

# Response to Indigenous Skills & Employment Program Discussion Paper

## Indigenous Eye Health | The University of Melbourne

Wednesday 8 September 2021

### Background

Indigenous Eye Health at the University of Melbourne aims to Close the Gap for Vision for Indigenous Australians. An important part of our work is contributing to the elimination of trachoma in Australia by 2023.

We work closely with communities and organisations in Central Australia in the collective efforts to eliminate trachoma.

In the past, we've worked with several CDP programs in Central Australia to deliver education and training to participants about trachoma prevention and elimination – with a particular focus on the links between housing and good health.

### What are the key opportunities in your region that are not currently being addressed?

IEH would like to see health and wellbeing being a focus of the new Indigenous Skills & Employment Program (ISEP). This includes addressing the health and wellbeing of the individual participating in the program, as well as providing education and training to participants about a range of health and wellbeing topics.

It is important to look at the participants journey from a holistic perspective; this includes addressing their health and wellbeing needs in addition to increasing their skills and providing employment opportunities. We are keen to see health and wellbeing support provided as part of a participant's skills and employment journey. A strong focus of this should be to support participants who may be facing social and emotional wellbeing and mental health issues. We also believe that it's important to support and work with participants who may need support increasing their literacy and numeracy skills.

In addition to addressing the health and wellbeing of the individual participant, it's also important to equip people with the skills and knowledge to take ownership over their health journey and contribute to the good health of their community.

In Central Australia, there's a real opportunity to work with program participants and deliver education and training sessions that focus on the prevention of infectious diseases such as trachoma, gastroenteritis, scabies, otitis media, rheumatic heart disease/fever and a range of respiratory illnesses.

Poor environmental health conditions are recognised as a key contributing factor to the burden of preventable disease in Aboriginal people living in communities throughout

Central Australia. Inadequate and poorly maintained housing contributes to the burden of disease. It is important to increase knowledge within Central Australian communities about the links between good health and housing.

A major focus of our work in Central Australia is advocating for all households have access to safe and functioning bathrooms and washing facilities. Lack of access to functioning health hardware negatively impacts on people's ability to maintain good hygiene practices and stay healthy.

There are opportunities to increase participants skills and knowledge around a range of health and wellbeing issues affecting their local communities.

We also think work experience opportunities are an important element to all of this. Organisations in Central Australian communities such as local councils, health clinics and schools are well placed to play a role in building people's capacity and interest to take on employment opportunities.

### **What would success look like in your region?**

- Healthy, vibrant, proud, resilient communities
- People feel empowered to take ownership over their health and wellbeing
- People feel empowered to contribute to the good health and wellbeing of their families and communities
- People understand the links between housing and good health and feel proud of their homes

Healthy people, healthy families, healthy houses, healthy communities.

### **Are there specific cohorts, industries or transition points that should be targeted in your region?**

The Indigenous health and wellbeing sector.

### **How do we embed partnerships?**

By working with local communities to determine their health and wellbeing needs.

### **Are there any issues you consider would be best addressed by a national approach?**

Health and wellbeing isn't just important for participants and communities in Central Australia, it's important right across the country. We believe communities across Australia would benefit from the new ISEP having a strong health and wellbeing focus – with the aim of supporting individual participants health and wellbeing needs, but also empowering participants and communities to take increased ownership over their health journeys.

### **What are the barriers to employers providing safe and culturally appropriate work environments?**

Organisations should be willing to undertake cultural safety training as well as adopting ongoing mechanisms to learn, reflect, adapt, and ensure they always provide a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Ongoing mechanisms could include undertaking a Reconciliation Action Plan or some form of ongoing cultural safety and responsiveness plan, which is reviewed and updated regularly.

It can be quite isolating if you are the only Indigenous person employed at an organisation, so if this is the case, it would be important for organisations to ensure that employee has adequate support for them to do their job. This could include mentors, a 'buddy-system' and additional training.

**For further information, please contact [REDACTED], Senior Engagement Officer,  
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