



The Royal  
Australian &  
New Zealand  
College of  
Psychiatrists



National Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework  
and Implementation Plan 2021-2031

# Improve the mental health of communities

## About the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists

The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP) is a membership organisation that prepares doctors to be medical specialists in the field of psychiatry, supports and enhances clinical practice, advocates for people affected by mental illness and advises governments on mental health care. The RANZCP is the peak body representing psychiatrists in Australia and New Zealand and as a bi-national college has strong ties with associations in the Asia-Pacific region.

The RANZCP has around 5900 Australian members including around 4400 qualified psychiatrists and more than 1400 members who are training to qualify as psychiatrists. Psychiatrists are clinical leaders in the provision of mental healthcare in the community and use a range of evidence-based treatments to support a person in their journey of recovery.

### Submission Summary

- ◆ Overall satisfaction
- ◆ Alignment of and relevance of strategy with workforce priorities
- ◆ Implementation plan additional information and comments
- ◆ Existing initiatives

### Submission

- ***Acknowledgement***

The RANZCP acknowledges the work undertaken by National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Project Reference Group and submits the following feedback for the Group's consideration.

- ***Responses to Survey questions***

This online consultation has been developed to offer a further opportunity for stakeholders to provide feedback on key aspects of the draft Workforce Plan, to inform its finalisation.

#### How long will this consultation survey take?

It is anticipated that this consultation survey will take **30 minutes to complete**, depending on the depth of feedback you provide.

## Overall satisfaction

### Record your response:

I am satisfied with the Workforce Plan overall. *The RANZCP agrees.*

The Workforce Plan meets the needs of my organisation to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. *The RANZCP agrees.*

### Additional comments

The RANZCP acknowledges the Traditional Owners and custodians of country who have contributed to the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031. The RANZCP commends the reference group who have led the development of this important plan which will guide efforts to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. The RANZCP supports efforts at all levels of education and training, policy, and advocacy, which increase the success of recruitment and retention strategies. As a specialist medical training College, the RANZCP currently has 35 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members, consisting of 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Fellows (psychiatrists) and 24 Trainees. The RANZCP and its membership engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a diverse range of contexts and across all aspects of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, mental illness and community health etc.

The RANZCP supports the goals of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031 and its vision to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long healthy lives that are centred in culture, with access to services that are prevention-focussed, responsive, culturally safe, and free of racism and inequity. Achieving this vision will require a specialist psychiatric medical workforce that is representative of the people it serves, within a mental health system that is culturally safe and responsive. The RANZCP recognises that as the number of medical graduates increase, so will the potential pool of medical specialists. This is however, by no means a guarantee that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates will progress onto psychiatry training and Fellowship. Much needs to be done in the early years of university and medical training to support an individual's journey to specialisation in psychiatry. Appropriate opportunities are needed to gain insight and experience in a specialty to determine if it is the right career choice. This support needs to be underpinned by programs that enable peer support and information sharing, together providing the right collegial balance for training and development.

The RANZCP's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Committee is composed of psychiatrists who have direct experience working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, as well as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members who are involved in mental health service provision and policy development. This Committee was established in 1997. The Committee provides advice directly to Board/RANZCP staff and external stakeholders on policy development, advocacy prioritisation and education development. The committee has the responsibility to provide advice and contribute to RANZCP submissions to government, internal initiatives, and cultural protocols. The Committee affirms the ongoing importance of dialogue between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and specialist medical colleges as a means to better understanding the requirements and pathways for specialist training. Increasing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical specialists is a central goal of the committee and ongoing dialogue and engagement between government agencies and the RANZCP is welcomed as the implementation plan is progressed.

## **Strategic direction – Alignment & Relevance**

### Record your response:

The activities and actions currently undertaken within my organisation are aligned to the draft Workforce Plan's six Strategic Directions. *The RANZCP agrees.*

The six Strategic Directions are relevant in supporting and building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce. *The RANZCP agrees.*

### Additional comments

The RANZCP acknowledges the significant progress made in enhancing entry pathways into medical training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates bring both technical excellence, determination, and a unique personal and cultural lens to the workplace. These distinctives not only make them highly effective clinicians, but agents of positive change in their health service environments.

Pathways to specialist training have been limited for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical graduates. Outside of the general practice specialty, other specialty colleges have both low numbers of Fellows and limited numbers of Trainees. Pleasingly, for psychiatry we have seen great improvements in these numbers in recent years. Through the ongoing work of the RANZCP's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Committee over two decades, trainees have been supported to both enroll in the program and progress to Fellowship. There remains however, ongoing risks to recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychiatry trainees and those interested in pursuing a medical specialty (pre-vocational etc.). Two key actions are identified in the National Workforce Strategy draft that are of pivotal importance to addressing these risks, including:

- “Medical leaders also need to invest in understanding and **championing cultural safety** throughout the health system and actively engage in strategies to grow and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical workforce. They have a key role to play in identifying and eliminating institutional racism and improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.”
- “**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and women are currently underrepresented** within Australia's medical workforce and in positions of leadership. A greater emphasis must be placed on increasing opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and female doctors to be placed in senior positions, for current and future generations.”

These two priority areas are crucial to increasing the safety of workplaces and though increasing visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in positions of leadership, inspiring the next generation of medical specialists. The RANZCP therefore strongly supports the strategic direction of the implementation plan, but affirms the importance of targeted initiatives and increasingly visible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, to ensuring that recruitment and retention goals are realistic and deliverable.

