

Australian  
Indigenous  
Psychology  
Education  
Project  
(AIPEP)

# Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students

*We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of lands and waters throughout Australia, and pay respect to Elders both past and present. We recognise the importance of continued connection to culture, country and community to the health, social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.*

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Artwork by Alta Winmar 2013



Australian  
Indigenous  
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(AIPEP)



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# Table of contents

List of acronyms.....	3
Note on terminology.....	3
Table of contents.....	4
Executive summary.....	5
Statement of commitment.....	7
Section 1: Introduction.....	9
Mission .....	9
Aim .....	9
Objective.....	10
Rationale .....	10
Recruitment, retention and graduation research.....	11
Section 2: Pedagogical principles.....	13
Section 3: Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students .....	14
Section 4: Critical Factors for Increasing Recruitment, Retention and Graduation.....	16
Section 5: Other considerations .....	22
Recruitment for ‘merit’ .....	22
Moving beyond retention ‘in spite of the system’ .....	22
Creating the dream; highlighting the potential.....	22
Inspiration and desperation.....	23
Responsibility and accountability.....	23
Monitoring and evaluation .....	24
Section 6: References .....	25
Note on implementation and review.....	30



## List of acronyms

AIPA	Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association
AIPEP	Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project
APAC	Australian Psychology Accreditation Council
APS	Australian Psychological Society
ATSIHCF	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework
HoDSPA	Heads of Departments and Schools of Psychology Association
NHMRC	National Health and Medical Research Council
NRC	National Reference Committee
PsyBA	Psychology Board of Australia
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WIL	Work Integrated Learning

## Note on terminology

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	Refers to the 230 or more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and clans, which are autonomous and sovereign nations.
Indigenous	Refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Indigenous peoples, such as Maori in Aotearoa/New Zealand or First Nations peoples in Canada.
People	Refers to human beings in general or considered collectively, and interchangeable as the plural of persons.
Peoples	Refers to “distinct human groups with their own social structures who are linked by a common identity, common customs, and collective interests” (APS, 2007). In the context of this report, the term ‘peoples’ is used to emphasise that there are multiple nations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within Australia, each with their own unique sets of laws, cultures, languages and traditions. It is inappropriate to homogenise these as a single cultural group.
Indigenous governance	Refers to the distinctly different governance models that are based on Indigenous peoples’ cultural values, traditions, rules and social systems. Within mainstream structures, this is about ensuring that Indigenous views are heard and enacted. This can be undertaken by empowering Indigenous leaders, creating safe places where Indigenous directions and advice on relevant matters are respected, supported and given precedence.

## Acknowledgements

The AIPEP Team would like to acknowledge the many contributors to the Project, including research participants, subscribers to the AIPEP mailing list, members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students Network (ATSIPSN) and participants at conference presentations and workshops. In particular we would like to acknowledge our major community partner, the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA), and members of the following groups:

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## AIPEP artwork

### About the artist

Alta Winmar is a Balladong/Koreng Noongar woman living in Perth, Western Australia. She is a Noongar artist who has exhibited works in Western Australia and art pieces in other parts of the world. Alta is a proud Noongar Yorga (woman).

An artist for many years, Alta now works with the Sister Kate's Home Kids Aboriginal Corporation, and connects art with healing. She has reconnected further with her Noongar culture through community programs, and is focusing on cultural healing and art as a great tool which also helps children with their cultural identity. Alta has found that, through the arts, Aboriginal people have the opportunities to heal.

### Learning circles

This art represents life, learning and acquiring and passing down knowledge.

The centre image is a tree showing the cycles of life with many branches of people coming together, connecting to each other, mother land, sea, and sky above. The flowers are the outcomes of people from many areas coming together in peace to talk, think and share knowledges. The cycles of life hold us, the people, all the animals, all the plants, the living earth, the seas and the sky together and throughout time. The cycles of life hold all living things together from the past to now in the present, and into the future.



It is through the cycles of life and understanding that a small ripple from a centre moves through, connects, and is absorbed like knowledge is acquired, to be shared for the growth of all mankind.

## Executive summary

The Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) mission is to:

- Contribute to closing the gap between the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples
- Build a more sustainable and equitable society by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in psychology education and training.

Aims	Outcome Papers
1. Indigenous knowledge and content in undergraduate and postgraduate psychology training	• AIPEP Curriculum Framework
2. Recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students	• AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students
3. Graduate and professional development of workforce capabilities required for appropriate and effective work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	• AIPEP Workforce Capabilities Framework

Collectively, the AIPEP outcome papers provide a template for meeting the standards set out by the Australian Psychology Accreditation Council (APAC), workforce competencies specified by the Psychology Board of Australia (PsyBA) and ethical obligations stipulated by Australian Psychological Society (APS), and will contribute to:

- Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practising psychologists
- Culturally responsive psychological services
- Closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-Indigenous people's health, education, employment and economic status.

## Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students

The objective of the AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students is to provide evidence-based strategies to increase the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students in accredited undergraduate and postgraduate programs.

The Guidelines are divided into five sections

<b>1. Introduction</b>	Section 1 outlines the goal, aim and rationale for the Guidelines, and provides a context of research in the area.
<b>2. Pedagogical Principles</b>	Section 2 sets out 12 pedagogical principles relevant to recruitment, retention and graduation of students.
<b>3. Recruitment, Retention and Graduation Guidelines</b>	Section 3 sets out key guidelines for increasing the enrolment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students.
<b>4. Critical Factors for Increasing Recruitment, Retention and Graduation</b>	Section 4 provides further information on critical factors central to successful recruitment, retention and graduation strategies.
<b>5. Other Considerations</b>	Section 5 provides a discussion of a number of important areas including merit-based selection, accountability, monitoring and evaluation.
<b>6. References</b>	Section 6 lists the references cited throughout the guidelines.

