

14 February 2017

Latest *Closing the Gap* outcomes of deep concern

The significant lack of improvement in the latest *Closing the Gap* report, released today by Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull, is of deep concern and emphasises that more must be done to improve life expectancy, health and other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) has warned.

While the Government is on track to halve the gap in Indigenous students attaining Year 12 education by 2020 — and to potentially close the gap in enrolments of Indigenous children for early childhood education by 2025 — targets to close the gap in other critical areas like life expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment remain elusive.

"This latest report should be a strong wake-up call to us all that a significantly greater effort is required to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people" RDAA President, Dr Ewen McPhee, said.

"Only by achieving strong and consistent improvements in each target area will we see significant and much-needed steps forward.

"It is a continuing tragedy that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people still suffer from poorer health outcomes and a shorter life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians.

"While the reasons for this are complex and include a range of socio-economic and other factors, it is certainly the case in the healthcare system that much more can be done.

"For example, we have a continuing lack of access in many locations to culturally-appropriate health services. Understandably, the availability of culturally-appropriate healthcare often makes the difference between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients going to see a doctor or other health professional, or not going at all.

"And while there are increased opportunities for cultural competency training within our medical and other health courses, more consistent access for medical and health

students (particularly non-Indigenous students) to this critical training is needed for them to have the skills and knowledge required to communicate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

"There also continues to be a strong need to encourage and train more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to become doctors and other health professionals, and to support them in their important work once they graduate.

"We welcome the Government's continuing focus on the need to establish a National Rural Generalist Pathway that will deliver more doctors with advanced skills to rural and remote communities. Advanced training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health is one area we believe should be offered through the Pathway. This will in part help the next generation of rural and remote generalist doctors to respond effectively to the healthcare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people."

[Click here for a high resolution photo of Dr Ewen McPhee.](#)

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