

Working together to build the future of Indigenous psychology



Victoria Hovane

Standing at the University of Western Australia to launch Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association's (AIPA) culturally-responsive internship and supervision support project, I felt an enormous sense of pride – not simply because we were launching a new program, but because we were witnessing the next chapter in a journey that has been many years in the making.

This is the first program of its kind in Australia. Funded by the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing, it will provide culturally-responsive internship placements and supervision support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander provisional psychologists as they transition into professional practice.

For AIPA, this is much more than a workforce initiative. It is about creating pathways that allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists to flourish in ways that are culturally safe, professionally supported and grounded in who we are as First Peoples of Australia.

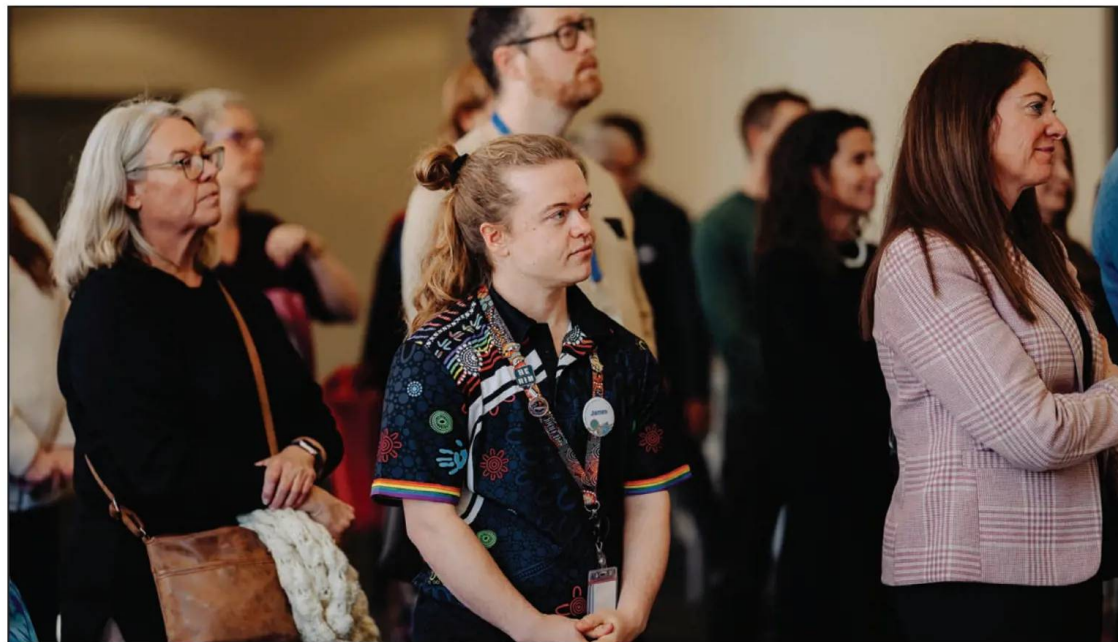
My dream is that one day every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person in Australia who needs mental healthcare will have access to care that is culturally safe, culturally responsive, and grounded in our ways of knowing, being and doing.

Throughout the launch, I was reminded that our work has always been about bringing together the strength of our ancient knowledge with the opportunities offered through psychology.

It involves centring the ancient wisdom of our Old People, our ancestors, considering what psychology has to offer our people, as they face the challenges presented by colonisation that for us, never stopped; honouring wisdom that is critical for building and sustaining our resilience, identity and ways of being in the world; and securing systems change for our future generations, so they don't have to have these same battles.

Those words reflect the heart of what AIPA stands for.

Our communities have



First Nations psychology student James Hill (centre). Picture: Dariusz Toh.



AIPA co-vice chair Shannon McNeair, Prof Pat Dudgeon and AIPA chair Prof Victoria Hovane.

Picture: Ginger Gorman.

always possessed deep psychological knowledge through culture, kinship, Country and community. Today's Indigenous psychologists continue that legacy while also working within contemporary health systems to improve social and emotional wellbeing for our people.

The launch itself reflected that beautiful intersection of culture and future. Guests were welcomed into a carefully curated cultural space by Noongar Elders Aunty TJ and Aunty Alta, with self-smoking using banksia cones before Alton Walley delivered a moving Welcome to Country. Elders, students, academics, government representatives, Indigenous psychologists and

partners came together to celebrate a shared vision for the future of our profession.

It was also an opportunity to acknowledge the many people whose advocacy has brought us to this point. The development of this project was led by former chairperson, Vanessa Edwidge, Tony Keissler, former CEO and Alyce Merritt, former program director, with support from the AIPA board, and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia.

We are grateful for all the support shown throughout our journey. We acknowledge the trust shown in us through the funding of this first of a kind program in Australia, and look forward to working with the Department, and all of our members, allies – including the

Australian Psychological Society – our community-controlled organisations, the Australian Psychology Board and the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Authority, and other valued stakeholders, in continuing to build an Indigenous Psychology workforce for the future.

One of the highlights of the day was hearing from psychology student James Hill, whose reflections reinforced exactly why this work matters. Building stronger pathways into psychology is not simply about increasing numbers. It is about ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are supported, mentored and supervised in culturally responsive ways so they can

thrive throughout their careers.

As I looked around the room during lunch after the formal proceedings, there was a deep sense of optimism. We were celebrating a significant achievement, but there was also a clear understanding that this is only the beginning.

The future of Indigenous psychology depends on growing our workforce, strengthening leadership, expanding culturally responsive supervision and ensuring future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists can succeed without facing many of the barriers those before them encountered.

This program is an important milestone, but it is also a promise – to our students, our communities and our future generations – that AIPA will continue working to build a stronger Indigenous psychology profession for Australia.

Professor Victoria Hovane is a Ngarluma, Jaru and Gooniyandi psychologist, an experienced practitioner, researcher and leader whose work over more than four decades has focused on improving the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. She is deputy director (First Nations Knowledge) at the ARC Centre of Excellence for Prisoner Reintegration, UWA, has been at the forefront of advancing Aboriginal approaches to healing, family violence and intergenerational trauma, and is chairperson of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA).