

media release

11 November 2020

Making community health training available to remote Indigenous communities during COVID-19

Despite the COVID-19 pandemic, community health training in remote Indigenous communities has been able to continue thanks to a partnership between the Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies) and Medibank.

Menzies's Certificate II in Community Health Research empowers Indigenous people to help deliver health promotion and research in their own communities, providing new employment opportunities and greater health literacy, but the pandemic shutdown impacted the face-to-face, personalised delivery method.

Travel to remote communities was restricted during the pandemic to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, meaning access to some face-to-face education and training opportunities was limited. Medibank supported Menzies with funding to digitise the course and make it available online for remote communities.

Menzies' Associate Dean Teaching & Learning Dr Sharon Chirgwin said the course is an important step to provide those living in remote communities with the skills and knowledge required to participate as equals in research that impacted on their communities.

"Menzies is committed to improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and our vision is that Indigenous Australians set the priorities and direction of health research in their communities and at a national level," Dr Chirgwin said.

"The Certificate II in Community Health Research is one step in enabling this to occur by training those who work in remote communities to conduct research in ethically and culturally responsible way.

"It also enables Menzies to learn from those in communities about how they see health and health issues and to utilise a 'both-ways' approach to addressing health issues.

"Medibank's support to make the course digital has made a big difference. Most of our trainees in this course are Indigenous women living in community, but we have seen a greater variety of ages enrolling and more men taking part as a result of the course being available online."

The course covers health literacy and promotion, research methods, the ethics of consent and health data, communicating health messages in a culturally appropriate way and presentation skills.

Medibank's Chief Medical Officer Dr Linda Swan said the support from the Medibank Better Health Foundation recognised the importance of continuing to offer this training despite the challenges of the pandemic.

"We saw how important it was for Menzies to be able to offer this course online, and maintain the unique personalisation for each student," Dr Swan said.

"To hear how passionate the 2020 students are about the lived health experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians is recognition of the importance of shifting traditional power structures in health to benefit Indigenous communities."

There are both individual and community benefits flowing on from completion of the Certificate II in Community Health Research. The course gives the graduate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based researchers a nationally accredited award that provides a pathway to further education and increased employment opportunities, and the community gains the skills to take charge of their own health priorities and health research projects.

About Menzies

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 35 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.

About Medibank

Medibank was the first health insurer in Australia to take a step towards greater reconciliation in 2012 when we developed and released our first Reconciliation Action Plan. We believe the health inequality of our nation's First Peoples affects, and is the responsibility of, all Australians. Medibank's purpose of Better Health for Better Lives strengthens our sense of community connection and responsibility towards reconciliation.

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