

Remote Area Health Corps uses innovative methods to attract and retain health professionals for remote Indigenous health work

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¹Remote Area Health Corps

Lisa Studdert is the General Manager of the Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) administered by Aspen Medical through an agreement with the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). RAHC was established with Federal Government funding to mobilise urban-based health professionals for short-term placements in remote and Indigenous primary health services in the Northern Territory. Dr Studdert previously worked with the Asian Development Bank (ADB) where she was a health specialist for six years, including three as the Head of Health Programs in Hanoi, Vietnam. With the ADB, Lisa led the development of projects and policy in the areas of health systems reform, provincial health infrastructure development, health financing, health workforce, HIV and AIDS and nutrition. Lisa has experience in health sector strategic planning and program management with the United Nation's World Food Programme, UNICEF and AusAID and was previously an advisor on public and Indigenous health issues to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Dr Michael Wooldridge. Lisa has a PhD in public health nutrition.

The Remote Area Health Corps (RAHC) is funded by the Federal Government as part of the Expanding Health Service Delivery Initiative for the Northern Territory (NT). RAHC recruits urban-based health professionals – GPs, RNs, allied and dental—for paid, short-term placements (3-12 weeks) in health clinics serving predominantly Indigenous communities in remote areas of the NT. Since late 2008, RAHC has filled over 500 short-term health professional placements in remote Indigenous communities across the NT with more than 2,000 weeks of additional health services delivered.

The RAHC model is now attracting and supporting a number of health professionals to undertake regular and scheduled placements, often returning to the same health service and continuing care programs over a period of time. While placements remain 'short-term' the professional is well known and immediately effective in care delivery. The RAHC logistics and support framework make these placements possible for the health professional and health service.

RAHC has developed an innovative online learning resource to support health professionals new to remote and Indigenous health work. With eight accredited 1-2 hour modules available in a range of topics including mental health, paediatrics, emergency care and communication, health professionals can work at their own pace and remotely to develop skills and knowledge. RAHC is also supporting health professionals to undertake specialized skills training such as the highly regarded REC course. These learning opportunities supplement and extend health professionals' knowledge beyond that acquired in the initial 2-day cultural and clinical orientation program.

The presentation will give an overview and update on the RAHC program and in particular, introduce the online learning resources which are available to the public. The RAHC program is now established in the NT and key features might well be adopted and adapted for remote workforce support in other jurisdictions.