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students are supplemented by the AIPEP Resources Database which is located at [www.IndigenousPsychEd.org.au](http://www.IndigenousPsychEd.org.au). The database contains a range of resources such as journal articles, books, chapters, news items, videos, podcasts, and academic units of study. The database is a PsyBA recommended resource for those sitting the National Psychology Exam.

The AIPEP project team and national reference committee are delighted to share these research findings and outcome papers in the hope they will assist in the delivery of better psychology education and training, with a view to helping close the gap in health outcomes.



## Statement of commitment

*We acknowledge the Traditional custodians of the land and waters of Australia and pay our respects to Elders past, present and future.*

We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the First Nations People of Australia and the traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waters. We recognise the strength, resilience and value of the oldest living, continuous cultures of the world, their languages and spiritual relationships with the land and waters.

This Statement of Commitment is an acknowledgement of the strength, longevity and richness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges, and of their important place in understanding and mitigating the contemporary challenges the world faces, including climate change and human co-operation. We acknowledge our profession's part in past practices and policies which have negatively impacted on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We undertake a commitment to take collaborative action as a profession and a discipline to play our part in addressing the mental health gap and preventing future harm.

This Commitment builds on the following documents of particular relevance to psychology:

- *Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) Statement of Apology and Commitment to the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal Children (1997)*
- *The Boatshed Racism Roundtable Declaration (2009)*
- *APS Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) (2012)*
- *Allied Health – Statement of Intent to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Wellbeing (2014)*
- *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration (2015)*
- *APS Ethical Guidelines for the Provision of Psychological Services for, and the Conduct of Research with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (2016)*

We recognise that the mental health burden carried by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is disproportionate to representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Australian population. Many barriers exist to Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander peoples' early access to health and wellbeing services. The objectives of the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) – increasing Indigenous knowledges and content in undergraduate and postgraduate psychology training, the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students, and improvement in the competencies of psychologists in the workplace – are in the national interest.

Psychology involves the exploration of human thinking and behaviour and the application of

this understanding to support problem solving at a personal, community, organisational and societal level. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges are valuable to psychology and can enhance our knowledge, understanding, skills and outcomes. We recognise that cultural competencies and the implementation of anti-racism strategies, within professional training and in workplaces, are fundamental to psychology as a discipline and profession, and commit to continue the work of AIPEP through respectful partnership, collaboration and leadership.

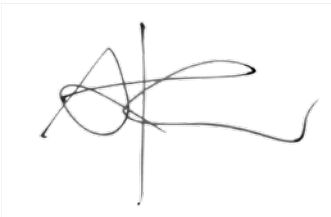
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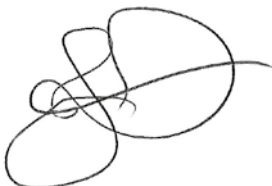
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## Section 1: Introduction

The Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) was funded by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT)<sup>1</sup>, with support from the Australian Psychological Society (APS), to develop frameworks, strategies and recommendations to increase the capability of psychology graduates to work appropriately and effectively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in psychology degrees. This three-year project (2013-2016) emerged in recognition of psychology's vital role and responsibilities to address the mental health crisis facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and the detriment to psychology as a discipline and profession through the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and participation.

AIPEP involved a multi-pronged research approach that gathered information, insights and experiences from a range of key stakeholders and data sources in order to inform the development of guidelines, recommendations for increasing participation and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in psychology programs, best practice examples and professional development. AIPEP was informed by a multi-disciplinary national reference committee and guided by Indigenous governance, values and partnerships.

In response to its research findings AIPEP produced three key outcome documents to provide guidance and direction for future action:

- AIPEP Curriculum Framework
- AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students
- AIPEP Workforce Capabilities Framework

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students have been developed to support higher education institutions providing psychology training programs to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students enrolling and completing psychology training with particular focus on the training required for registration. The most appropriate and effective approaches taken by each institution and school of department will be dependent on the needs and local context of both the institution and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This document therefore establishes core principles and provides illustrative examples from the AIPEP research.

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students recognise that the development of cultural responsiveness and competencies relevant to the effective and appropriate recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students is an ongoing journey rather than a defined destination. It therefore serves as a guide for training providers and educators on how to develop innovative, flexible and reflexive approaches that are based on respect and guided by and accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### Mission

The mission of AIPEP is to:

- Contribute to closing the gap between the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples
- Build a more sustainable and equitable society by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's participation in psychology education and training.

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<sup>1</sup> The OLT ceased on the 30 June 2016; the Australian Government Department of Education and Training continued to support the project through the Promotion of Excellence in Learning and Teaching in Higher Education program.

## Aim

The specific aims of AIPEP are to increase:

- Indigenous knowledges and content in undergraduate and postgraduate psychology training
- Recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students
- Graduate and professional development of workforce capabilities required for appropriate and effective work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Objective

The objective of the AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students is to

*provide evidence-based strategies to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students in accredited undergraduate and postgraduate programs.*

This provides a template for meeting the standards set out by APAC, workforce competencies specified by PsyBA and ethical obligations stipulated by the APS *Code of Ethics* and *Ethical Guidelines*.

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students will contribute to:

- Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander practising psychologists
- Culturally responsive psychological services

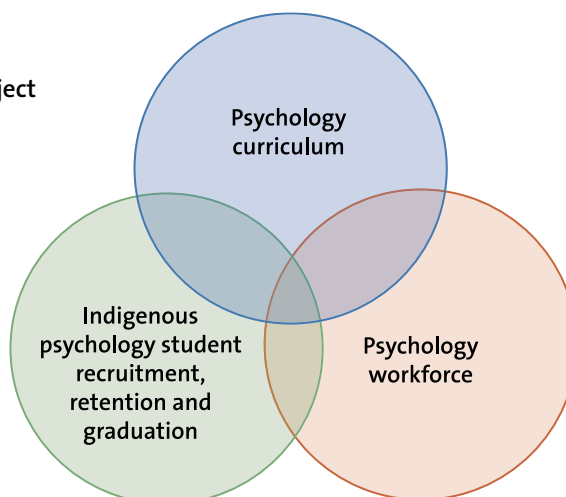
- Closing the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous education, employment and economic status.

