



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Researchers Pave the Way for Future Generations

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The Heart Foundation is Australia's largest non-government funder of heart research, and has invested over \$710 million into research since its establishment in 1959 (this figure has been adjusted for inflation). For more than 60 years, the Heart Foundation has led the fight to save hearts and improve the heart health of all Australians by investing in the best and brightest researchers in Australia.

The Heart Foundation acknowledges the ongoing strength and resilience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples in sustaining the world's oldest living culture and is dedicated to supporting initiatives that help to close the gap in heart health outcomes.



L-R: Tanika Ridgeway, Worimi Elder Uncle John Ridgeway (Tanika's pop) and Dr Michelle Kennedy.

As part of our commitment to supporting better heart health for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, the Heart Foundation provides funding for First Nations research groups and individuals to create high-impact change through a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award.

Awardee, Dr Michelle Kennedy, has been undertaking research led by, and in partnership with, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander People and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services. The award has enabled Dr Kennedy to employ two future medical doctors as Aboriginal research assistants; Sian Maidment and Tanika Ridgeway.

This year marks Sian's third year as a research assistant, undertaking a community-led research project to develop smoking cessation care during pregnancy, called 'Which Way?' [1,2].

"Working as a research assistant has given me insight into community consultations, culturally-considered research dissemination, and a deeper understanding of the knowledge and world views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples within a healthcare setting," says Sian.

Tanika is in her second year working with Dr Kennedy. "My experience as a research assistant has helped to build my knowledge and skills to conduct decolonising research practice (whereby Indigenous people approve of and are involved in the research and research methods) and has highlighted the importance of knowledge translation with, and for, Aboriginal communities," explains Tanika.

"I believe my research assistant role will assist me in becoming a doctor who treats the individual and looks at ways of improving health for communities in the future. Without this financial support from the Heart Foundation, this research and the support for Aboriginal students to work flexibly around their studies would not be possible."

The Heart Foundation award has allowed Dr Kennedy to build a program of research from the ground up, championing the voices and experiences of Aboriginal communities, working together to build meaningful knowledge and evidence to inform policy and practice.

"I am honoured to be able to use this funding to provide work and training opportunities for Aboriginal medical students at the University of Newcastle, to build the next generation of Aboriginal clinical researchers," says Dr Kennedy.

Applications for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Award open Monday 9 May 2022, and close Friday 17 June 2022. See further details at: heartfoundation.org.au/Research/2022-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Award

References

- [1] Bovill M, Chamberlain C, Bennett J, Longbottom H, Bacon S, Field B, et al. Building an indigenous-led evidence base for smoking cessation care among aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women during pregnancy and beyond: research protocol for the which way? Project. *Int J Environ Res Public Health*. 2021;18:1342. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph18031342>.
- [2] Tackling Indigenous Smoking. Pregnant women and families. <https://tacklingsmoking.org.au/pregnant-women-and-families/>. [accessed 13.1.22].