

Learning through healing for Indigenous mental health workers

As Mental Health Month draws to a close, the first trainees to participate in an innovative mentoring program for Indigenous mental health and drug and alcohol workers graduated in Central Queensland today.

Known as the Professional Development Supervision Mentoring Selfcare (PDSMS) Program, the training initiative was developed by Rockhampton-based psychological service Wakai Waian Healing to bolster the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

Principal psychologist Ed Mosby, the director of Wakai Waian Healing, said he was delighted with the outcome of the innovative workforce development initiative, funded by Central Queensland, Wide Bay, Sunshine Coast PHN.

“We’re absolutely thrilled to be here today; we are so proud of all the trainees,” Mr Mosby said.

“The PDSMS Program requires a high level of motivation and commitment from participants and brings together not just skills and knowledge but an opportunity for their own self-empowerment and healing.

“We first approached the PHN with the original proposal for the program because demand for our own services was so high, and there was a lack of other organisations in Central Queensland providing culturally specific mental health and alcohol and other drug clinical therapies.

“We knew that workforce was a priority in the region, and particularly Indigenous health workforce, so what we’re doing with this training is building it ourselves, from the ground up.”

The PDSMS Program is designed to enhance workforce capacity, by including elements of professional development, professional supervision, supportive mentoring and individual and group selfcare.

Trainees were also required to complete a Certificate IV in Mental Health if they had not already done so.

Mervin Saunders, who works for Gumbi Gumbi, a drug and alcohol and drug rehabilitation centre in Rockhampton, was in the first cohort to complete the PDSMS Program, and also completed the Certificate IV.

“I joined the mental health sector a year ago, the PDSMS Program has given me a lot of skills, a lot of tools, and has enhanced my confidence in dealing with clients,” Mr Saunders said.

A total of 14 participants enrolled in the 2019/2020 program, all working within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare organisations who helped facilitate the learning.

PHN Senior Manager Michelle McAllister said the pilot program was an important step towards improving Indigenous health outcomes.

“The aim of the PDSMS Program is really about empowering people to deliver services in their own communities,” Ms McAllister said.

“When we talk about creating a sustainable, resilient, capable, competent workforce it’s vital we look at what those words really mean in the context of culturally appropriate care.

“Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to be part of all aspects of their health and wellbeing is the future in terms of making real change.”

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Several participants in this year's PDSMS Program are now continuing their studies, enrolling in the Diploma of Counselling and tertiary studies in psychology.

Following the success of this year's program, the training initiative is expected to run again in 2021.

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