## Rationale

The mental health crisis facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is well documented. It is reflected in an overall suicide rate twice that of non-Indigenous people, and more than twice the rate of self-reported high and very high levels of psychological distress (Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2015). This crisis is further exacerbated by the severe under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the profession of psychology and the dearth of cultural responsiveness in psychology education and training programs.

AIPEP recognises that there are three core areas through which the profession of psychology can help to address this gap: through the development of the psychology undergraduate and postgraduate curriculum; through the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students; and through the graduate and professional development of workforce capabilities required for appropriate and effective work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. AIPEP findings show that all three areas, and their interconnected elements need to be addressed to achieve sustainable change and outcomes. In combination, the three outcome reports offer a complete framework for increasing Indigenous participation and graduation and for ensuring that the psychology workforce can respond in culturally appropriate ways to the health and education needs of Indigenous clients and communities. This is illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1. The intersecting focus areas of the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project**





While psychology training program figures are not yet available, national higher education figures suggest that Indigenous representation in psychology training programs is well below population parity of three percent (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012).

Psychology as a discipline and profession therefore has much work to do to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students in order to address this current under-representation. Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in psychology also addresses participation concerns raised in the Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples (Behrendt, Larkin, Griew, & Kelly, 2012) and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students are a critical aspect of the AIPEP outcomes as they recognise the:

- specific knowledge, skills, and values required of all psychologists who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in mainstream and Indigenous services
- particular strengths and capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists to work with their peoples
- impact on the profession in relation to two-way knowledge sharing, education and cultural consultation
- impact of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples participation in higher education on the employment, health and wellbeing outcomes of individuals and communities.

## Recruitment, retention and graduation research

Since the mid-1990s, research into the recruitment and retention of students across the demographic spectrum has been prolific (Cushman, 1998; Darlaston-Jones, 2005; Darlaston-Jones et al., 2003 a, b; DETYA, 1997; Dobson, 1999; Evans & Farley, 1998; Evans & Peel, 1999; Gillespie & Noble, 1992; Scott, Burns, & Cooney, 1996; Sharma, Dobson, & Haydon, 1998; Tinto, 1993; White & Moseley, 1995; Yorke, 1999). Consequently, there is a wealth of knowledge about the types of strategies needed to support students as they transition into and through the higher education journey. Much of this literature has been founded on an acculturation framework that assimilates students to the existing norms and culture of higher education (Berry, 1980; Darlaston-Jones, 2005). This in turn can lead to dissatisfaction and attrition, especially among students from minority and equity group backgrounds (for example, women, students with disabilities, students from non-English speaking backgrounds and international students). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students not only represent a minority in Australian society but continue to experience the effects of colonisation (Behrendt, et al. 2012; Biddle & Cameron, 2012; Bunda, Zipin, & Brennan, 2012). So while there are some commonalities between the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students as they navigate the complexities of higher education, these experiences are intensified for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and therefore require additional consideration.

More recent research shows that a range of strategies are being employed by higher education institutions and individual faculties and disciplines to provide specific support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (Bessarab, Green, Jones, Stratton, Brown, Zubrzycki, 2014; Kinnane, Wilks, Wilson, Hughes & Thomas, 2014). These strategies include pre-entry initiatives, support and mentoring throughout the journey as well as curriculum

changes. They also include alternate entry pathways – for example, not using ATAR results – and have a frequent emphasis on ‘upskilling’ potential students via bridging programs, often provided by Indigenous Education Centres (IEC). While important, these strategies often employ a ‘deficit reduction’ tone that may reinforce negative stereotypes about ‘merit’ rather than recognising both the social, cultural, economic and political barriers experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and the specific skills and knowledges they bring to the program that can benefit their peers, the profession and, ultimately, the community in which they will work (Barney, 2016).

Addressing these recruitment and retention challenges requires multifaceted responses that transcend the discipline to include the whole

institution and which address the underlying culture of the higher education institution (Department of Health, 2014; Oliver, Grote, Rochecouste, & Dann, 2015). This includes, but is not limited to, policies that position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention as a specific priority, developing and requiring staff to engage with cultural responsiveness training, offering support services through IECs, engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Elders, and employing targeted engagement with schools and communities to encourage groups of students to enter higher education and study at the same time providing a support structure through the peer network generated by cohort recruitment (West, Usher, Foster & Stewart, 2014).

## Section 2. Pedagogical principles

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students are founded on a number of principles which position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as sovereign First Nations. The Guidelines acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced disproportionate disadvantage as a direct result of Australia's colonial history and the resultant contemporary normative assumptions and practices. The Guidelines also recognise the 60,000 years of continuing cultural history and the value of this history and knowledge in health promotion and treatment strategies.

