



NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION

MEDIA RELEASE

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More work required to tackle unconscious bias in health

The challenge of addressing racism and inequality across our health system took centre stage at the NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association's (NSWNMA) 72nd Annual Conference in Sydney today.

Janine Mohamed, CEO of the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives, highlighted the need for more work to be done by health professionals individually, as well as across their facilities, the broader health system and within our communities.

"Racism in the health system has serious consequences for the healthcare and health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Ms Mohamed said.

"One of the solutions for me, I believe as a priority is: to know it, to talk about it and agree to deal with it through multiple strategies.

"You belong to 97 per cent of the population with the power, the privilege and the responsibility lies with you to change it."

Professor Yin Paradies from the Alfred Deakin Research Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation emphasised the need for nurses and midwives to recognise unconscious bias and be motivated to change their own attitudes and the attitudes of their colleagues and peers.

"The importance of leadership, simultaneous strategies, looking at different forms of bias and the different levels of implementation as well as the standards themselves, that is, the strong anti-racist policy platform that can be used for advocacy," said Professor Paradies.

"There has been some work done already and the principles of this can be much more broadly applicable – looking at policy in practice to get funding, links with communities and also getting the right data to assess how different patients are treated in systems based on their racial or cultural background."

NSW Chief Nursing and Midwifery Officer, Jacqui Cross, said NSW Health was committed to the provision of a culturally safe, culturally appropriate and competent health care system.

"We know that by providing opportunities for aboriginal people to gain education and employment within nursing and midwifery that there are significant benefits to aboriginal health outcomes," said Ms Cross.

Kate Lappin from the Asia Pacific Forum on Women, Law and Development addressed the social and economic inequalities impacting women and how nurses and midwives can act.

"If patriarchy is the system that uses fear and threats to create the economic, global, political and social order, what is the opposite? For us, it's solidarity," Ms Lappin said.

"We need to act in solidarity in order to bring about change."



Associate Professor Hahrie Han, from the University of California, explained the power in organising for social change in health.

“Transformation is a core part of what we do as people. One thing that makes movements different from other forms of social change is that they are fundamentally about transformation. Nurses and midwives have the power to transform others.”

General Secretary of the NSWNMA, Brett Holmes, reiterated the need for nurses and midwives to act and help improve cultural awareness.

“It is unfortunate that racism, unconscious bias and inequality are systemic in our health system,” Mr Holmes said.

“Clearly, there’s still a long way to go in acknowledging the role of indigenous nurses and midwives within our health system, as well as the role they have in improving the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We plan to be involved in helping to deliver change.

“A very good argument was made today that all nursing students undertake cultural safety training within their health education curriculum. Where current staff have not undertaken such training, the health system should ensure it completed in due course by all staff.”

Over 750 nurses, midwives, members and guests from across the state gathered at Rosehill Gardens Grand Pavilion during Professional Day on Wednesday.

Tomorrow, NSW Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women and Minister for Ageing, Tanya Davies, will address delegates and members.

The 72nd Annual Conference runs until Friday, July 21 at Rosehill Gardens Grand Pavilion, Sydney.

**** Media Alert ****

Media are welcome to attend public addresses during the NSWNMA’s 72nd Annual Conference in the Grand Pavilion at Rosehill Gardens.

THURSDAY, 20 JULY

2.00pm to 3.30pm – Hahrie Han, Anton Vonk Associate Professor from the University of California

4.00pm to 5.00pm – Tanya Davis, Minister for Mental Health, Minister for Women and Minister for Ageing

NB: Notices of motion and General Business items are closed to media. You can also follow the Annual Conference via social media, using [@nswnma](https://twitter.com/nswnma) and [#NSWNMAConf](https://twitter.com/NSWNMAConf)

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