

# Medical school critical for NT



JOHN PATERSON

AS a local born and bred Aboriginal Territorian, having worked in both levels of government and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and for the past 16 years as the chief executive for the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), I understand and have actively promoted the need to grow our own local medical workforce.

Given the high number of our Aboriginal population living in some of the remotest and rural communities of the Northern Territory, we have an obligation and a responsibility to provide these communities with the diverse range of medical care that is afforded to all Territorians.

In these regions, the model of health care should include residential doctors, nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers as well as local community liaison staff who can provide the appropriate non-clinical support for community.

Delivering health care services to these communities can be very challenging and if you are not prepared for a cultural change many clinicians find it very hard to stay long term.

This is why I am supporting the CDU- Menzies School of Medicine.

We need a local medical school that is governed by local experts, including Aboriginal health and education leaders, and supported by all level of governments to grow our own.

The CDU-Menzies School of Medicine board has agreed to ensure the medical program has the right entry-level courses to ensure our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students gain the support and assistance in preparing them for the medical program.

We will ensure that all students have access to additional learning opportunities, that will be led by our GPs, nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers and experienced chief executive officers from the Aboriginal community-controlled health sector.

The board has a shared vision for the health system in the NT, that includes primary health care, hospitals and specialist outreach medical services that provide our health workforce with work opportunities that are exciting, challenging, rewarding and, most importantly, connected to ensure we have an effective and efficient health system that will support us into the future.

A local medical school that grows its own workforce is a critical cog in making this happen.

The challenges we face with Indigenous health in the Northern Territory are many, and include high rates of chronic disease and the prevalence of some diseases, such as rheumatic heart disease, which should not be found in a modern first world country such as Australia.

These statistics are mirrored in unacceptably high rates of entrenched disadvantage, poor housing, education and poverty in our communities that are the drivers of the health statistics we see – the social determinants of health.

Our health workforce must be equipped to understand the complex environment and cultural sensitivities of the communities in which they work and rise to the unique challenges that this brings to providing quality health care.

That is why we need our own people providing services to our communities. I am greatly encouraged by the commitment of the School of Medicine in seeking to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into medicine and into the diverse health professions of a modern, multi-disciplinary health service.

I am excited by the opportunity to contribute to the growth of this vision as part of the board and to use my skills, experience and passion to help nurture the next generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals.

**JOHN PATERSON IS THE CO-CHAIRMAN OF THE CDU MENZIES SCHOOL OF MEDICINE STRATEGIC BOARD AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE OF THE ABORIGINAL MEDICAL SERVICES ALLIANCE NT (AMSANT).**