Twelve pedagogical principles underpin the AIPEP Curriculum Framework and the Workforce Capabilities Framework:

The principles that are critical to this work are:

- 1. Status:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised as the First Nations of Australia and are accorded the respect and dignity associated with this status. This is a key element of the social justice foundation to which psychology can contribute. By affording Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians the status that was denied to them as a result of the flawed application of Terra Nullius<sup>2</sup>, it serves as both a symbolic and substantive act of reconciliation.
- 2. Rights:** As First Nations peoples, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a right to receive services situated within their cultural realities and needs, as stipulated by the United Nations Declarations on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) (United Nations, 2008).
- 3. Potential:** Education is fundamental to the development of human potential, full participation in society and full enjoyment of most other human rights.
- 4. Knowledges:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges are valuable to the profession and practice of psychology. The discipline and profession can be enhanced by incorporating different cultural norms and practices into the corpus of psychological knowledge and theory which will enhance its applicability and relevance.
- 5. Paradigms:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing relies on an ecological and holistic paradigm, where community development, policy, history, society, economics and other social determinants of health are understood and articulated by health professional graduates (Phillips, 2015).
- 6. Responsibilities:** The knowledge, skills and values to work effectively and appropriately with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be built across all areas of the psychology workforce to ensure both effective clinical care and the recognition and incorporation of these capabilities into areas such as policy, management, program development, health promotion and education, all of which have direct and significant impacts on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- 7. The Learning Journey:** Knowledge and skills must be built over time both with psychology training and within the workforce. Different professionals will be at different stages of their own development and some will be more open to different approaches than others. Consequently, psychology professionals need time to develop and integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content into their existing worldviews. This needs to be managed with care and sensitivity and without judgment in a safe and supportive environment.

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<sup>2</sup> Terra Nullius is a Latin expression meaning 'land belonging to no one'. In 1770 Captain James claimed possession of the East Coast of Australia for Britain under the doctrine of 'terra nullius'. Official and public acceptance of terra nullius continued until the 1992 Mabo judgment.

8. **Strategy:** An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education strategy should be embedded by relevant stakeholders across the school, institution or sector via a program-centred approach through strategic planning, implementation, and evaluation. In this way an integrated educational experience is developed that contests the dominant Western paradigm. At the same time it identifies the associated power and privilege inherited by non-Indigenous Australians that is the corollary of constructing the 'other' in a deficit space. This in turn challenges, and potentially disrupts, the entrenched stereotypes associated with Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships.
9. **Stepped Curricula:** Curriculum change involves both vertical and horizontal embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and pedagogies. Content should be embedded vertically across the entire degree structure (at undergraduate and postgraduate levels); but also horizontally into units of study (subjects and courses) at the same level. A program-centred approach allows different emphases and foci to be explored in a relevant and meaningful manner while ensuring an integrated understanding and purpose.
10. **Reflexivity:** The ability to provide culturally responsive services is preceded by an understanding of one's own identity as a cultural being. The capacity of all graduates to understand their own cultural identity relevant to that of another person or group is a foundation skill required in every aspect of personal and professional life. The cultural lens through which a person understands her or his context is essential to the interpretation of, and responses to, the world.
11. **Diversity:** Psychology and psychologists recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the manner in which social and emotional wellbeing of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians are enhanced by Indigenous cultures and diversity.
12. **Experiential Learning:** Practical experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and services is fundamental to the building of professional capabilities required of all psychology graduates. Such opportunities also build the relevance of the psychology curriculum and profession for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, subsequently influencing the recruitment and retention of Indigenous psychology students.



## Section 3. Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students

The AIPEP Guidelines for Increasing the Recruitment, Retention and Graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Students have been built using the findings of the AIPEP research and recommendations of previous work in health-related disciplines (for example, AIDA, 2015; Minniecon & Kong, 2005; National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, 2008). The Guidelines establish a shared understanding of the value and importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' participation in the discipline and practice of psychology, recognise the current under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in psychology programs and the need to increase participation, retention and graduation for the benefit of individual students, psychology training, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, and psychological outcomes of all Australians.

AIPEP recognises that 'success' in higher education can mean different things to each student and does not necessarily equate only with graduation. Psychology students may not complete the requirements of a psychology major or possibly not graduate from an undergraduate fourth year, or higher program and yet go on to important, meaningful and successful careers and lives which may or may not be in the social and emotional wellbeing field. In fact, research has found that the employment outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students are equal to (Li, 2014) or better (Edwards & Coates, 2011) than their non-Indigenous peers. By focusing on graduation AIPEP is by no means suggesting that those who do not graduate have 'failed'. Graduation is seen as one of many ways to succeed. However, to reach the aim of increasing the number of qualified psychologists it is important that the discipline and profession of psychology focus on increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres

Strait Islander students who graduate from undergraduate and postgraduate programs. While obviously not the only indicator, graduation can also be seen as a measure of the success of retention strategies, including the cultural relevance of programs, the cultural safety of the program, school and higher education institution, and the cultural, social and academic support of students.

All Australian psychology departments and schools and principal stakeholders (including accreditation, regulation and professional membership organisations) have a social responsibility to articulate and implement their commitment to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education and social and emotional wellbeing. They should therefore adopt the following guiding principles:

- 1. Prioritise:** Make recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students a priority, and specifically mention this in mission and strategy documents
- 2. Leadership:** Show leadership to the wider higher education community by ensuring Indigenous knowledges are incorporated into the curriculum
- 3. Equity:** Employ equity strategies to explicitly recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students for their potential
- 4. Places:** Provide specific places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at undergraduate, fourth year, and postgraduate levels
- 5. Scholarships:** Provide scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at undergraduate, fourth year, and postgraduate levels

6. **Cultural safety:** Ensure cultural safety in the physical environments, teaching and academic staff body, and other associated environments including recruitment and selection procedures, support structures, curriculum, pedagogy, and communications
7. **Indigenous communities and organisations as strategic partners:** Value and engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities (and students where possible and appropriate<sup>3</sup>) in the business of psychology departments and schools, including (but not limited to):
  - the development, implementation and evaluation of curriculum, assessment, pedagogy, selection, induction, outreach, and work integrated learning
  - the development and maintenance of respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and community representatives to assist with recruitment pathways, student support, engagement with community cultural activities, curriculum and governance.
8. **Relationships with IECs:** Develop and maintain respectful relationships with IECs
9. **Vocational pathways:** Develop, implement and evaluate strategies to engage with schools and vocational training to create pathways, awareness and relationships that lead to higher education
10. **Sustainability:** Ensure that all strategies to enhance the recruitment, retention, and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students are comprehensive, long term, sustainable, appropriately resourced, integrative and evaluated.

