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Senator the Hon Fiona Nash  
Deputy Leader of the Nationals in the Senate  
Minister for Rural Health  
PO Box 6100  
Senate  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

Dear Minister

**Re: Salary Support for General Practice Registrars in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services**

This letter concerns the impact of the changes to the Salary Support for General Practice (GP) Registrars in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Services. As you know the Department of Health released their policies for GP training on 6 January 2016. Members of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) are concerned that this policy may have potentially negative impacts upon the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health sector and on doctors undertaking placements in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS).

As you know AIDA is the peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors and medical students and advocates for improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. AIDA also works to achieve parity of Indigenous health professionals across the health sector, and shape a health system that is culturally safe, high quality, reflective of need and which respects and incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural values.

AIDA initially expressed our concern over the proposed changes to Salary Support policy to Ms Megan Cahill, Chief Executive Officer, General Practice Education and Training in September 2014. AIDA is aware that other key stakeholders such as the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners (RACGP) - including their National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, the Indigenous General Practice Registrar's Network (IGPRN) and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) also expressed concern. We were pleased to learn that in the new policy there is no 12 month limit to salary support.

However, AIDA remains concerned that neither training toward Fellowship in Advanced Rural General Practice (FARGP) or in Advanced Rural Skills Training through the Australian College of Remote Rural Medicine will be supported under the new policy parameters. Excluding support to the RACGP's FARGP and Advanced Rural Skills Training means that these specialist Fellows will no longer have the option to receive salary support to work in the sector. This means that either ACCHS will have to find the additional funding to top up the salary, or that senior clinicians will not be attracted to work in ACCHS because of wage disparity.

AIDA also notes that these reforms will impact on the delivery of primary health care in remote areas and have adverse impact on the operational capacity of ACCHS. For example, if the salary support is not available to registrars working in remote areas, they will likely be pulled back to regional centres, leaving a gap in service delivery and appropriately training medical staff in ACCHS. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience diseases at much younger ages, at greater prevalence and with greater rates of

co-morbidities. In an environment of clinical complexity, and high patient need, this is a detrimental outcome which could adversely impact on patient care.

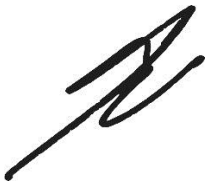
We are also concerned that the extension of training time will not be supported. The likely impact is that when a registrar has completed their training and is awaiting formal recognition of their Fellowship, because they are not able to access salary support funding, this cost will be borne by the ACCHS.

Alongside the freeze in Medicare rebates, this could be seen as a reduction in funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. It may also be seen as not being supportive of the Close the Gap targets and policy objectives. AIDA notes the significance of the launch of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Health Implementation Plan in October 2015, and we continue to advocate for a well-trained and resourced medical workforce to assist with implementation of this.

On another matter, please accept my congratulations for your recent appointment to the Deputy Leader role of the Nationals. We look forward to continuing to work with you in this new capacity.

We would welcome an opportunity to discuss these changes further. Please contact AIDA's CEO, Ms Kate Thomann, on 02 6273 5013 to agree a suitable time.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Kali Hayward', written in a cursive style.

Dr Kali Hayward  
AIDA President

15 February 2016