

# Celebrating 10 years of collaboration: the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association and Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand

Closing the gap by growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical workforce



The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association Ltd  
Yaga Bugaul Dangun



This year marks the 10th anniversary of the collaboration between the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA), the professional association for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and medical students,<sup>1</sup> and Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand (Medical Deans), the peak body representing professional entry-level medical education, training and research in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>2</sup> In October 2005, AIDA and Medical Deans established an inaugural collaboration agreement formalising our shared commitment to achieving health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a focus on growing the Indigenous medical workforce.

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Over the past 10 years, AIDA and Medical Deans have reaffirmed this strong and sustained commitment to achieving our shared objectives through three successive collaboration agreements. Notable milestones have been achieved since 2005, including:

- a growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical student cohort;
- co-auspicings of the biennial Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Connection, which brings together a range of key health and medical education stakeholders to share innovative approaches in Indigenous medical education;<sup>3</sup>
- implementation of the Capacity Building for Indigenous Medical Academic Leadership Project to support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people becoming medical academic leaders;<sup>4</sup> and
- the National Medical Education Review,<sup>5</sup> which highlighted best practice for Australian medical schools in implementing the Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework.<sup>6</sup>

While all our achievements are significant, we are particularly pleased with the marked growth in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students.

In 2005, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students represented just 0.8% of first-year domestic enrolments. In 2011, this increased substantially to 2.5%, reaching population parity for the first time. In 2014, a record number of about 30 Indigenous medical students completed their degrees, and three universities celebrated their first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical graduates. These achievements reflect the importance of partnership in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students along the education and training pathway, to contribute to a growth in the Indigenous medical workforce.

Although there has been real progress in growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctor and medical student numbers, there is still much work to be done in this area, particularly in regards to strengthening recruitment and retention. We envision a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and medical students reach a critical mass in the Australian medical workforce; and one in which all doctors are trained to deliver equitable, accessible, high-quality and culturally safe services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The success of the AIDA and Medical Deans partnership has provided the impetus for similar arrangements to be developed across the medical education and training continuum, such as AIDA's collaboration agreements with the Committee of Presidents of Medical Colleges and the Confederation of Postgraduate Medical Education Councils. Our achievements have been recognised in Australia and internationally, through presentations on our successes at forums such as the Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors' Congress (PRIDoC) Conference. PRIDoC provides a culturally safe environment for health and medical professionals of the Pacific region to share and promote culturally safe research and clinical practices for Indigenous peoples.<sup>7</sup>

The current AIDA–Medical Deans collaboration agreement is due to expire at the end of 2015.<sup>8</sup> To ensure that our

**Tammy Kimpton**  
BMed, FRACGP<sup>1</sup>

**Peter J Smith**  
MD, FRACP, FRCPA<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association, Canberra, ACT.

<sup>2</sup> Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand, Sydney, NSW.

president@aida.org.au

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partnership continues, AIDA and Medical Deans are in the process of developing a new collaboration agreement for 2016–2018. We anticipate launching the new collaboration agreement around the time of the 6th biennial LIME Connection, which will be held in Townsville on 11–13 August 2015. The development of the new AIDA–Medical Deans collaboration agreement is timely, as it coincides with the theme of AIDA’s 2015 conference — “Collaborate, communicate and celebrate” — which will be held in Adelaide on 16–19 September 2015.

We look forward to extending our partnership to continue our work in growing the Indigenous medical workforce and improving health and life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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