



Inquiry into Economic Self-determination and Opportunities for First Nations Australians, RWAV submission

June, 2024

Acknowledgment of Country

RWAV acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the lands, skies, and waterways across Victoria and Australia. We pay our respects to the Elders, past and present, Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander people, and the organisations who work closely with us to improve the healthcare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities across rural and regional Victoria.

Preamble

The Rural Workforce Agency Victoria (RWAV) recognises the profound grief, loss, suffering, and dispossession that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of European invasion. RWAV acknowledges that historical events of the past continue to cause grief and suffering among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities today.

Throughout our reconciliation journey, RWAV will continue to embed a culture in which reconciliation is deeply ingrained throughout our organisation.

Submission Paper: Background

This document contains RWAV's submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs Inquiry into economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians (The Inquiry). [Terms of Reference](#) for the Inquiry are available on the Committee's website.

Terms of Reference and context

The Joint Standing Committee on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs inquiry and report on economic self-determination and opportunities for First Nations Australians, with particular reference to:

1. Opportunities for, and barriers to training, employment and business development;
2. Impediments to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support economic prosperity in the long term, including barriers to building the economic and social infrastructure required to support industry and business to expand and create jobs;
3. Options to unlock capital and leverage intellectual property, the Indigenous Estate and First Nations skills to elevate First Nations people as economic partners;
4. The international and intergenerational experiences of fostering economic independence for First Nations communities;
5. Any other related matters

RWAV's view

As an organisation that supports access to primary healthcare services for rural and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across Victoria, our submission focuses on the effects that socio-economic and social determinants can have on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Economic disadvantage and a lack of access to health-related education and jobs leads to less Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation within the health workforce, poorer health and well-being outcomes, and less uptake of services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people due to the lack of culturally safe healthcare and that is trusted by communities.

Introduction

RWAV will always strive to enable and empower opportunities for community-led governance, cultural knowledge, and cultural safety principles to be at the forefront of our approach to the work that we do. RWAV is an ally to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Organisations, communities and people.

Discussion

It is widely understood, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience substantial disparities in socio-economic factors such as education, housing, employment, income, health and access to healthcare services compared to other groups in Australia. These socioeconomic inequalities place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at heightened incidence of health risks, with the disease burden for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2.3 times higher than that of the broader Australian population (AIHW, 2024).

This vulnerability is further heightened when health and education services are geographically limited in rural and remote areas and/or are not conducive with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural determinants of health and well-being. Disparities in health care may indicate challenges in access, availability, affordability, racism, unconscious bias, availability of non-discriminatory and culturally safe workforce and services.

RWAV understands that the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation within the health workforce can be influenced by a range of socioeconomic and social factors, including the prevalence of unconscious bias and racism in mainstream medical and healthcare training courses. Barriers to completing medical training have been found to include; “cultural differences, marginalisation and racism from other students, faculties and hospital environments resulting in a fear of prejudice, the threat of being questioned about identity and tokenistic or stereotypical expectations leading to emotional and moral burnout” (AIDA 2019). Economic factors and lack of academic support have been found to be significant barriers to continuing medical studies (AIDA 2019).

Recommendations:

Determinants of social, economic, and health outcomes do not evolve in isolation; they are interconnected. When striving to enhance socioeconomic and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, these interconnections and their impact should be considered.

To enhance socioeconomic and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we contribute the following for consideration:

- A self-determined and community-led approach towards solutions that allow for fluidity with intersectoral agency engagement and collaboration on health projects and health service delivery.
- Implementation of policy and practices to advance an approach that always enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination.
- Increased investment to provide Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations with the resources to support self-governance and delivery of healthcare services.
- Increased support to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ambassador/champion roles to showcase achievements and encourage others to pursue roles in industry jobs and within healthcare.
- Nationally coordinated career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- Increased funding for dedicated grants to support better access to higher education courses in healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Address issues of unconscious bias and racism within education sectors including mainstream medical and healthcare training courses.

References

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework - Summary report - AIHW Indigenous HPF](#)

[AIDA Policy Brief-Strong Futures: Strengthening the Path to Fellowship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Graduates \(AIDA\)](#)

[First Nations people Overview - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare \(aihw.gov.au\)](#)

[Status and determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

[Study Report - Closing the Gap review - Productivity Commission \(pc.gov.au\)](#)



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About RWAV

RWAV improves access to quality primary care health services and other health services for rural, regional and First Nations communities across Victoria. We improve health outcomes through effective and customised health workforce solutions that are informed through partnerships, workforce and population health data, and collaboration with communities.