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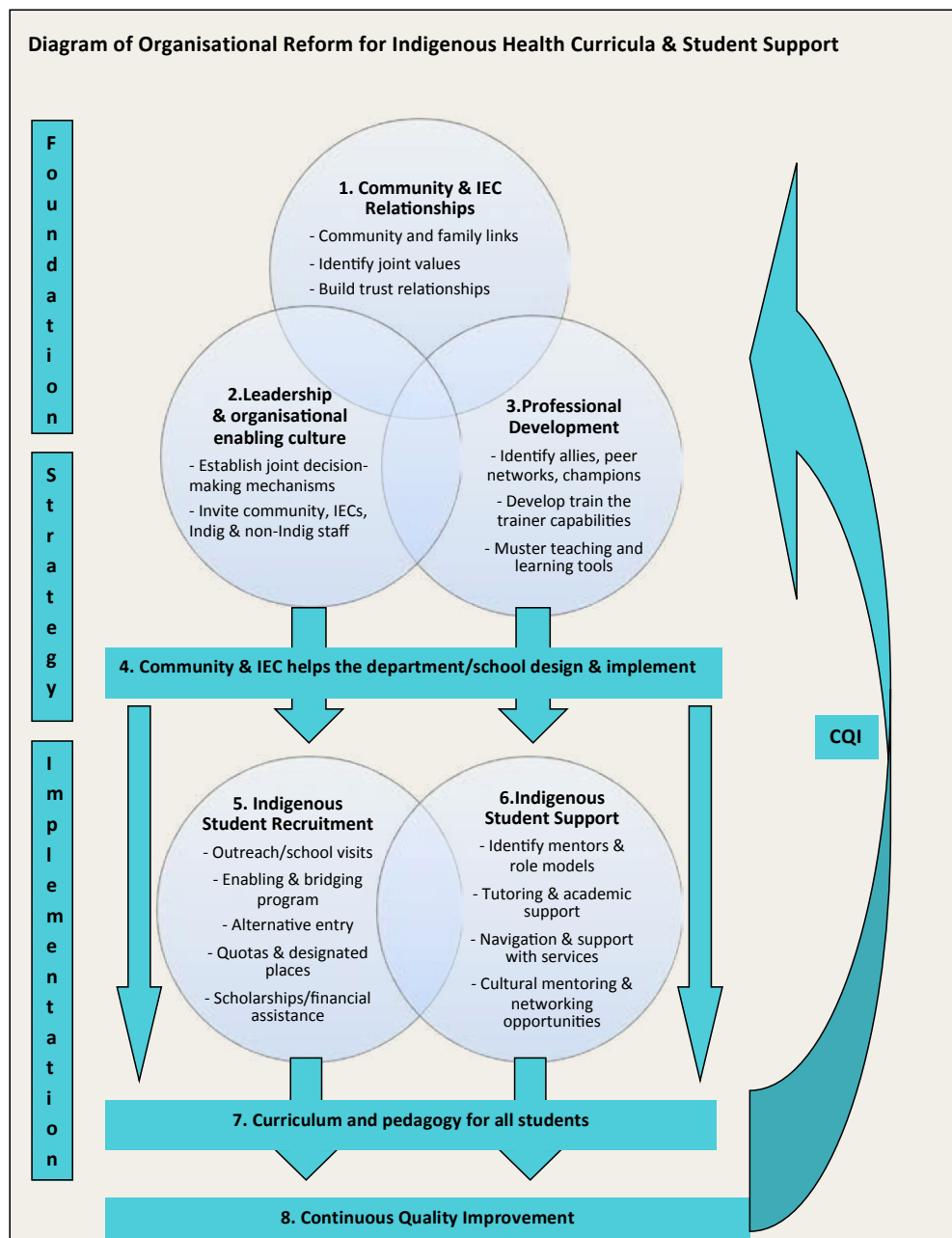
<sup>3</sup> Students should be included appropriately in the formal decision-making and business processes of schools/departments. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students should not, however, be expected to represent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples or knowledges, particularly in the classroom and particularly without prior discussion.

## Section 4. Critical Factors for Increasing Recruitment, Retention and Graduation

This section outlines critical factors for recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Figure 2 offers a visual representation of the three elements of curriculum, recruitment strategies and workforce outcomes within a continuous quality improvement (CQI) cycle.

Table 1 expands on these critical factors by providing an explanation of the role of each factor as well as, where appropriate, specific suggestions and strategies for engaging and supporting students to graduation.

