

PHN announce first Indigenous board member

With improving Indigenous health and wellbeing one of the top priorities for Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN, Gangulu man Shea Spierings has joined the board of directors of its governing body, Sunshine Coast Health Network Ltd.

SCHN Board Chair, Dr Peter Dobson said the appointment was an important step towards culturally-appropriate representation at the organisation's highest level.

"We're absolutely delighted to welcome Shea to the Sunshine Coast Health Network board, which shapes the strategic direction of the PHN and informs the services it delivers," Dr Dobson said.

"As a GP, I know only too well the significant challenges facing the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"Shea is not only from the Indigenous community, he also brings with him valuable academic insight into the barriers and enablers we need to understand to continue working towards Closing the Gap."

Hailing from Central Queensland, Mr Spierings is currently a Poche Scholar at the University of Queensland's Poche Centre for Indigenous Health where he is investigating Aboriginal men's health, and the effectiveness of COVID-19 health messaging in Indigenous communities.

He also has significant experience advising and working in the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service sector, research sector, and youth sector and in 2015 was appointed by the Australian Government to serve as the Australian Youth Delegate to the United Nations.

PHN CEO Pattie Hudson said she was looking forward to Mr Spierings' input in helping shape the PHN's approach to identified service gaps.

"The PHN is absolutely delighted to welcome Shea to the Sunshine Coast Health Network's board of directors and we are very much looking forward to sharing in his knowledge and expertise," Ms Hudson said.

"Culturally appropriate health care is a key priority for the PHN, and our programs are developed locally, in partnership with community, Elders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers as well as mainstream health professionals.

"Relationship building is a big part of this process and we'll be able to learn so much from Shea on how to enhance this further."

Prior to his career in health and research, Mr Spierings worked as a concreter, steel fixer, and labourer on large-scale construction projects.

He holds a Bachelor of Arts (Hons.) from the University of Queensland, is a member of the Australian Institute of Company Directors and is looking forward to bringing together his wide skillset and significant cultural connections to improve health outcomes in the Central Queensland, Wide Bay and Sunshine Coast region.

"I was born and raised in Rockhampton," Mr Spierings said.

"My people are Gangulu, we traditionally come from an area west of Rockhampton, but I also have a strong personal connection with the Sunshine Coast region, where I lived for a number of years.

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“I’m looking forward to being a part of making some of the decisions that impact the communities which I’m still very much a part of.

“Currently, I am doing my PhD which has a strong focus on Aboriginal men’s health. Previously I worked in the Community Controlled Health Sector, and in the youth leadership space, so for me it’s about bringing all those different areas and interests together in a governance role.

“There are challenges ensuring access to primary healthcare across such a diverse region with vastly different needs, but engaging with communities and listening to them is something that’s of great importance to me and critical to meet both the existing and emerging challenges facing the region.”

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