

Statement by Faculty of Medicine, UNSW on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

The Faculty of Medicine at the University of New South Wales recognises the unique position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our culture and history. The Faculty acknowledges the violence and discrimination of Australia's history, and the need to address the disadvantage that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people continue to face today.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people are the original owners of the Land and it is important that this special position of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people is recognised and incorporated into activities of the Faculty.

The following have been inspired by the literature published by the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation[1], the New South Wales Government [2, 3] and by others.

These proposed strategies provide ways for individuals and groups within the Faculty to implement their own processes for reconciliation. The original literature indicates that these issues, amongst others, are considered crucial when appreciating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and cultural life[4].

1. Acknowledgement of country

The Faculty accepts that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have inhabited Australia for well over 50,000 years and that the culture and identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is bound up with the land and sea. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the original owners of the land. This includes all land occupied and used by the University of New South Wales and its clinical schools.

- There is no place in Australia where this is not true
- This is the only place in the world where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians belong.

Recommendations

1. Staff should make a brief statement at the beginning of all programs. (Muru Marri Indigenous Health Unit is available for liaison on implementing this Recommendation).

– DUE: Suggested wording sent to all staff by Dec 2005

Typical Acknowledgement of Country statements can include:

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of this Land the people.

OR

I would like to acknowledge that this [series of lectures, course, meeting, conference] is being held on Aboriginal Land and recognise the strength, resilience and capacity of Aboriginal people in this Land.

2. All staff should be briefed about acknowledgement of country and the importance of reconciliation.

– DUE: Distribute both the *Aboriginal Cultural Protocols and Practices* [3] and the *NSW Government Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal People* [5] by Dec 2005

3. An acknowledgment to the Aboriginal owners should be made in the websites of the Faculty and all associated schools.

– DUE: July 2006

2. Apology and recognition of truth of the past and its effect on the present

The Faculty is sorry for the contribution which health care professionals have made to the injustices and trauma of the past including the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities.

Recommendations:-

4. *All staff should be provided with information and resources about the injustices of the past and be encouraged to participate in national Sorry Day and Reconciliation Week activities.*

– DUE: Web based information available for all staff and students by July 2006

5. *Curriculum materials should acknowledge the strong culture and traditional practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

– DUE: Report by Associate Dean Education to FSC December 2006

3. Relationships between Faculty and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Faculty recognizes the need to build relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendations

6. *The Faculty will engage local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to give advice to the Faculty on its education and research.*

– Due:- Ongoing.

7. *The Faculty continues to support the development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campus community, including the role of Nura Gili.*

– Due:- Ongoing.

8. *The Faculty will speak out to promote the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and against prejudice.*

9. *The Faculty encourages all staff to attend cultural awareness / cultural safety sessions presented by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

- DUE: Report on staff attendance at cultural awareness / cultural safety sessions Dec 2006

4. Opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff

The Faculty acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had limited opportunities to participate in the Faculty as students or members of staff.

Recommendations

10. The Faculty aims to employ no less than the same proportion of people of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent as in the general population and review how Faculty employment practices may need to be changed to achieve this.

- DUE: Annual measurements from 2005 with goal achieved by 2010

11. The Faculty will develop programs to encourage and support student entry and continuing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the undergraduate and post graduate course work and research degree programs of the Faculty.

- DUE: Annual measurements from 2005

12. The Faculty will work with student organizations and the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association to develop activities that encourage and support Indigenous students.

- DUE: Achieved by end 2007

5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

The Faculty acknowledges the priority that needs to be given to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island people, given their current health status and past inequities in the determinants of health and access to health care. It acknowledges the physical, emotional and spiritual dimensions of health as defined in the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Recommendations:

13. The Faculty will map and monitor curricular activities relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island health in Undergraduate and Postgraduate programs.

– Due: Preliminary map due September 2005, review due July 2006

14. The Faculty supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organizations in advocating for more research and education focused on improving health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

– Due:- Ongoing.

15. The Faculty will provide students with an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of health and health practice as well their health problems and potential solutions.

– Due:- Ongoing.

16. Faculty and School research strategies will include a strategy to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

– Due: Dec 2006

6. Conclusion

This statement is an expression of goodwill and allows for a set of measurable actions that the Faculty can take in its role as a leader in medical education. The Faculty acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's dispossession, the benefit derived by subsequent generations of Australians and the immeasurable and continuing cost this has been to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This document is an initial guide for action and should not be seen as an end unto itself. This statement needs to be seen within the broader context of UNSW Indigenous policy. It is intended to be a living document that will be reviewed every second year to maintain its currency.

REFERENCES

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, *As A Matter of Fact: Answering the myths and misconceptions about Indigenous Australians*. 1998, Office of Public Affairs: Canberra.
2. New South Wales Government, *The NSW Government Statement of Commitment to Aboriginal People*. 1997, New South Wales Government,,: Sydney.
3. Premiers Department, *Aboriginal Cultural Protocols and Practices Policy*. 2005, New South Wales Government,,: Sydney.
4. Jonas, W.J.A., Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Australia), and Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (Australia). *Walking together*. 1995, Parkes, ACT.