**Figure 2. Organisational reform for Indigenous health curricula and student support**



**Table 1. Critical Factors for increasing the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students**

Critical Factors	Explanation
Community partnerships	Building relationships with communities and organisations offers potential for shared learning to occur. Students at undergraduate and postgraduate level have the chance to directly assist an organisation or community group in many diverse ways while at the same time being exposed to a knowledge system and experiences that they might not otherwise have access to.
Organisational leadership and enabling culture	<p>Leadership at the institutional, faculty and school or department level, is fundamental to the creation of a culturally safe enabling culture in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and knowledges are valued and supported. Senior ownership and appropriate accountability for the creation and maintenance of an inclusive and culturally appropriate environment and curriculum has flow-on effects within the organisational hierarchy. Leadership provides both strategic and practice facilitators for individuals and teams to make change. Leaders should ensure the organisation's commitments and rationale in this area are communicated to all levels of staff, particularly senior middle managers (for example, curriculum, year and subject coordinators).</p> <p>Conversely, where leadership is not present, action may be ad hoc and dependent on individual champions.</p>
Mentors and role models	<p>Mentors and role models, whether formal or informal, provide a range of supports for the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students.</p> <p>A mentor or role model is a person to identify with who:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• illustrates the education and career possibilities available to students</li> <li>• believes in the student's ability and capacity to succeed</li> <li>• can provide a cultural perspective, support, or affirmation related to academic or social matters</li> <li>• can provide academic or cultural supervision for research or work integrated learning experiences</li> <li>• can support key transitions such as entry into study, between undergraduate and postgraduate levels and registration</li> <li>• can provide links to networks and local community (recognising that not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students will be from or familiar with the local community).</li> </ul>



<p><b>Mentors and role models</b> <i>continued</i></p>	<p>Mentors and role models may be:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander or non-Indigenous</li> <li>• Within or external to the discipline</li> <li>• Within or external to the institution.</li> </ul> <p>It is critical to define the purpose of the mentoring relationship and identify appropriate matches between students and their mentor or role model. It may be appropriate for students to have multiple mentors and role models to fill differing needs.</p> <p>The under-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in higher education institutions means that it is critical that, when establishing formal or informal mentoring roles, the mentor's workload is taken into consideration. It is also important to reach outside the discipline and institution to develop ongoing relationships with community representatives, professional associations (for example, Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA) and Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA)), and Indigenous services who may provide mentoring or role modelling to students.</p>
<p><b>Tutoring and academic support</b></p>	<p>While some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are well prepared academically for higher education, the availability of quality tutoring and academic support remains a critical factor in the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Such support provides:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Recognition of skills and capacity to build on existing strengths</li> <li>• Identify areas for development</li> <li>• Coaching on academic writing and presentation styles, and related planning and preparation.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Scholarships and financial assistance</b></p>	<p>Financial stresses are cited by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a factor in their decisions to defer or leave higher education before graduation. They are also critical in decision making around continuation of study to postgraduate level. Financial assistance is therefore a critical factor in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' participation and success in psychology.</p> <p>Financial assistance may take the form of, for example:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• scholarships and bursaries (generic and Indigenous specific)</li> <li>• government assistance programs (for example, AbStudy)</li> <li>• employment programs (for example, cadetships, traineeships and on-campus employment)</li> <li>• affordable housing or childcare (on-site or off-site)</li> <li>• conference attendance support</li> <li>• travel support for intensive programs</li> <li>• support with books, computers and software.</li> </ul> <p>The availability of these options and opportunities must also be promoted to students, and support provided with application procedures and compliance requirements.</p>

<b>Curriculum and pedagogy</b>	<p>The incorporation of Indigenous knowledges, values, and traditions in the curriculum in an appropriate and ongoing manner is critical in building relevance and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Curriculum and pedagogy should use Indigenous research and theory and incorporate co-teaching or facilitation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander educators, Elders and community members.</p> <p>Further information on curriculum and pedagogy is provided in the AIPEP Curriculum Framework.</p>
<b>Community and family links</b>	<p>Connecting with local and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities creates a number of important two-way relationships as well as increasing the relevance and visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and culture within the curriculum and learning environment. In particular:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building two-way knowledge sharing between psychology and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities</li> <li>• raising awareness of the relevance of psychology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and building trust that the program will offer cultural safety for students.</li> </ul> <p>It is critical that connections and respectful relationships are made with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and traditional ownership and cultural protocols are explicitly acknowledged and respected. Understanding the colonisation history of the local area will inform all students' learning as well as their reflections on past and current policy, practice and the resulting impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.</p> <p>Links with local community are also of significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from other areas, enabling them to engage respectfully with local Elders and organisations, access services and adhere to local protocols and traditions.</p>
<b>Peer networks</b>	<p>Peer networks of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students offer, most critically, cultural support and safety for students who may be (or perceive themselves to be) the only Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander student in their higher education program. Peer networks may operate across different year levels within psychology, within other health disciplines, or across the institution as a whole. As part of AIPEP a network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students from across Australia (ATSIPSN) has been established using the social networking forum, LinkedIn. ATSIPSN has created a valuable opportunity for students to connect and share information of relevance.</p> <p>It is also important to link Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with professional associations and representative bodies such as AIPA and IAHA, particularly when considering further study options or nearing graduation.</p>

<b>IEC relationships</b>	<p>Building respectful relationships with the IECs offers multiple benefits for schools of psychology, including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Opportunities for cultural exchange that might be the first interaction that many non-Indigenous students and staff have with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples</li> <li>• Opportunities to consider broader higher education and institutional investments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community engagement (including in recruitment, retention and support)</li> <li>• Cross disciplinary collaboration in research and teaching</li> <li>• Mentoring for staff and students</li> <li>• Demonstration of reconciliation in action.</li> </ul>
<b>Outreach and school visits</b>	<p>Providing students and their families with the chance to view higher education as a viable option is essential to recruitment and retention. Outreach:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• offers opportunities to build sustainable relationships</li> <li>• provides knowledge exchange between the higher education institution and the community</li> <li>• allows students to see the value of higher education and of psychology specifically</li> <li>• offers opportunities for Elders and others to contribute to the education of psychology students</li> <li>• provides learning opportunities for students and staff.</li> </ul> <p>Building long term mutually beneficial relationships is a necessary foundation for sustainable reconciliation.</p>
<b>Enabling and bridging program</b>	<p>Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students do not complete the upper years of high school. For many in regional or remote areas, upper year secondary education requires that they travel long distances every day or relocate to larger urban centres for residential school. For some, neither option is viable for a range of economic, social and cultural reasons. Some students leave school early to care for other family members or because they feel isolated at school. For these and a host of other reasons some students enter higher education via bridging programs that aim to prepare them academically to meet the requirements of higher education.</p> <p>As is the case for many non-Indigenous students entering through alternate pathways, it can be challenging to adjust to the new environment. It is, therefore, essential to provide support and mentoring. It is also important that staff members are encouraged to view students coming into the higher education context through pathways other than ATAR as equally capable as those entering through traditional pathways (McNaught, 2011).</p>

