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Targeted work needed to Close the Gap *National Close the Gap Day*

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still significantly disadvantaged in the areas of life expectancy, mental health and general health, and targeted, culturally appropriate care is needed to address this growing crisis.

Dr Ewen McPhee, Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) President, said that there were many areas that could be improved by a greater cultural understanding by health professionals.

"The significant lack of improvement in the latest Government *Closing the Gap* report is of deep concern and emphasises that more must be done to improve health and other outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Dr McPhee said.

"Targets to close the gap in critical areas such as life expectancy, infant mortality, education and employment continue to fall short, which is a tragedy for our indigenous population.

"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.

"A mental health crisis exists in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, with serious psychological distress, self-harm and suicide reported at more than double the rate of other Australians.

"Providing culturally responsive mental health care that respects and promotes Indigenous culture and identity is key to addressing this issue," Dr McPhee said.

"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.

"It is good to see an increase in the opportunity for medical professionals to access cultural competency training, we need more consistent access for medical and health students to this critical training to equip them with the skills and knowledge to communicate effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.

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

"We firmly believe we could make great inroads into Closing the Gap in health outcomes with the establishment of a National Rural Generalist Pathway to deliver more doctors with advanced skills to rural and remote communities.



MEDIA RELEASE

“Advanced training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health is one area we believe should be offered through the Pathway, to help the next generation of rural and remote generalist doctors to respond effectively to the healthcare needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people,” Dr McPhee said.

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