

## Student placements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services – perspectives from a tertiary institution

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**Background:** Developing a workforce of capable graduate optometrists passionate about delivering quality eye care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services is important. Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has a longstanding history in prioritising optometry student placement within these health services. For over 25 years, all final year students provided eye examinations for patients at local community-controlled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services under the supervision of QUT clinicians. Recently, many students have undertaken extended clinical placements in regional health services. As an example, of the 61 students in the final year of the program in 2018, 37 volunteered to travel to regional or remote locations to complete placement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

**Maximising student engagement:** Several factors have facilitated high participation rates by students. First, QUT has worked closely with a number of regional health services over many years, strengthening the relationship and developing the trust of the health service, specifically in relation to delivery of clinical care and student involvement. QUT optometrists supervise students at these sites, alleviating student anxiety around being in an unfamiliar environment. Students are encouraged to develop their clinical and decision-making skills, as well as reflect on their practice, whilst being supported closely. Second, significant effort has been made to broaden the delivery of clinical content relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the five-year Optometry program. In addition to cultural safety training, many course units include content specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This integration across the course facilitates students' knowledge of relevant theory prior to undertaking placement.

**Moving forward:** Universities play a key role in facilitating student placement in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services and 'closing the gap for vision'; how it is prioritised directly influences student engagement.