<b>Alternative entry</b>	<p>Recognising that life skills and experience in other domains might provide valuable foundational knowledge for higher education study offers another option for entry into higher education. Many higher education institutions now accept and encourage entry by portfolio. This offers another pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to achieve admission. Students with employment and life skills should be encouraged to view this as beneficial and their prior learning and experience appropriately recognised.</p>
<b>Quotas and designated places</b>	<p>An 'open door' admissions policy where every interested Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student is offered a place would be desirable. At minimum, specific places should be reserved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students at undergraduate, fourth year, and postgraduate levels of study on the basis of the unique contribution that they can make to the psychology program and to the higher education institution. This form of affirmative action is needed to redress the social and economic disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. Explicitly recruiting students on the basis of their potential and the fact that they bring unique knowledge and perspectives that can enhance and benefit psychology will do much to shift the perceptions of deficit that persist. However, it is equally important that this not be a tokenistic gesture with one or two students then bearing the burden of being the voice on all matters Indigenous. Ideally, cohort recruitment strategies would ensure that groups of students progress through psychology at all levels, contributing to a sense of cultural safety.</p>



## Section 5. Other considerations

### Recruitment for ‘merit’

One of the major challenges for higher education institutions is that, for a range of reasons, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people choose not to disclose their heritage (Kinnane et al., 2014). This was discussed by a number of AIPEP research participants as a protective mechanism to avoid acts of discrimination, but it also meant that students were protected against their own self-doubt in relation to their cultural background.

*...we go, “Oh, did they just give that to me because I’m Aboriginal?”...and feeling like a fraud because of that. And ... they’re gonna ... unmask me as a fraud”. You know, I’m kind of going against that stereotype of Aboriginal people. (Indigenous psychologist, A11)*

Equity strategies that recruit for Indigeneity as a purposeful act can go a long way to removing this anxiety. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are contributing important and valuable knowledges and experiences to the school or department, educational context, and profession, and are therefore sought after and highly valued. When such strategies are accompanied by cultural responsiveness training for staff, and the inclusion of Indigenous knowledges in the curriculum, it demonstrates a commitment to engagement beyond the level of social desirability and becomes a sustainable process towards equity.

### Moving beyond retention ‘in spite of the system’

Research suggests that completion of a degree might not necessarily relate to retention but rather to persistence ‘in spite of the system’ (Darlaston-Jones, 2005). This illustrates the focus needed on innovative, flexible and reflexive retention and graduation, as well as recruitment, strategies.

One example of innovation raised in the AIPEP research suggests that a combined approach from the school, faculty, and IEC can be particularly effective.

*One of the things we’ve done in the last three years which has been really effective is we’ve set up what we call faculty working booths for Indigenous education in each faculty. And every school has to send a champion for their Indigenous students to that group, even if they don’t have any Indigenous students. It’s chaired by me with the Associate Dean Academic in each faculty so it’s about 10 or 15 people depending on the faculty. And what we’ve been doing is looking at their Indigenous students. Our initial realisation was that they didn’t even know if they had any Indigenous students so we’ve made the data available to them. We let them know who their students are... and it’s allowed us to do things like set up action plans for individual students. (IEC participant, D1)*

### Creating the dream; highlighting the potential

For high school students to see higher education as a viable post-secondary option they need to receive messages of encouragement from multiple sources. For those students who are the first in their family to consider higher education it is particularly challenging to view this pathway as legitimate (O’Shea, May, & Stone, 2015). School careers advisors can be a key conduit into higher education for these school leavers. It is therefore critical that careers advisors undergo cultural responsiveness training to assist them to identify any latent bias they might unconsciously hold which may affect their advice to and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

It is also essential that higher education institutions provide effective and appropriate outreach to secondary schools. For example, psychology educators could build relationships with local secondary schools and communities and provide seminars to school psychology classes. Similarly, groups of secondary school students studying psychology could visit higher education campuses and attend lectures or tutorials in first year classes to experience the life of a higher education student. Several AIPEP participants mentioned such experiences as triggering their aspirations of higher education.

## Inspiration and desperation

Many of the AIPEP research participants spoke of entering higher education as mature aged students, often after several years in the workforce and frequently after direct contact with psychologists themselves. Sometimes these experiences were of psychologists inspiring a change of direction.

*I was looking for something to do and I worked at the CES and there were psychologists there, and they inspired me. (Indigenous psychologist, A11)*

At other times they saw psychologists struggling to find appropriate ways of responding to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients because the training they had received had not adequately prepared them for the context.

