



## **Senate Select Committee on Health**

### **Public Hearing - Canberra Friday 13 February 2015 NRHSN Briefing Paper**

#### **1. THE NATIONAL RURAL HEALTH STUDENTS' NETWORK (NRHSN)**

The NRHSN provides a voice for students who are passionate about improving health outcomes for rural and remote Australians.

It has more than 9000 members who belong to 28 Rural Health Clubs at universities throughout the nation. They include students from medical, nursing and allied health courses.

The NRHSN offers multi-disciplinary networking, professional development and opportunities to promote rural health careers.

The NRHSN Program is funded by the Australian Government and managed and supported by Rural Health Workforce Australia.

#### **2. INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES**

Rural Health Clubs organise and participate in Indigenous Community Engagement Activities.

The aim of these activities is to inspire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to consider:

- choosing to study a health discipline at University
- the wide range of health disciplines available to study
- working in their local community as a health professional
- staying at school to complete their studies
- making healthy lifestyles choices.

These activities are also a fantastic opportunity for RHC members to:

- experience and make connections with rural or remote communities



- increase their knowledge of community health and education
- promote the study of health disciplines
- gain positive rural experiences
- get to see an aspect of rural life they may not otherwise see while interacting with the local communities
- visit a rural health service and speak to local health professionals.

Indigenous Community Engagement Activities can include activities such as:

- attendance at Indigenous Family Days
- working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through youth clubs, Indigenous Community Health Services or other organisations
- Indigenous Community Festivals
- assisting schools with a predominantly Indigenous student population with a series of health workshops including healthy eating, skills based sessions and highlighting health careers as options for future study.

In 2014, 145 Rural Health Club members attended 15 Indigenous Community Engagement Activities across Australia.

### **3. MEMBERSHIP DEMOGRAPHICS**

Two percent of NRHSN members identify as being Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

### **4. ADVOCACY**

The NRHSN is passionate about the rural health and believes that all Australians have a right to access appropriate and high quality health care. This includes Indigenous Australians and therefore the NRHSN believes that eliminating the disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the general population should be a key national priority. Comprehensive training of health students from all disciplines must provide opportunities that facilitate the development of clinically and culturally competent professionals, who are confident in all aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The NRHSN advocates for:

- Increased focus on attracting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students into and through health courses to graduation; so that the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across health disciplines reaches parity with the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Australian population



- Continued support for programs that promote early engagement with health careers in both primary and secondary education such as through high school visits and mentoring
- Development and implementation of national guidelines for flexible entry schemes in to medical and health courses
- An integrated Indigenous health curriculum to be facilitated by all health education providers, applying these principles across all health disciplines
- Tertiary education institutions to ensure training in culturally appropriate and safe practices for all health students entering the workforce. Subsequent long-term evaluation should be carried out by the tertiary institute to assess sustainability of culturally competent practices.
- Increased clinical placement opportunities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health across primary, secondary and tertiary health services in regional, rural and remote contexts that are beneficial, educational and safe for the community and the student.
- Universities and graduate training providers to engage with professional peak bodies to ensure vertical integration of Indigenous health content throughout health professional training pathways.
- Promotion of institutional commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and social priorities (eg. Reconciliation Action Plan)
- Training bodies to ensure a clear commitment to addressing issues pertaining to recruitment and education
- Universities and other health training organisations to ensure the appointment and support of qualified, competent and motivated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander academic positions. Such academic positions should be supported by the Indigenous community and aim to address the recruitment of Indigenous students, Indigenous curriculum and teaching
- A co-ordinated and equitable approach to financial support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students across all health disciplines
- Universities and other health training organisations to prioritise the development and maintenance of relationships with the local Indigenous communities, including Aboriginal medical services and other relevant Indigenous health organisations. This will provide students with the opportunity to experience Indigenous health settings with confidence and institutional support via these partnerships.

##### **5. OTHER KEY FACTS ABOUT THE NRHSN**

- 71% of NRHSN members are female, 51% are studying medicine, 17% nursing, 5% pharmacy, 2% dentistry and 25% are enrolled in a range of allied health courses such as physiotherapy and optometry.
- Last year 300 Rural Health Club members visited 120 country high schools and spoke to more than 5,000 country students.



**APPENDIX A: INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT ACTIVITIES 2014**

Clubs	Activity	Location	State	Dates	No. of Members
ARMS	Vibe 3on3	Leeton	NSW	26 Feb	4
CRANC	Vibe 3on3	Leeton	NSW	26 Feb	4
MIRAGE	Redfern Family Day	Redfern	NSW	25 Oct	7
ROUSTAH	Tarpari Wellbeing Day	Port Pirie	SA	16 Apr	4
AURHA	Tarpari Wellbeing Day	Port Pirie	SA	16 Apr	6
RHUUWS	Vibe 3on3	Alice Springs	NT	6-Jun	4
FURHS	Barunga	Barunga	NT	6-9 Jun	4
KRASH	Barunga	Barunga	NT	6-9 Jun	4
LARHC	desert SMART EcoFAir	Alice Springs	NT	8-10 Aug	2
ROUNDS	desert SMART EcoFAir	Alice Springs	NT	8-10 Aug	4
TROHPIQ	desert SMART EcoFAir	Alice Springs	NT	8-10 Aug	4
MARHS	Desert Harmony	Tennant Creek	NT	14-24 Aug	2
RAHMS	Desert Harmony	Tennant Creek	NT	14-24 Aug	4
StARRH	Mahbilil	Jabiru, Kakadu	NT	6 Sept	2
SPINRPHEX	Vibe 3on3	Bunbury	WA	7 May	2
WAALHIIBE	Vibe 3on3	Bunbury	WA	7 May	4
NERCHA	Vibe 3on3	Bunbury	WA	7 May	4
WARRIAHS	Vibe 3on3	Leeton	NSW	26 Feb	4
NOMAD	Vibe 3on3	East Gippsland	VIC	5 Mar	3
OUTLOOK	Vibe 3on3	East Gippsland	VIC	6 Mar	5
WILDFIRE	Careers Day Out	Shepparton	VIC	22 May	5
RUSTICA	Careers Day Out	Shepparton	VIC	22 May	5
SHARP	Careers Day Out	Shepparton	VIC	22 May	2
RHINO	Deadly Dukes Program	Townsville	QLD	Feb - May	26
HOPE4HEALTH	Teddy Bear Hospital	Cherbourg	QLD	7 May	26
BUSHFIRE	Musgrave park Fun Day	Musgrave	QLD	11 July	4