

Foreword

I am honoured to be invited by the editors, Wendy Edmondson and Robyn Williams, to present a foreword for this engaging and innovative book *Burda-Burda Balayi Health Professionals and Indigenous Health: Working at the Interface*. While there continues to be a proliferation of cultural awareness programs in the Australian training and education landscape, I welcome the increasing recognition that different approaches are also required if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes are to be improved and we can progress reconciliation. I commend this book for shifting to a more nuanced and innovative discourse about the recipients, but also the providers of health care and the social, cultural and historical contexts in which this care transpires.

For too long, non-Aboriginal health professionals have learnt about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures through a Eurocentric lens. This has led to essentialising and ‘othering’ of Indigenous peoples globally, manifesting in negative attitudes and behaviours on the part of many non-Aboriginal health professionals. Such thinking has resulted in a deficit paradigm, which includes unconscious biases, racism and discrimination, impacting health-care delivery. I believe that resultant health disparities are a matter of deep national concern as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes remain alarmingly compromised in a country with first-class health facilities.

I commend the book for highlighting that ongoing colonialism – manifesting in intergenerational and transgenerational traumas – and the social determinants of health continue to underpin health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is widely known that the rates of disease experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are 2.3 times higher than that of non-Aboriginal peoples, yet many are largely preventable. Unfortunately, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are often blamed for our own adverse health outcomes, which is reflective of current problematising narratives and negative stereotypes. In this deeply challenging climate, I have long considered that there is a critical need for health services, and many health professionals, to undergo significant transformative change to be better equipped to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health inequities.

While there has been some improvement in health outcomes, I believe that there is still extensive work to be done and much of this work falls to health professionals at the front-line. Appropriate training, therefore, is essential in building a culturally safe workforce to effectively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. I support a shift from a reliance on cultural awareness training to include engagement with cultural safety principles. Cultural safety reverses the gaze and focusses on the professional behaviours of health professionals by providing strategies and methods to become a more reflective practitioner, cognisant of white privilege and power, social justice, trust and respect.

I am pleased that the book encourages the exploration of your own cultures and identities, and conversely, if appropriate, to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities as a step to appreciating and respecting cultural difference. Often non-Aboriginal health professionals believe they have little or no culture because they have never been questioned about it. Non-Aboriginal values and perspectives are often seen as the ‘default’ or ‘normal’ position and are subsequently ‘invisible’ or unacknowledged. In this context, truth-telling about the contested history of this country is examined, particularly how readers create their own truths and understanding from their unique cultural world views after exploring how history is constructed and deconstructed. Essentially, addressing their own conscious and unconscious biases.

It is encouraging to see an enlightening discussion of the journey of health professionals from university to a professional setting, to facilitating life-long learning in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Learning pathways are explored, and tools and strategies discussed, to assist health professionals to develop critical reflection, transformative learning and decolonisation. Some of the topics covered may cause discomfort, guilt or resistance, as you will inevitably react in different ways. Alternatively, responses may comprise keenness, acceptance and a

willingness to learn. I believe managing any discomfort and new knowledge enriches and enhances understanding and deepens the insights of health professionals.

I am pleased that the inclusion of such important themes as culture and identity, data sovereignty, and social and emotional wellbeing will allow you to understand these critical matters from Aboriginal and Torres Islander perspectives. The final chapter is potentially confronting, as it addresses some matters of critical importance to many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, but it also provides an opportunity for health professionals to apply new skills and knowledge as a catalyst for life-long learning.

The chapters in the book draw on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework (2016) and the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools (CDAMS) Indigenous Health Curriculum Framework, and this is a welcome initiative. Learning resources include a range of rich case studies, critical reflection questions, and an instructors' resource manual to illustrate key concepts and topics. This book has the potential to shift the way you view your environment and to challenge deeply held views about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and health, and importantly, your own values and world views as well.

I congratulate the authors for embracing some of the more challenging and contentious topics in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in a considered and candid manner. Many, whom I know personally, are leading Aboriginal specialists and their allies, in their respective fields of Aboriginal endeavour, bringing many years of experience, integrity and credibility, as well as fresh insights, to their chapters. I would like to express gratitude for their dedication and commitment to the production of this book.

This book is a welcome addition to the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health education. I encourage those teaching, studying or researching this subject to avail yourselves of this thought-provoking book that explores key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health topics through a different lens. Your learning will be enhanced and self-awareness increased.

Professor Tom Calma AO

Biography

Professor Tom Calma is an Aboriginal Elder from the Kungarakan (Koong ara kan) tribal group and a member of the Iwaidja (Ee wad ja) tribal group whose traditional lands are south west of Darwin and on the Cobourg Peninsula in the Northern Territory, respectively. He has been involved in Indigenous affairs at a local, state, national and international level and worked in the public sector for more than 45 years. He is currently on a number of boards and committees focusing on rural and remote Australia, health, mental health, suicide prevention, education, culture and language, justice reinvestment, research, reconciliation and economic development. In 2010, after a distinguished career of 38 years in the Australian Public Service, Professor Calma retired; he currently works as a consultant, volunteer and academic.

Professor Calma was awarded the Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) in 2012 and was the 2013 ACT Australian of the Year, recognising him for his distinguished service to the Indigenous community as an advocate for human rights and social justice, through contributions to government policy and reform, and to cross-cultural understanding.