*...there needs to be a recognition that the Western paradigm is not the only paradigm ...[About] Aboriginal Australia, there is nothing. There is nothing that is culturally appropriate. There is nothing. (IEC participant, B3)*

*I can really relate to that, because I was working in disability support, and the psychologist would write these behaviour management plans, and I'd look at them and I'd say, "this isn't appropriate for the Indigenous ladies". So I would rewrite it and they'd say, "Oh yes, OK". And they'd take it away and rewrite it, and they would get all the credit for it. (Indigenous psychologist, A11)*

Ultimately the discipline and profession of psychology must seek to motivate student entry and retention through the potential that such inclusion offers. To achieve this, the discipline must recognise that Indigenous knowledges bring a beneficial dimension to the study of human behaviour and this should be translated into the knowledges and skills training provided to equip psychologists to work effectively and appropriately with diverse populations. While input and engagement are critical, it should not be the role of the Indigenous student to lead change in models of education or practice. Psychology must also demonstrate its commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

to address the inadequacies in training and the profession. Providing a range of entry pathways, and retention and graduation strategies, alongside culturally relevant curriculum and pedagogy are essential components to achieving equitable access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

## Responsibility and accountability

Overall responsibility for the implementation and success of these goals lies with every individual within the educational system; but there are specific roles and associated power that contribute to this individual responsibility. The education and training of psychology students and psychologists is overseen by APAC and PsyBA, both of whom have stated their commitment to these guidelines and the objectives of the project. Heads of Schools and Departments of Psychology Australia (HODSPA) and individual heads of schools also have a responsibility to know what content is taught and how it is taught within the programs that they oversee, as do course coordinators. These roles carry the power and responsibility to ensure that PsyBA capabilities and APAC standards are met in an authentic and rigorous manner. In addition, higher education institutions can ensure that the policies and procedures within the institution require authentic commitment to the principles entailed in increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation and graduation across the spectrum of courses and disciplines, but particularly in areas associated with addressing health and wellbeing inequities.

Specifically, these responsibilities might entail the following considerations:

### 1. Individual level

It is important that each person be consciously aware of his or her knowledge, beliefs and attitudes regarding Indigenous knowledges, the history and contemporary impact of colonisation and the consequences of systemic racism. This can be addressed via a range of strategies such as:

- a. (Re)education through cultural responsiveness workshops and events, as well as engaging in critical self-reflexivity

- b. Peer mentoring with more experienced educators
- c. Developing appropriate pedagogical practices through workshops, conferences and peer mentoring
- d. Engaging in peer review of class content and teaching practices
- e. Developing relationships with the IEC and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## 2. School level

Support and encouragement from the head of school and course coordinators can assist educators to develop appropriate and authentic teaching and learning content and practices, including:

- a. Building school level relationships with IEC and local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities
- b. Actively recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff
- c. Implementing appropriate cultural protocols in the school such as Acknowledgement or Welcome to Country at staff meetings, and encouraging staff and students to become self-aware of their role in reconciliation
- d. Supporting staff and students to engage with cultural responsiveness training (provided at the school level at no cost).

## 3. Higher education institutional level

Leadership is required to implement change within an organisational structure and it is important that this be done at both symbolic and substantive levels and that the messages associated with change be consistent and authentic. This can be done by:

- a. Developing and implementing higher education institution-wide cultural responsiveness training to be delivered by appropriate persons. This should ideally be a range of initiatives that start with basic knowledge and skill level and build over time to more challenging content so that staff capacity is increased
- b. Developing sustainable relationships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

- c. Creating an Indigenous advisory board to provide guidance on all decisions in relation to their potential impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, students and peoples
- d. Developing and applying appropriate cultural protocols authentically
- e. Developing equity recruitment programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and students
- f. Funding scholarships and bursaries to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to engage with higher education, including postgraduate and post-doctoral places.

These suggestions are not exhaustive and should be developed with the local context in mind and how this connects to the broader Australian society.

## Monitoring and evaluation

In order to ensure that strategies to increase the recruitment, retention and graduation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology students are effective, it is vital that monitoring and evaluation approaches be incorporated from the outset. In doing so it is clear to all stakeholders the intentions of the strategy and the manner in which success will be measured.

Monitoring and evaluation includes:

- Developing clear goals, objectives, targets and measurable outcomes
- Establishing accountability and reporting timeframes
- Monitoring both the implementation process and outcomes
- Seeking input from all stakeholders
- Developing recommendations for the revision and refinement of programs and initiatives.

In the context of psychology, adherence to training and education standards is monitored by APAC, with accreditation teams evaluating each site every five years. Schools and departments of psychology provide access to teaching material, assessments and exams and also to staff and students to generate a picture of how the APAC

Accreditation Standards for Psychology Programs are being met (APAC, 2010). Specific accreditation standards and criteria, with reference to these AIPEP Guidelines, should be developed and assessed to determine the degree to which the letter and spirit of these are being met in each department/school of psychology. As part of the revision of APAC standards (APAC 2016), new standards have been proposed in the July 2016 Proposed Accreditation Standards for Psychology Programs: Consultation Paper. Evidence guidelines, based on these standards, are expected to provide the specific criteria against which schools will be assessed (APAC, 2016). Appropriate training

of the assessors is therefore vital to ensure that assessors have the capacity to determine if the guidelines are being met and where greater supports might be required. AIPEP, AIPA and IAHA made a joint submission to the 2016 APAC consultation on accreditation standards and outlined recommendations for curriculum, pedagogy, assessment and accreditor training (Dudgeon et al., 2016). At the time of finalising these guidelines, approval of proposed standards is expected in 2016. The final version of these new standards will be available on the APAC website: [www.psychologycouncil.org.au](http://www.psychologycouncil.org.au).

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## Note on implementation and review

The AIPEP outcome papers were developed over an 18-month period. Several AIPEP project team members had developed and implemented curriculum modifications and recruitment strategies as part of their higher education institutions' curriculum development or Indigenous education strategy. This experience informed the documents, which were revised in response to extensive iterative consultation including with the AIPEP national reference committee, AIPA, HODSPA, participants

at AIPEP workshops and conference events, and psychology educator 'early adopters'. In terms of road testing the documents, AIPEP members have already used earlier drafts of these documents in supporting psychology educators, and a mechanism for ongoing comments from stakeholders has been put in place. The APS Indigenous Psychology Advisory Group (IPAG) will provide oversight on review of these documents, thus providing ongoing quality control.



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