

## Working for improved Indigenous health—through allied health

Kylie Stothers<sup>1</sup>

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Kylie Stothers (nee Wright) is a Jawoyn woman, born and raised in Katherine, Northern Territory (NT). A mother of two children and a social worker with 12 years' practice experience in rural and remote NT.

Currently Kylie is employed part time as an Aboriginal research associate with the Centre for Remote Health, based in the Katherine office. Kylie was an inaugural member of Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) and is the current social work board member of IAHA.

Kylie's practice experience has been in the areas of child protection, hospital and clinical practice, Aboriginal community controlled health service, research and education. She has a broad range of interests in Aboriginal health, including child and maternal health, aged care, health promotion, and workforce issues. Kylie is passionate about 'growing our own' in terms of workforce capacity, having dedicated the last four years to attending local high schools to talk about allied health as a career option for the workforce of tomorrow.

Kylie enjoys supporting the local health workforce to gain access to further education and professional development opportunities and is an advocate in helping to increase access for professional development opportunities for those in the remote areas of the NT.

Although based in a small rural town, Kylie is able to contribute nationally to policy and development through her involvement in key peak bodies such as IAHA, SARRAH and AASW and NCATSISW. In her local town she is also involved in community activities such as NAIDOC, local career expos and many other Aboriginal health-related activities.

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Good morning and greetings from Indigenous Allied Health Australia—the peak Allied Health body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

IAHA is governed by a Committee of Management, who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals—from eleven allied health professions: audiology, dietetics, exercise physiology, occupational therapy, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry, psychology, social work, speech pathology and radiography.

Six States and Territories of Australia are represented on the committee, but more importantly, more than ten Indigenous tribes or nations are represented through the links that these allied health members have to their communities.

Current committee members are individuals who are not only allied health professionals but also parents, grandparents, members of families with extended responsibilities, who come from a diverse range of working experience from policy development, to rural, remote and urban, from direct service delivery to research and academia.

Although individuals, the committee members are united in theirs and IAHA's vision: "to achieve the same quality of health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples"—which will be achieved through three key objectives.

Our first objective is to contribute to improved knowledge and competencies of allied health practitioners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their communities.

We are building on our already long established strengths (as individuals, as a community and as a people) and are committed to not only supporting our already established Indigenous professionals, but are also concentrating our efforts in supporting the next generation through working to achieve Indigenous health curriculum changes within all Australian universities, which will have a huge impact on the next generation of Allied Health professionals. We are advocating for excellence in tertiary curricula addressing socio-cultural and economic determinants of Indigenous health. We currently are liaising with the Deans of Health Sciences and allied health academics committed to see national standards set for the teaching of Indigenous health.

We also aim to achieve this objective by providing educational events, resources and learning opportunities for allied health practitioners to gain the understanding, knowledge and skills to be culturally competent—our

website is continually growing with relevant documents and links to other sites, online learning and documents for our website members to access.

Our second objective is to contribute to improved allied health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities

IAHA is reaching out to our high school students to help make the dreams of individuals happen—that a pathway to university and an allied health career is possible. We participate in career expos and we have some inspiring short videos of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals on our website speaking of their passion for their profession.

Although only just over a year old, IAHA through its membership of key national Indigenous health committees, is actively involved in advocating for access to allied health services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote and rural as well as urban settings. IAHA is represented on such committees as: the Close The Gap Steering Committee; the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group; the National Allied Health Advisory Committee; and Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education.

We are committed to supporting our already established Indigenous professionals through informal discipline specific communication, online discussion and exchanges. Students are linked in with those of us with experience.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health professionals and students are eligible to be **Full members** of IAHA.

Other health professionals and students who are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are welcome as **Associate members**. **Associate membership** is also open to non-Indigenous allied health professionals and allied health assistants.

**Website membership** is open to anyone working in or studying health with an interest in improving health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities—particularly through allied health

IAHA is a new generation of Australian Indigenous Allied Health Professionals committed to creating a change in the way Allied Health services are delivered to our communities. We would really appreciate you joining us—whether Indigenous or not—if you are in allied health or other health roles—we encourage you to join us and help us achieve our objectives.

It is easy—just go to: [www.idigenousalliedhealth.com.au](http://www.idigenousalliedhealth.com.au) and click on: JOIN IAHA & WEBSITE

You are very welcome to contact us!

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