

31 January 2020

Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs
House of Representatives
Parliament of Australia

Dear Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs

Re: Submission from the Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association to the Inquiry into Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business

The Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association (AHHA) welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to your *Inquiry into Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business*.

AHHA is Australia's national peak body for public hospitals and healthcare providers. Our membership includes state and territory health departments, Local Hospital Networks (LHNs) and public hospitals, community health services, Primary Health Networks (PHNs) and primary healthcare providers, aged care providers, universities, individual health professionals and academics. As such, we are uniquely placed to be an independent, national voice for universal high quality healthcare to benefit the whole community.

To achieve a healthy Australia supported by the best possible healthcare system, AHHA recommends Australia reform the healthcare system over the next 10 years by enabling outcomes-focused and value-based healthcare. This requires:

1. A nationally unified and regionally controlled health system that puts patients at the centre;
2. Performance information and reporting that is fit for purpose;
3. A health workforce that exists to serve and meet population health needs;
4. Funding that is sustainable and appropriate to support a high quality health system.

AHHA's *Healthy people, healthy systems*¹ is a blueprint with a series of short, medium and long-term actions to achieve this goal.

Within this context, AHHA is concerned that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience a significantly higher burden of disease and a reduced life expectancy in comparison to other Australians. A key strategy to improving this situation is increasing the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the health workforce.

It is accepted within Australian Government policy that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health staff help improve the healthcare outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people²³. This

¹ Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association. 2017. *Healthy people, healthy systems*. Available at https://ahha.asn.au/sites/default/files/docs/policy-issue/ahha_blueprint_2017_0.pdf.

² Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council. *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2016–2023*. Canberra: AHMAC; 2017.

³ Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council. *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2014 report*. Canberra: AHMAC; 2015. Contract No.: Report.

policy is well-supported by evidence from many Australian studies⁴⁵⁶⁷. A strengths-based approach to the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in healthcare organisations focuses on the capabilities that they bring to the workplace. This contrasts with the social justice, or corporate social responsibility, framework that many organisations apply in their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policy. For example, recent research undertaken at AHHA found that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment policies of State and Territory health departments did not consistently convey their need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff⁸. Conveying need is fundamentally about acknowledging and valuing the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The importance of this approach was demonstrated by research on the Australian Public Service where failure to appreciate the potential contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff has led to retention and capability issues⁹¹⁰. An additional concern is that the equity messages of improving representation and redressing disadvantage may not be effective at engaging the line managers within organisations who actually implement policy¹¹.

AHHA contends that organisations, both Government and non-government, who want success in recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait people must state a value proposition for their policy that aligns with their business.

We appreciate the considered attention the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs is giving to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment. I would be pleased to meet with you to further discuss AHHA views.

Sincerely,



Alison Verhoeven
Chief Executive
Australian Healthcare and Hospitals Association

⁴ Taylor EV, Haigh MM, Shahid S, Garvey G, Cunningham J, Thompson SC. Cancer Services and their Initiatives to Improve the Care of Indigenous Australians. *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*. 2018;15(4):717

⁵ Mbuvi V, Fullbrook P, Jessup M. Indigenous cardiac patients' and relatives' experiences of hospitalisation: A narrative inquiry. *Journal of Clinical Nursing*. 2017;26(23-24):5052-64.

⁶ Custodio J, Kelly G, Haenga M, Bell C, Bond T, Prouse I, Eastwood A. Working in partnership with communities at risk: the potential of integrated public health action during an outbreak of APSGN in remote Australia. *Australian Indigenous Health Bulletin*. 2016;16(4)

⁷ Daws K, Punch A, Winters M, Posenelli S, Willis J, Maclsaac A, Rahman, Muhammad A, Worrall-Carter L. Implementing a working together model for Aboriginal patients with acute coronary syndrome: an Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer and a specialist cardiac nurse working together to improve hospital care. *Australian Health Review*. 2014;38(5):552-6.

⁸ Bourke C, Lahn J, Gibbs C, Lennard N. Assessing the support of health leadership for increased Indigenous participation in the health workforce. *Australian Health Review*. 2019, Accepted for publication.

⁹ Lahn J. Being indigenous in the bureaucracy: Narratives of work and exit. *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*. 2018;9(1):3.

¹⁰ Faulkner S, Lahn J. Navigating to Senior Leadership in the Australian Public Service: Identifying barriers and enablers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in APS employment. *Australian Public Service Commission*; 2019.

¹¹ Bourke C. A case study of Indigenous employment at an Australian university. *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*. 2019, Accepted for publication.