

## Bachelor of Midwifery (Indigenous) Away from Base Enhancement Program

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Maternal mortality for Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is four times higher and infant mortality is three times higher compared to non-Indigenous populations<sup>1</sup>. A key strategy towards closing the gap in maternal health outcomes is to increase the number of Indigenous Australian midwives who are able to work within their own communities<sup>2</sup>. In 2013 only 186 midwives employed in Australia identified as Indigenous, representing 0.8% of all employed midwives<sup>3</sup>. An increase in the number of Indigenous people in the maternity workforce able to work in their home communities is an Australian workforce priority.

The Bachelor of Midwifery (Indigenous) Program, also known as the Away from Base (AFB) BMid Program, now in its fifth year of delivery, is a small, innovative program designed to prepare Indigenous midwives to lead and champion midwifery services in their home communities and address the workforce shortage of Indigenous midwives. One of the key challenges for the Program however has been progressing students to graduation in a timely manner. To optimise learning and engagement for Indigenous students studying in away from base mode the *AFB Mid Enhancement Program* was initiated. This project (supported by a Queensland Regional Training Network grant) enhanced the AFB BMid with two specific strategies informed by the recommendation of the Review of Higher Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Islander People<sup>4</sup>.

Firstly an Indigenous Lecturer in Midwifery was engaged to contribute culturally relevant midwifery knowledge to the curriculum, provide cultural advocacy and support and strengthen connections with the Indigenous community. Secondly an additional clinical placement in a tertiary hospital enabled students to meet increased midwifery registration requirements. These program enhancements, evaluated with staff and student focus groups, had a positive impact on student experience, student engagement, learning outcomes and course progression and directly resulted in the course completion of four students by early 2014.

In direct response to student feedback a suite of innovative strategies have also been implemented: the *AFB BMid Student Learning Community*, a culturally inclusive platform that facilitates student interaction with peers and teachers; as

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<sup>1</sup> National Perinatal Epidemiology & Statistics Unit, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2011).

<sup>2</sup> The National Maternity Services Plan 2010-2015.

<sup>3</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2013).

<sup>4</sup> Review of Higher Education Access & Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island People (Final Report) (2012)

well as a 'virtual staff room' and *Midwifery Education Resource Kit* to creatively support curriculum and professional development for clinical industry partners. Enhanced support and additional resourcing has resulted in strengthened relationships with industry partners and improved clinical facilitators' preparedness for students undertaking placement.