Certificate III level vocational education qualification. Students undertake a work placement in a health or related sector to gain on the job training and experience in their preferred career pathway.

The IAHA National Academy has Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students and graduates supporting them as role models and mentors, sharing their journeys into health, experiences in further education and the opportunities which exist. The approach reaffirms Article 14.1 which states that 'Indigenous peoples have the right to establish and control their educational systems and institutions providing education in their own languages, in a manner appropriate to their cultural methods of teaching and learning'.

The success of the IAHA National Academy in the Northern Territory in 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.

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

Strengthening co-design with Government and ways of working

IAHA 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.

In recognition of the inherent strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations, IAHA's work is reflective of the articles and principles of the UNDRIP in practice, however 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.

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.

Where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led solutions have been clearly identified and articulated, such as the Workforce Plan which has the support of all governments nationally, implementation, monitoring and accountability has remained lacking. In contrast, IAHA invests significantly in capturing the impact of our programs particularly when numbers do not depict the full story, and the longer term and generational impacts of our work – from a rights-based perspective is hard to measure. This requires IAHA to educate governments on why achievements and the way we work is important from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities’ perspectives, alongside navigating compliance obligations under mainstream systems.

Meaningful implementation of the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement at all levels, roles, and functions, consistent with the UNDRIP and alongside the progression of the Uluru Statement from the Heart (discussed below) is needed for transformational change to occur.

iii) how implementation of the Uluru Statement from the Heart can support the application of the UNDRIP

IAHA support the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) and the [MASIG Statement – Malunqu Yanqu Wakay \(the Voice from the Deep\)](#).

A deliberate approach to progress the three key principles underpinning these statements - Voice, Treaty and Truth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - enshrined in the constitution and with appropriate infrastructure and support mechanisms (including the establishment of the Makarrata Commission), will go a long way to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have full participation in the development of laws, policies and practices that impact their wellbeing, and enable their communities to thrive.

This is also more broadly recognised in Article 37.1 which states that Indigenous peoples have the right to the recognition, observance and enforcement of treaties, agreements and other constructive arrangements concluded with States or their successors and to have States honour and respect such treaties, agreements, and other constructive arrangements. While acknowledging the role of UNDRIP in acting as a legal instrument to protect and promote the rights of Indigenous peoples, IAHA also affirms that the expression of rights by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is dependent on support for Nation Building, Indigenous sovereignty, and self-determination, with the goal of these reforms needing to be the empowerment of communities.