

16 March 2023

## Rural doctors continue to work toward Closing the Gap

**National Close the Gap Day – 16 March 2023**

Rural doctors work on the front line of healthcare for the majority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and are committed to Closing the Gap in health outcomes.



Dr Megan Belot, President of the Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) said that there were a range of initiatives being rolled out by the Federal Government supporting Indigenous health care.

“We are excited by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan which is working toward increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in the health sector,” Dr Belot said.

“This is a very positive initiative to help improve health and wellbeing outcomes, as supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to become doctors and other health professionals will help ensure the provision of culturally-appropriate healthcare services.

“Increasing the number of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), and extending the care provided by existing ACHHOs is also a great outcome.

“But every patient has a right to a choice when selecting their health care, and there are many people who choose not to seek care in an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS). This choice also needs to be supported,” Dr Belot said.

“It remains critically important to recognise and support the work that so many rural doctors do both in private general practice, and in our rural hospitals, to care for their Indigenous patients.

“Both ACCHOs and private general practice must be funded and supported to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and health practitioners to assist in providing culturally safe care.”

Rural hospitals are also pivotal in providing the advanced and complex care needs of rural Indigenous patients, and many of these services are under-staffed, under-funded and unable to meet the health care needs of their communities as a result.

“To achieve real outcomes toward Closing the Gap requires commitment to supporting every level of the health sector providing care to Indigenous patients,” Dr Belot said.

“The National Rural Generalist Pathway, which is slowly being rolled out across Australia, provides high quality training in rural health care, with advanced training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health available.

“This advanced skill provides the foundation of training for all doctors, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, to be able to provide the care needed by First Nations communities.

“RDAA also supports a constitutionally enshrined Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice to Parliament, which would be the first step in implementing the Uluru Statement from the Heart,” Dr Belot said.

“The Voice will create a holistic pathway to genuine systemic reform, and a new way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This is key to resolving the inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.”

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A high resolution photo of Dr Megan Belot is [available here](#).

The above photo in lower resolution (for online) is [available here](#).

**Available for interview:** RDAA President, Dr Megan Belot (via contacts below)  
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