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## RDAA celebrates 50 Years of Deadly and the Indigenous leaders shaping rural medicine

The Rural Doctors Association of Australia (RDAA) is celebrating NAIDOC Week by recognising that caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities has made generations of rural doctors better clinicians.

This year's NAIDOC Week theme, **50 Years of Deadly**, celebrates five decades of honouring the strength, culture, leadership and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



**RDAA President Professor Sarah Chalmers** said the milestone was an opportunity to celebrate the growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors, especially those who work in rural and remote Australia. There is also opportunity to recognise the invaluable lessons rural doctors continue to learn through working alongside Indigenous communities.

"For 50 years, NAIDOC has celebrated the achievements, resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This week is an opportunity to acknowledge not only those achievements, but also the profound impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have had on improving Australia's health system and on the doctors privileged to work alongside them," Professor Chalmers said.

"Many of our members will tell you that some of the most important lessons they have learned as doctors have come from caring for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and communities.

"Delivering healthcare in these settings asks more of you as a clinician. It requires cultural humility, strong relationships, careful listening, an understanding of different ways of communicating, and an appreciation of the social, cultural and historical factors that influence health.

"It also means helping patients navigate complex barriers to care, from distance and disadvantage to the ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma and systemic inequity. Rural doctors are often not only clinicians, but also advocates for patients, helping them access the care they need. Those experiences make us better doctors for every patient we treat."

Professor Chalmers said the past 50 years had seen significant progress, with more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors entering the profession and growing recognition of the importance of culturally safe healthcare.

"The increasing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors is something all Australians should celebrate. Their leadership, knowledge and lived experience are strengthening our health system and inspiring the next generation of young people to pursue careers in medicine.

"At the same time, the medical profession has continued to grow its understanding of cultural safety. We know there is always more to learn, but every step towards more culturally responsive care helps improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Professor Chalmers said this year's theme held particular significance for RDAA following the election of **Dr Claire Griffiths as President of the Rural Doctors Association of Tasmania.**

"Claire is the first RDA President that identifies as Aboriginal and it is a wonderful milestone for our organisations and reflects the growing influence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander doctors across rural medicine. Her leadership is helping inspire the next generation of Indigenous doctors and strengthening our profession as a whole."

***Dr Griffiths said NAIDOC Week was an opportunity to celebrate both the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the shared journey towards better health outcomes.***

"Growing up as a palawa woman, I know how important it is for our people to see themselves reflected in healthcare and leadership," Dr Griffiths said.

"Every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professional brings valuable cultural knowledge and lived experience to the profession, but culturally safe healthcare is everyone's responsibility.



"I've seen first-hand the commitment of rural doctors across Australia to learning from the communities they serve. That willingness to listen, build trust and continually learn is what helps create better healthcare and stronger partnerships.

"NAIDOC Week reminds us that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture is an integral part of Australia's identity. It's a time to celebrate culture and the important people who have shaped our nation as we look forward with confidence to our emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, including those who will one day become rural doctors."

Professor Chalmers said RDAA encouraged all Australians to use NAIDOC Week to celebrate the enduring contribution Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples make to Australia's communities, culture and future.

"Fifty Years of Deadly is about celebrating achievement, recognising leadership and committing ourselves to a future where every Australian has access to culturally safe, high-quality healthcare. RDAA is proud to stand alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in that journey."

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Get to know your local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities through activities and events held across the country. [Click for information on local events.](#)

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[Photo of Prof Sarah Chalmers](#)

[Dr Claire Griffiths](#)

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