

# AUSTRALIAN ROTARY HEALTH INDIGENOUS HEALTH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

[www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au](http://www.australianrotaryhealth.org.au)

Australian Rotary Health Indigenous Health Scholarships Program is a jointly funded initiative between Rotary Clubs and some State Governments. The aim of the program is to establish a scholarship fund that can be used for assisting Indigenous Australian students studying nursing, medicine and allied health.

The purpose of the program is to increase the number of Indigenous Australian medical staff and by so doing, improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in rural and remote areas of Australia where access to basic preventative medical treatment is often difficult.

## Is there a need for more Indigenous Australian doctors?

- ♦ There is certainly a need for more Indigenous Australian doctors, nurses and allied health staff, who are prepared to work in Australia's rural and remote areas.
- ♦ Being seen as leaders and significant advocates by the community, puts Indigenous Australian doctors in a position to influence change.
- ♦ There are 563 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander registered medical practitioners in Australia with a further 412 students in medical schools across the country.\*

\*2021 (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework)

## Why the focus on Indigenous Australian doctors?

We know from what Indigenous Australians have told us that being able to talk to a doctor or health professional from their own culture is less daunting and more reassuring than is contact with non-Indigenous Australian medical and health professionals.

Indigenous Australians may be reluctant to use the services of non-Indigenous Australian doctors and health workers resulting in medical conditions not being diagnosed until they are very sick and require hospital care. Lack of cultural knowledge and awareness are two reasons for this.

Indigenous Australian doctors can and do make a difference and help improve the health status of their people. For example, research carried out at Inala Community Health Centre in Brisbane, found that with an Indigenous Australian Health Team (including an Indigenous Australian doctor) more Indigenous Australian people attended for consultations. The patients found that the Indigenous Australian Health Team understood their needs better and their overall health

improved as a result. In New Zealand an increased number of Maori and Pacific Island medical graduates has led to an increase in access to health care by 'under serviced' Maori and Pacific Island communities.

Indigenous Australian doctors and nurses are important role models for other Indigenous Australians considering career opportunities in health. They also provide community advocacy and leadership in other related areas such as housing, education and community services.

It is also important to realise that the training of more Indigenous Australian doctors and nurses will assist in the process of Indigenous Australians and communities taking more control of their health and the way services are delivered.



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**This program has the support of the New South Wales and South Australian State Governments**

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## What can Rotary offer?

Australian Rotarians have a proud record of giving generous support to requests for assistance from overseas countries in times of need, especially from developing countries seeking humanitarian aid.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, on all health indicators, have the poorest health in Australia. 140,000 Indigenous Australians live in remote communities and lack primary health care.

We can do our bit to change this situation by supporting selected Indigenous Australian students in their medical studies.

Rotary has proven through the PolioPlus program and through the Mental Health program that it can achieve its goals. Indigenous Australian medical students need to be adequately supported financially, educationally and personally.

## How can you support this project and what's involved?

- ◆ Australian Rotary Health offers scholarships to selected students in consultation with the State Governments and Universities.
- ◆ The scholarship payment is \$5,000 per year made in 2 parts (in each semester).
- ◆ Medicine and other health degrees can be expensive, lengthy and arduous courses. The scholarship can make all the difference to a struggling student, especially since Indigenous Australian students are often of mature age with a family to support.

- ◆ We encourage sponsoring clubs to treat their students much like exchange students with occasional invitations to meetings. The knowledge of the members of the club is a source of encouragement and advice. This approach has been greatly appreciated by students.



## Will governments make a contribution?

Yes. Funding has been assured on a dollar for dollar basis from some State Governments.

## What will your club get out of the program?

Your club will get a better understanding of First Nations communities in Australia. Being able to support or possibly mentor a First Nations Health Worker to make a difference in their community.

## What's the next step?

Australian Rotary Health Indigenous Health Scholarship Program is a worthwhile humanitarian project, which

Australian Rotarians should embrace. A commitment of \$2,750 per year to co-sponsor (includes administration fee) is a very small price to pay to help improve the health and well being of Australia's Indigenous peoples.

## What the Aboriginal And Torres Strait Islander Peoples health statistics tell us

■ The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians was estimated to be 71.9 years for males & 75.6 years for females, compared with 80.7 years for all males and 83.7 years for all females, a difference of approximately 8.8 years.<sup>1</sup>

■ The prevalence of diabetes among Indigenous Australians was nearly four times the prevalence reported by non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>2</sup>

■ Hospitalisation rates were 11 times higher for Indigenous Australians than for other Australians for care involving dialysis, and 2.4 times higher of other Australians for both respiratory diseases and injury.<sup>2</sup>

■ The conditions, which account for most of the consultations by Indigenous Australians with General Practitioners, are the main reasons for hospitalization of Indigenous Australians. These conditions are: circulatory diseases, diabetes, respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal conditions, kidney disease, eye and ear problems and mental and behavioural disorders.<sup>2</sup>

■ Mortality rates for Indigenous males and females for endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (including diabetes) were 3.7 times more than those for non-Indigenous males and females.<sup>2</sup>

■ In 2023 suicide accounted for 5.2% of all Aboriginal deaths compared with 1.8% of deaths for other Australians.<sup>2</sup>

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2022

2. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2024

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*Australian Rotary Health enjoys the support of Rotary clubs and districts throughout Australia; however, it is not a program of The Rotary Foundation or of Rotary International.*

*Australian Rotary Health is an independent charity whose Board is comprised entirely of Rotarians.*

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