

AHPA NEWSLETTER | ISSUE 1, 2017

Welcome to the first edition of the Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) newsletter for 2017. This issue provides an overview of our recent advocacy work, our ongoing work in digital health as well as work we're doing with our member associations to better support First Australians.

NEWS AND UPDATES

My Health Record system to become 'opt-out'

A key focus for AHPA in 2016 was supporting allied health involvement in My Health Record consumer participation trials in Queensland and New South Wales. Those trials tested an opt-out consumer enrolment process through which everyone in the region automatically had a record set up on their behalf, unless they opted out. Over 98 percent of consumers in each region received records providing much greater useability for health professionals. Thanks to the success of the trials, the government has now confirmed that an opt-out approach will be rolled out across Australia. AHPA also welcomes announcements that the first pathology results are now being uploaded to the My Health Record system in NSW. AHPA continues to advocate strongly for allied health use of My Health Record and the need for government assistance to facilitate use as part of the rollout.

Digital health webinars and National Health Services Directory update

AHPA is continuing its work to support the use of digital health by allied health practitioners in 2017. A key focus is improving understanding about what is involved in taking up digital practice systems. To that end we are launching a free webinar series in May. Any allied health practitioner is able to participate in the webinar and a recording will be made available via the AHPA website. The first webinar will be held on May 22, 2017 at 7:30pm.

[Please click here to register for Webinar 1: An introduction to allied health practice software.](#)

AHPA and its members continue to work with Healthdirect to support use of the National Health Services Directory (NHSD) a free directory developed and funded by all Australian governments and a key potential support for secure messaging initiatives. We encourage you to find out more or to register your practice now.

Advocating on behalf of the allied health sector

Despite the array of evidence showing the effectiveness of allied health interventions in improving health and wellbeing, the Australian health sector is still largely structured around the funding of medical care. AHPA and its members have a strong history of working with all levels of government to improve understanding of, and support for, the important role of allied health professionals. That advocacy work is increasingly resulting in opportunities to contribute to policy development and public consultation processes. Already in 2017, AHPA has contributed submissions and/or participated in:

- National Digital Health Strategy consultation
- National Diabetes Strategy 2016-2020 Implementation Plan consultation
- Productivity Commission review of National Disability Insurance Scheme costs
- Aged Care Legislated Review consultation workshops
- Labor Health Policy Summit
- Private Health Ministerial Advisory Committee and Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) Review Taskforce

A key ongoing focus for AHPA and its members in 2017 will be advocating to improve access to allied health services via Medicare funding. We will be working collaboratively to identify where patients and practitioners are being adversely impacted by the current rules and processes. If you are interested in contributing your experience or want to find out more about AHPA's advocacy work, please contact comms@ahpa.com.au. AHPA will also shortly launch a new website where you'll be able to access recent submissions and advocacy documents.



CLOSING THE GAP ON INDIGENOUS HEALTH

AHPA members sign Statement of Intent

On March 17, 2017, Allied Health Professions Australia (AHPA) and its members and friends joined Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) to sign a Statement of Intent expressing each organisation's commitment to reducing the gap in the health status and life expectancy of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The importance of this commitment was underpinned by the Close The Gap Campaign Priorities and Progress Report released on the 16 March, which continues to call for a renewed commitment from all.

One of the practical ways AHPA and IAHA are working to achieve change is by advocating for and driving change to embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives for culturally safe and responsive practice in all university curricula across allied health courses. This work has already been started by some professions with occupational therapy in particular embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into their professional standards and therefore into the course curriculum. Participants in the signing event heard firsthand the impact this can have thanks to a presentation by current occupational therapy student Emily who shared her perspective on cultural responsiveness:

When I realized we were going to learn about working with people in a culturally respectful and appropriate way I remember thinking, "Culture? Why is that important? I'm studying occupational therapy, not sociology!" Besides, we're all the same aren't we? Shouldn't we all be treated the same?" But I learned that Indigenous communities around the world continue to experience poor health outcomes. I learned that culture isn't just some box to be checked off, nor some arbitrary label to be written on paper work and then forgotten. It's something that shapes the way we see and the way we interact with the world. As allied health professionals a big part of our role is to consider the individual and all of the factors affecting their health. It is impossible to know everything and so we ask questions. For the culturally capable health professional I learnt that it can be as simple as asking "Is there anything I need to consider when working with you?" and checking that the people we work with understand what is happening in their own terms, and that we're focusing on things meaningful to them.

Representatives from IAHA included Kirrilaa Johnstone and Nicola Barker, the Chair and Deputy Chair of the IAHA Student Representative Council, who shared their own experiences as Aboriginal young people currently studying an allied health course. Their experience provided a great perspective of why the actions from signing this agreement with partner organisations is critical to changing the health system in eliminating racism and improving the health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The IAHA Chair, Nicole Turner finished the event with a message to all AHPA members and friends to now "take action, think carefully about what you do, say, think and challenge yourself and your organisation to strengthen your engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and IAHA in leading positive change. To work with us and not for us and to support our communities to drive the solutions and strategies to improve health outcomes".

AHPA thanks IAHA and AHPA's members for their participation and commitment. Together we can improve awareness in universities and in the community about the importance of culturally safe and responsive practice.

Would you like to find out more? Please visit Indigenous Allied Health Australia for practical resources that can support individuals, organisations and systems to meet the health and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Visit <http://iaha.com.au/policy/cultural-responsiveness/> to get started