

Re-framing the Indigenous kidney health workforce

A new taskforce of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clinicians will address the needs of an Indigenous-led kidney health workforce in Northern Australia

Many Australian professional clinical societies address kidney health or Indigenous health, but none exist for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clinicians dedicated to Indigenous kidney health.

For over three decades, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have lived with a disproportionate burden of dialysis-dependent chronic kidney disease.¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with chronic kidney disease face unique challenges accessing care.² Indigenous renal patients, families and communities are advocating for an increased, stronger and effective Indigenous kidney health workforce.³ The recent Medicare Benefits Schedule item supporting assisted dialysis by a registered nurse, Aboriginal health practitioner or Aboriginal health worker in very remote Australia in partnership with primary health care providers further escalates the need for local Indigenous workforce development.⁴

On 3 August 2018, ten individuals met and formed the Northern Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kidney Health Workforce Taskforce (Box). Delegates agreed that the Indigenous kidney health workforce needs our voices to be heard:

Together and individually we have authority to speak as health professionals who are also community members. We are obligated culturally and through family lines to achieve health advancement. We hold and value long term relationship with patients and their communities; culture and family are centred in the strength of our work, and this is valued by patients. We are expert in our own history, our own identity, and in renal clinical care.

The formation of the taskforce addressed an unmet need to support each other and give reference to our key leadership in supporting kidney health in Northern Australia. However, the meeting was opportunistic, as three interstate delegates were

Northern Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Kidney Health Workforce Taskforce



From left to right: Sam Mills, Craig Castillon, Maria Lovison (back row); Gwendoline Lowah, Jaquelyne Hughes, Maria Nickels, Janet Kelly (middle row); Jody Peris, Barbara Beaton (front row); absent from photo, Charmaine Grewal. ♦

visiting for other meetings. Taskforce members recognise our value locally and our relevance at state, territory and national levels,⁵ and have agreed to develop this forum. We will work towards delivering a Northern Australia Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kidney health conference in 2020, and seek other strategic opportunities aligned with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework.⁵

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