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**Re:** Submission to the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA) on consultation for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board - Consultation Paper dated 21 November 2011

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

The HSUSA represents the interests of a diverse range of health practitioners and employees in public and private health and community service sectors. We represent members covering a broad range of skills including radiographers, pathologists, disability workers, administrative workers, mental health workers, kitchen workers, cleaners, aboriginal health care workers and personal care attendants. The essential purpose of the HSUSA is to represent the interests of members in the workforce to improve member outcomes and contribute to the ongoing improvement of health and community care policy, services, and facilities for clients.

## **2. WORKFORCE**

HSUSA members care for some of the most vulnerable members of the community in environments of high stress. Roles require not only technical specialist knowledge within the field but also empathy, concern and adherence to mandatory reporting requirements. Our members interact with their direct clients and also with family, friends, bureaucracy, police, and the broader community. Our research informs us that our members are passionate about the work they do and are attracted to the work because of the contribution they can make to the community. Our research also informs us that our Aboriginal Health Worker (AHW) members are concerned to ensure that impending national registration requirements do not disadvantage workers who at times have struggled to meet practitioner requirements established in other health professions who have long histories of social, education and political engagement in the community. Notwithstanding this concern, the HSUSA does not draw a distinction between levels of care and clinical responsibility to be exercised by AHWs. The AHW workforce is a specialist workforce established to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) people. It is an eclectic workforce made up of people with myriad life experiences who bring those learned experiences to their work. We note that issues regarding criminal history have been canvassed in previous consultations. In this regard we support the framework of a fair, transparent and open criminal history check however, reinforce other submissions noting the ATSI community's overrepresentation in the justice system. We submit that all circumstances regarding a person's history should be taken into account when considering registration.

### 3. NATIONAL ACCREDITATION

The HSUSA is strong supporter of national accreditation as a means of genuinely recognising the vast skills Aboriginal Health Workers bring to the indigenous and non-indigenous community. We support the grandfathering arrangements canvassed in previous consultations for workers subject of registration who have broad experience in the field but do not yet hold a qualification. We further note the paucity of accessible training opportunities in remote areas and look forward to working constructively with stakeholders to ensure AHWs are provided opportunities to participate in training and development to achieve relevant qualifications in the future.

In relation to the current round of consultations regarding;

- Advertising guidelines;
- Code of conduct for registered health practitioners; and
- Guidelines for mandatory notifications

we note the Board's acknowledgement that the above three codes and guidelines are '*...common across the 10 health profession that are currently regulated...*' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia, 21/11/11, pg.1). Whilst we are in broad agreement with these proposals we note that existing practice areas have long histories of political, educational, social and technological engagement with the community. In this regard we say the proposed guidelines and codes should be read in context of the roles and responsibilities of Aboriginal Health Workers.

We attach current classification structures for Aboriginal Health Workers from the current Award establishing the skills and responsibilities to be exercised by AHWs.

The HSUSA thanks the Board for the opportunity to make comment regarding the proposed national registration requirements for ATSI health practitioners.

Yours sincerely



Jorge Navas  
Branch Secretary  
9 January 2012

Enc.