## **Implementation Plan Actions**

### **Strategic Direction 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are represented and supported across all health disciplines, roles, and functions.**

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional Comments:

The contribution of Aboriginal Mental Health Workers within both Aboriginal Community Controlled Mental Health organisations and in mainstream services is immense. In our 2020-21 Pre-Budget proposal to the Government the RANZCP further emphasised the need for governments to ensure coordinated and consistent investment in appropriate staffing for Aboriginal Medical Health Services and for funding to be allocated to training and retaining Aboriginal Mental Health workers in both mainstream and Aboriginal Medical Health Services.

### **Strategic Direction 2: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce has the necessary skills, capacity and leadership across all health disciplines, roles, and functions.**

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional Comments

The RANZCP supports the ongoing importance of involving relevant stakeholders, including Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) and professional organisations such as the National Aboriginal Health Workers Association, who hold expert knowledge of the scopes of practice and current needs across communities. The RANZCP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health committee is also available to support the implementation of these goals, that include ensuring that revised scopes of practice and training programs reflect the integrated nature of mental health teams. Importantly, the availability and flexibility of training courses needs to be enhanced so that greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to accreditation. The RANZCP also supports continued funding for the Leaders in Medical Education network (LIME) which has proven to be an important resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, trainees, and Fellows to build relationships and exchange information.

### **Strategic Direction 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in culturally safe and responsive workplace environments that are free of racism across health and all related sectors.**

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional comments

As detailed in the RANZCP submission to the Productivity Commissions consultation on a National Indigenous Evaluation Strategy, the RANZCP affirms the importance of improving the quality of evaluations in across the Indigenous health sector. As was acknowledged in the *Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage Report 2016*, the evaluation of programs, and subsequently policies, affecting Indigenous people, has been sporadic and inconsistent for many years. The development of culturally safe

evaluation mechanisms that provide information on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainees and the most effective supports to enhance retention. One mechanism that has been used by the RANZCP to improve our collection of information from trainees has been the RANZCP Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainee Forum. This direct feedback, given in a safe and anonymized way (where relevant), is crucial to evaluating the safety of workplace environments. The RANZCP would therefore support Aboriginal led evaluation teams that could assist health services and hospitals ensure culturally safe workplaces. Private practitioners, including locums, would also benefit from enhanced resources and guidance on how to obtain educational and practice support. The establishment of a dedicated website with this purpose is therefore strongly supported.

**Strategic Direction 4:** There are appropriate numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying and completing health qualifications to meet the future health care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional Comments

The RANZCP advocates strongly for increased funding for STP posts within rural and remote settings that enhance the training of psychiatrists and increased the likelihood of individuals choosing to work in those settings long term. In addition to this funding, it is also imperative that funding be made available for training supervisors in rural and remote settings who support trainees.

**Strategic Direction 5:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students have a high level of completion and graduation from their courses and are supported to transition into the workforce.

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional Comments

The RANZCP affirms the critical importance of support networks within medical training and education. The Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) maintain a variety of events and communiques aimed at connecting trainees, building relationships, and resolving issues. The RANZCP supports increased funding for these initiatives that play an important role in strengthening the confidence of students and early career doctors.

**Strategic Direction 6:** Information and data are provided and shared across systems to assist health workforce planning, policy development, monitoring and evaluation, and continuous quality improvement.

Do you agree or disagree with the implementation actions under this Strategic Direction?  
The RANZCP agrees.

#### Additional Comments

No further comments.

## **Existing Initiatives – Employment, Education and Training**

The following questions aim to identify existing or needed support initiatives, not outlined in the draft Workforce Plan, which could support or enhance its intended outcomes.

### Training

**The Draft Workforce Plan includes actions to increase training opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Do you have any other suggestions?**

**The RANZCP has in place a number of existing support initiatives:**

The RANZCP has received Australian Government funding under the STP to provide support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees by holding bi-annual forums to facilitate discussions around how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees can be better supported. A mentoring program and exam preparation grants are also offered as part of this funding.

In addition, the RANZCP funds a Trainee Financial Support Initiative which includes the provision of up to \$6,000 per year to assist with the costs of specialist training (e.g. RANZCP training fees, assessment fees, attending conferences) and other activities to achieve Fellowship. In the period from 2018-2020 the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees and Fellows has doubled, highlighting the effectiveness of these initiatives.

The RANZCP also funds scholarships for medical students and junior doctors to attend the RANZCP Annual Congress, in partnership with AIDA.

### Education

**OPPORTUNITIES: The draft Workforce Plan includes actions to create new education and training pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people interested in a career in the health sector. Are there additional actions you think important to include in the Plan?**

In addition to the highlighted strategies increased support for exposure to specialist training pathways is crucial. Support for programs such as the RANZCP's Psychiatry Interest Forum, have had a marked effect on the transition of interested graduates into specialty training.

**SUPPORT: The draft Workforce Plan includes actions that will support the development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people throughout the different stages of their career in health (from school, through to higher education and into the workforce). Are there additional actions you think are important to include in the Plan?**

Further support for professional mentoring in specialist trainee years is required. In particular, continued support for mentoring programs, currently being delivered with Australian Government funding under the STP in 2018, 2019 and 2020 to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RANZCP trainees and provide opportunities for professional inclusion. These mentoring relationships have proved to be very successful in supporting trainee growth and retention in specialty training.

----END OF SURVEY---