

# INDIGENOUS HEALTH SCHOLARSHIP PROGRAM

## Australian Rotary Health Research Fund



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The ARHRF Indigenous Health Scholarships Program is a jointly funded initiative between Rotary, State Governments and the Australian Government. 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 only 120 Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander doctors in Australia with a further 120 students in medical schools across the country.\*

\*AIDA (Australian Indigenous Doctors Association)

### 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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## 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?

- The Australian Rotary Health Research Fund offers scholarships to selected students in consultation with the State Governments and Universities.
- The amount of a scholarship is \$5,000 per year. The cost to sponsoring clubs is \$2,500 per year.
- 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 and the government.

## Will governments make a contribution?

Yes. Funding has been assured on a dollar for dollar basis from State Governments and the Australian Government.

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

Your club will get a better understanding of Indigenous Australian communities in Australia. Being able to mentor and support fellow Australians to make a difference in their own communities is a rewarding project.



## What's the next step?

The ARHRF Indigenous Health Scholarship Program is a worthwhile humanitarian project, which Australian Rotarians should embrace. A commitment of \$2,500 per year is a very small price to pay to help improve the health and well being of Australia's Indigenous peoples. Our involvement will assist in the process of reconciliation and show that Rotarians really do care.

## What the Aboriginal Peoples health statistics tell us

- The life expectancy at birth for Indigenous Australians was estimated to be 59.4 years for males and 64.8 years for females, compared with 76.6 years for all

males and 82.0 years for all females, a difference of approximately 17 years.<sup>1</sup>

- The prevalence of diabetes among Indigenous Australians was nearly four times the prevalence reported by non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>1</sup>

- Hospitalisation rates were 12 times higher for Indigenous Australians than for other Australians for care involving dialysis, and twice those for other Australians for both respiratory diseases and injury.<sup>1</sup>

- The conditions, which account for most of the consultations by Indigenous Australians with General Practitioners, are the main reasons for hospitalisation 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>1</sup>

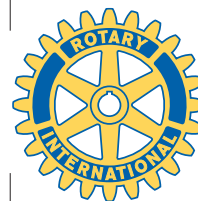
- Mortality rates for Indigenous males and females for endocrine, nutritional and metabolic diseases (including diabetes) were around seven and 11 times more than those for non-Indigenous males and females.<sup>1</sup>

- The death rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 1-14

years was more than twice that of non-Indigenous children of the same age.<sup>1</sup>

- Suicide accounted for 4.3% of all Aboriginal deaths compared with 1.6% of deaths for other Australians.<sup>1</sup>

1. *The Health and Welfare of Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, ABS 2005*



**Make this a vocational service project for your club and you can help make a difference.**

For more details contact your ARHRF District Committee or ARHRF Projects Co-ordinator Cheryl Deguara on (02) 8837 1900 or email [cheryldeguara@arhrf.org.au](mailto:cheryldeguara@arhrf.org.au)

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