

Expansion of the Indigenous nutrition workforce in Queensland Health

Amanda Lee, Dympna Leonard, Simone Lowson, Anita Groos, Christina Stubbs, Angela Simons, Deanne Minniecon, Queensland Health

Over the last 15 years there has been a concerted effort to increase the Indigenous nutrition workforce in Queensland. In 1994, Queensland Health funded the University of Queensland to develop the Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Food and Nutrition Strategy, which identified key areas for action including the establishment of an Indigenous-focused nutrition workforce. Funding to advance Indigenous health was secured in 1998, including the creation of two public health nutrition (Indigenous health) positions and two successful scholarships for Indigenous applicants to complete a Masters degree in community nutrition.

Eat Well Queensland 2002–2012 (EWQ), the Queensland Public Health Nutrition strategy developed by the inter-sectoral Queensland Public Health Forum, has been an invaluable tool for business planning and provided a framework for nutrition action to enhance nutritional status and prevent chronic disease in priority groups including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Five advanced health worker (nutrition) and three Indigenous nutrition promotion officer positions were funded under the Queensland Health Nutrition and Chronic Disease prevention package in 2002–03; job descriptions specified that these positions work on local implementation of EWQ.

From 2005–2009 the Queensland Strategy for Chronic Disease presented a further opportunity to extend the reach of evidence-based interventions through a dedicated Indigenous nutrition workforce. An additional 23 advanced health worker (nutrition) positions have been funded under this strategy, and are being recruited progressively. The majority of these positions will be located in non-government organisations.

Advanced health workers qualified in nutrition contribute greatly to the development and expansion of an appropriately skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nutrition workforce. However, there are currently no registered training organisations in Queensland that offer the Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care (Nutrition) qualification that is required by those working in such positions. In order to ensure that the Indigenous nutrition workforce has the relevant qualifications and skills for their job requirements, Queensland Health is funding a registered training organisation to deliver a Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care, Community Care (nutrition stream) to ten advanced health workers (nutrition promotion). This course will commence delivery in the 2007–08 financial year.