Curtin University’s approach to developing a culturally safe health workforce

Sandra Thompson
Comparing Life Expectancy
Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Australia*</th>
<th>New Zealand*</th>
<th>Canada*</th>
<th>USA*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>ATSI</td>
<td>All</td>
<td>Māori</td>
<td>All</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Life Expectancy (years)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Males</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>76.6</td>
<td>69.0</td>
<td>76.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Females</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>82.0</td>
<td>73.2</td>
<td>81.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Median age</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>35.0</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>33.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Infant mortality (/1000 live births)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>4.7</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>5.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low birth weight (proportion of all live births)</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indigenous compared with all non-Indigenous

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders die nearly 20 years younger than non-Indigenous Australians
- The difference in life expectancy for Indigenous people compared to non-Indigenous people is approximately seven years in the USA and Canada, 7.5 years in New Zealand and nearly 20 years in Australia
- ATSI infant mortality is three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians.
- Nearly three times as many ATSI children die before the age of five than Indigenous children in Canada. Infant mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are more than 50 per cent higher than for Indigenous children in the USA and New Zealand
- 13 per cent of Indigenous babies born in Australia are of low birth weight – more than double the incidence of low birth weight babies in Indigenous populations in Canada and the USA; and more than 60 per cent higher than the frequency of low birth weight Indigenous babies born in New Zealand
Figure: Population pyramid of Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations, 2006
Reconciliation Action Plan

**OUR VISION FOR RECONCILIATION**

Curtin University of Technology's vision for reconciliation is to be a place of learning that respects Indigenous culture and diversity: a place where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people come together to learn their chosen discipline contextualised within Indigenous culture and history.

Reconciliation is both a vision and a process: it involves a vision of what reconciliation is, and what strategies or processes are necessary to achieve that vision.

Curtin’s vision for reconciliation is that—individually and, therefore, collectively—we:

- Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians as the first Australians and as the Indigenous peoples of Australia;
- Support the right of Indigenous Australians to express their cultures and participate on an equal footing in all aspects of Australian life;
- Accept the Indigenous connection between country, community, culture and well being;
- Develop a greater understanding of how our different pasts and cultures are part of our shared history and shared future;
- Acknowledge that Indigenous and Western knowledge systems have much to learn from one another;
- Commit to a respectful partnership whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians tackle disadvantages together;
Curtin graduates demonstrate evidence, as appropriate to their disciplines, that they can:

1. Apply discipline knowledge, principles and concepts;
2. Think critically, creatively and reflectively;
3. Access, evaluate and synthesise information;
4. Communicate effectively;
5. Use technologies appropriately;
6. Utilise lifelong learning skills;
9. Apply professional skills
7. Recognise and apply international perspectives;
   Think globally and consider issues from a variety of perspectives;
   Apply international standards and practices within a discipline or professional area.

8. Demonstrate cultural awareness and understanding;
   Respect individual human rights;
   Recognise the importance of cultural diversity particularly the perspective of Indigenous Australians;
   Value diversity of language and
Diversity and Structural Adjustment funding (DEEWR 2009-2011)

• Ensure culturally safe health science graduates
  – Cultural safety training of staff and student in health sciences
  – Incorporating Indigenous perspectives and examples into the Health Sciences curriculum
  – Clinical placements in Aboriginal health settings (with support from cultural mentors)
  – Development of new Units (International Indigenous Health)
Increasing the Aboriginal health workforce

- Developing alternative pathways to higher education
- Links with high schools (Follow the Dream, Future Footprints)
- Orientation days – think about a career in Health Sciences
- Bridging courses
How?

• Leadership
  – Within Curtin
  – Aboriginal leadership

• Linkages
  – Across Curtin – CAS
  – Across the Faculty of Health Sciences
  – With government – Commonwealth, state and local
  – With industry – AHCWA, ACCHS, CUCRH, TAFES

• Working collaboratively and in partnership
...For the future we take heart; resolving that this new page in the history of our great continent can now be written.

We today take this first step by acknowledging the past and laying claim to a future that embraces all Australians.

A future where we harness the determination of all Australians, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to close the gap that lies between us in life expectancy, educational achievement and economic opportunity.

A future where we embrace the possibility of new solutions to enduring problems where old approaches have failed.

A future based on mutual respect, mutual resolve and mutual responsibility....