

AIDA Communique – Specialist Trainee Support Program - Cross-college Meeting

The recent Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) Specialist Trainee Support Program (STSP) Cross-college meeting was held on Thursday 11 December 2025 at the National Centre of Indigenous Excellence (NCIE) Redfern on Gadigal Country, Sydney. This meeting marked the final gathering of 2025 and gave the collective opportunity to discuss peer-to-peer mentoring, celebrate positive outcomes and strengthen our commitment to improving outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical specialists.

AIDA Acting Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Dr Jonathan Newchurch, Acting President Dr Olivia O'Donoghue, and newly appointed CEO, Dr Peter Malouf, joined the meeting. Their presence, wisdom, and guidance set a strong tone for the meeting, particularly as they spoke about the ongoing barriers faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialists in training.

The meeting opened with reflections from the medical colleges, sharing program updates, recent wins, and continued challenges. The reflections included insights into recruitment, resourcing, financial pressures for trainees, operational constraints, and the importance of strengthening culturally safe mentoring and support. Blake McDonald Assistant Director, Medical Specialist Training Section, Department of Health Disability and Ageing (DoHDA) provided an overall update which included information in relation to the Flexible Approach to Training in Expanded Settings (FATES) grant opportunity.

AIDA provided a comprehensive update including an overview of the recent accomplishment of the STSP November workshop, which had the largest attendance to date and continues to grow. Plans are underway for next year's workshop in Brisbane. AIDA then provided an update on the Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) Program and our work to support medical students earlier in their journey, bringing students together to strengthen cultural peer support and supporting the staff who support medical students. The team celebrated the first Medical School Student Support Workshop held at the AIDA conference. Student support staff were nominated by their university to attend this workshop to discuss successes and strengthen collaboration.

AIDA's Cancer Australia partnership update included an outline of progress to establish structured, culturally safe placement opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students who will work closely with oncology professionals. AIDA also shared the success of the program's first Advisory Group meeting in December. The next step in the program will be the launch of expressions of interest for final year medical students to be opened in December.

AIDA celebrated the tremendous success of the recent AIDA 2025 conference with medical colleges expressing their appreciation and gratitude. AIDA also highlighted that the Cultural Safety team are now delivering a bespoke 90-minute cultural safety session and will be joining the next Cross-college meeting held in February 2026 to deliver further training for the Cross-college Group.

The meeting then focused on peer-to-peer mentoring with the first presentation delivered by Sam Dipnall, Senior Manager of Membership Development from The Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists (RANZCP). Sam shared the strong successes of the RANZCP Mentoring Program which commenced in 2020 and is delivered annually over eight months. The program is open to all trainees and early career psychiatrists in their first three years post-Fellowship. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mentee applicants are prioritised to receive a mentor. Over the past five years, 88% of participants have reported that they would recommend the program to their peers. \

Chelsea Greer, Coordinator, Australian Government Funded Training Programs from RANZCP then followed with a presentation on the RANZCP Specialist Training Program funded, Peer Support Program. The program is a yarning network to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees by matching a new trainee in stage one, with a late-stage peer in stage two or three training to provide informal support. The program is open throughout the year and aims to improve and promote a positive psychiatry education culture that reduces feelings of isolation and supports trainees' wellbeing and work life balance from first year to Fellowship.

Jennifer Gulson, James Cook University medical student and AIDA Student Regional Lead gave a presentation to share the achievements of peer-to-peer tutoring. This student led initiative pairs senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students with junior students in a culturally grounded, community-led way. The model has strengthened academic confidence, cultural identity, and feelings of safety by ensuring Mob-to-Mob support. Feedback from students underscored how important culturally safe learning environments are, and the value of First Nations leadership in shaping mentoring programs.

After the presentations, the group split into smaller discussion circles and worked collaboratively on the below topics:

- What is currently working well?
- What improvements would you make if you could?
- What are the resources required for change?
- What are the opportunities for this group?
- Alternative methods to increase engagement from Trainees

Once completed the group gathered and shared what was captured and drew on each other's knowledge and experience. These conversations created space for collaboration and wisdom to be shared openly to further strengthen the support systems around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees.

The discussions throughout the day highlighted the importance of culturally safe mentoring systems within specialist training pathways. The Cross College Group expressed a shared commitment to exploring, adapting, and embedding these models within their respective colleges to support improved outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees.

Attendees

1. Australian Indigenous Doctors Association
2. Department of Health, Disability and Ageing
3. Australasian College of Dermatologists
4. Australasian College for Emergency Medicine
5. College of Intensive Care Medicine of Australia and New Zealand
6. Australian and New Zealand College of Anaesthetists
7. Royal Australasian College of Surgeons
8. Royal Australasian College of Physicians
9. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists
10. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Ophthalmologists
11. Royal Australasian College of Medical Administrators
12. Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia

Apologies

1. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Radiologists
2. Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Obstetricians and Gynaecologists