# AIDA Communique – Specialist Trainee Support Program

AIDA held the third meeting of the Specialist Trainee Support Program (STSP) Cross-College Project Group (comprising 12 specialty colleges) on Wurundjeri Country on Friday 9 December 2022.

The meeting continued the collaboration between AIDA and the 12-college strong consortium to augment the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors who wish to commence or are currently undertaking non-GP specialty training.

The meeting was hosted by the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO). The presentations and input from VACCHO were invaluable and gave a deeper understanding of the community-controlled sector and the sector’s holistic approach to care inclusive of social, historical, cultural and political determinants of health. The group reflected on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainee social, emotional and wellbeing and training experiences and success. These discussions progressed a key objective of STSP to progress engagement with the ACCHO sector.

All colleges shared updates on their activities, challenges and successes in progressing improvements in recruitment and retention since the last meeting in September 2022. Colleges also reported on retention. Of colleges that shared, 100% of trainees were retained in the preceding three months fulfilling on the commitment made at the September meeting.

The STSP team provided an overview of key data and information provided by colleges since the last meeting. Colleges had begun to identify Indigeneity of trainees within the last decade with the earliest being 2013 and the most recent in 2018. Of colleges who had responded, 29 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors had exited non-GP specialty training.

The STSP team tabled relevant data shared by Australian Medical Council (AMC) from colleges through the AMC’s annual monitoring process. AMC advised that in 2021, 13 doctors exited training in 2021 and six doctors exited training in 2020. A small number of these doctors exited training to pursue different training pathways. For the majority of the trainees who had exited, the reasons were not stated.

Analysis of the National Health Workforce data showed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical workforce has had exceptional growth over the last 10 years. In addition, the higher interest by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors in rural health care previously noted from the Medical Training Survey mirrors higher representation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors in non-urban areas. Of all medical practitioners in the labour force who graduated with a primary medical degree from Australia, 19% were working in MM2-7 locations in 2021. Of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical practitioners, the proportion was almost double, with 35% working in MM2-7 locations.

When considering the accessibility of specialist training in rural areas, data for GPs is extraordinary. 28% of all medical practitioners in the labour force who graduated with a primary medical degree from Australia were working in MM2-7 locations compared with 52% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander GPs.

The group noted that whilst much of the dialogue around medical workforce was a deficit discourse in relation to shortages and maldistribution, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is a positive story of growth and greater commitment and service to Aboriginal health and rural health.

A key focus of the meeting was on induction and participants engaged in a world café activity to share and assess their current approach to induction, how well it supports recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainees and plans to improve this process. Some colleges are very much at the beginning of considering and implementing policies and procedures and some colleges have been working in the space for some time and have progressed initiatives.

Some good practice in relation to induction included:

* letters of welcome sent from College Presidents to doctors who identified including information on support available through the college including fee reimbursement
* welcome events specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees
* welcome phone calls
* orientation packages

The group tabled key actions they would progress before the next meeting and shared the huge benefit they had received over the last six months through their participation in the consortium and the meetings and work led by AIDA.

**Attendees**

* Australian Indigenous Doctors Association
* Department of Health and Aged Care
* Australasian College of Dermatologists
* Australasian College of Sport and Exercise Physicians
* Australian College of Emergency Medicine
* Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
* Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
* Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists
* Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
* Royal Australasian College of Physicians
* Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
* College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand
* Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
* Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists