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## Medical schools aiming high to improve Indigenous Health

A new Indigenous Health Strategy released today by Medical Deans Australia and New Zealand reflects the continued commitment of medical schools across Australasia to contribute to improved health and social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Māori.

Professor Sandra Eades, Dean and Head of Curtin Medical School, and Australia's first Aboriginal Medical Dean, said "there has been substantial progress these last few years, but there is still much more to do".

"We have a very connected community across our medical schools, and through sharing our approaches, frustrations and ideas, we can build on the progress made so far, set our aims higher, and support each other in doing more and doing better" she added.

The last decade has seen strong and sustained growth in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori medical students commencing, progressing through, and graduating from medical schools across Australia and New Zealand; with Indigenous medical graduates more than tripling over that period.

In Australia this year, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students made up 3.2% of commencing domestic students and comprised 2.7% of domestic student enrolments in medical programs, increasing from 2.4% and 2.0% respectively in 2017<sup>1</sup>. In the past four years the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander graduates has also increased: from 1.1% of the 2020 graduating domestic cohort to 2.1% of medical graduates last year. In New Zealand this year, 18% of both commencing and total enrolled domestic students were Māori, and Māori medical graduates comprised 14.6% of the domestic graduating cohort.

Professor Richard Murray, President of Medical Deans, said "this new Strategy provides us all with tangible actions to focus on, and will guide and shape our work – as a sector working together and in collaboration with our Indigenous partners".

"We are grateful for the input and advice from the wide range of Indigenous health and education organisations and individuals we engaged with during the development of this Strategy. While we were pleased to hear the positive feedback on the work being done and changes being made, we also heard the continuing need to recognise and stamp out racism and better address the support needs of our students and graduates. We must, want to, and can do better, and this Strategy will help that" Professor Murray said.

A survey of final year medical students run each year by Medical Deans also shows a continued increase in the proportion of graduates who leave medical school expressing a desire for Indigenous Health to be a part of their future career<sup>2</sup>. Medical Deans' President, Professor Richard Murray, says "It is a good sign that more of our non-Indigenous graduates are wanting direct involvement during their career, and we will continue our work to make sure that all our future doctors are motivated, culturally safe, and technically competent to improve the health of Indigenous peoples".

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For enquiries or to arrange interviews, please contact: Helen Craig, MDANZ CEO, on 0449 109 721

**Medical Deans' Indigenous Health Strategy 2021-2025** can be accessed at:

<https://medicaldeans.org.au/resource/indigenous-health-strategy-2021-2025/>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://medicaldeans.org.au/md/2021/10/MDANZ-Student-Statistics-Snapshot-2021.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> <https://medicaldeans.org.au/data/medical-schools-outcomes-database-reports/>