Reflect

The Walter and Eliza Hall Institute is very proud to report the successful implementation of our first Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Our RAP has provided a clear framework to help shape our reconciliation agenda and take us on the next stage of our reconciliation journey.

Demonstrating our commitment

Institute director Professor Doug Hilton has championed the RAP, establishing crucial leadership in demonstrating our commitment to the reconciliation process. The institute’s Reconciliation Committee has grown and matured over the past year, and now has cemented its place among the established committees providing expertise and oversight of the institute’s core business.

In 2014, the institute’s annual general meeting was themed on ‘reconciliation’ in recognition of our first RAP publication. The annual member’s dinner was held at the Bunjilaka Aboriginal Cultural Centre, Melbourne Museum, where guests attended the First Peoples exhibition and learnt about Koorie people and culture.

It is testament to the success of the institute’s RAP program and the organisation’s long-term commitment to the reconciliation agenda that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a key focus in the institute’s Strategic Plan 2015-2020.

The institute has committed to increasing its work on diseases that disproportionately affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and better involve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in broader medical and clinical research conversations.

Specific attention will also be given to:

- creating meaningful and sustainable training and employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- increasing educational outreach activities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people;
- building a culturally accessible and inclusive organisation that has a strong cultural capability; and
- investing in strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

We acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation as the traditional owners of the land where our campuses are located, and recognise their continuing connection to country and community.
## Relationships

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<tr>
<td>Establish a RAP Working Group</td>
<td>A RAP Working Group, comprising of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians, is formed, operational, and meets monthly to support the development of our RAP.</td>
<td>The institute's Reconciliation Committee was formed in 2013 to develop and oversee the implementation of our first RAP. The committee sits alongside other key institute committees including those on gender equity, research ethics and education. Committee membership encompasses a range of staff and students from our scientific and professional services departments and teams. We have also been fortunate to secure the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander external colleagues on the committee. Our external committee members provide invaluable advice and ensure we have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in our decision-making process. The committee has grown from 13 members in 2013 to 19 members in 2015, indicating the interest and positive impact the committee has had on institute life.</td>
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<td>Develop external relationships</td>
<td>A list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations and stakeholders within our local area or sphere of influence that we could approach to assist us in our understanding of the potential activities in our future RAPs is developed.</td>
<td>The Reconciliation Committee has identified the key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders working in medical research and health that can help us shape our priority setting. We have invested in building relationships and exploring the potential for working together with organisations including Onemda, the VicHealth Koori Health Group, the Melbourne Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, the Lowitja Institute and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS).</td>
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<td>Celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW)</td>
<td>Our Working Group organises an internal event to recognise and celebrate NRW (27 May – 3 June annually).</td>
<td>In 2014, the institute's director Professor Doug Hilton hosted an all staff and student morning tea to celebrate NRW and launch our RAP. The institute also held a Research and Reconciliation Discussion Forum, titled How can the institute’s researchers get involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research? Dr Mary Belfrage from the VAHS and institute researcher Dr Willy-John Martin presented at the forum. A film screening of murundak: Songs of Freedom was held for staff, students and friends of the institute in 2015. The film's director Natasha Gadd opened the evening, which was hosted by Reconciliation Committee member Professor Len Harrison. Following the film, guests enjoyed native Australian flavoured food from Charcoal Lane, a social enterprise involved in training Aboriginal young people in the hospitality industry.</td>
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<td>Raise internal awareness of the RAP</td>
<td>An internal communications plan is developed and executed to raise awareness across the organisation about the RAP commitment, particularly with key internal stakeholders. A presentation on our RAP commitment is given to all relevant areas of our business to ensure they have an understanding of how their area can contribute to our RAP.</td>
<td>An internal communications plan was developed and implemented, including: • a series of presentations on the RAP at division and department meetings; • an internal website page with links to relevant cultural and research articles; and • internal messaging to raise awareness of institute and local events.</td>
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### Lessons learned

**Taking time to listen, learn and reflect:** Development of relationships based on mutual trust and understanding is a long-term proposition for the institute, particularly as we have not previously had a presence in the area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This requires a multi-faceted approach to increase our visibility and legitimacy in this space, with direct engagement being vital. Attending conferences, participating in relevant events and providing sponsorship has proved successful in achieving this aim.

**Capacity building:** The institute can make a significant contribution through capacity building work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. Our expertise in the areas of law, business development and communications have been used to great effect in assisting with the start-up and growth of two organisations: ngarra-jarra, the Indigenous health student organisation at the University of Melbourne and Teachabout, a school holiday learning program in a remote Aboriginal community south east of Katherine in the Northern Territory (see Reflections).

**Value of a champion:** As is common with all diversity and inclusion work, the value of having strong, engaged senior leadership cannot be underestimated. The institute’s director has provided the gravitas and traction vital in this early stage of our reconciliation contribution.
### Respect

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<td>Investigate cultural development</td>
<td>A business case for cultural awareness, capability and development based on our core business is developed, with findings presented to the relevant HR/Learning and Development area for their input. We have captured baseline data on our employees’ current level of understanding around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, cultures and contributions.</td>
<td>A proposal for developing cultural awareness training has been submitted to the Head of People and Culture recommending the implementation of a targeted cultural learning and training program. A program of cultural learning commenced in 2015, with a series of walks for staff and students run by the Koorie Heritage Trust (see Reflections). Institute staff and students participated in the bi-annual Reconciliation Australia Barometer Survey in 2014. The survey has provided robust baseline data on our organisation's level of cultural awareness, which will to enable us to track our progress.</td>
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<td>Celebrate NAIDOC Week</td>
<td>Our Working Group participates in a community NAIDOC Week event (1st Sunday – 2nd Sunday in July each year).</td>
<td>During NAIDOC week in 2014, the Reconciliation Committee participated in a range of activities offered by the University of Melbourne. Members attended a cultural guided walk around the university campus, and a lecture held at the Indigenous Health Unit on health and wellbeing. In addition, daily announcements were made on our internal website to raise awareness about the history of NAIDOC, and the various events that people could attend locally. For the first time in 2015 the institute held its own events in recognition and celebration of NAIDOC week, including an exhibition of Aboriginal art and a Parkville Community Leaders Breakfast to discuss Aboriginal health (see Reflections).</td>
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<td>Raise internal understanding of protocols</td>
<td>The internal communications plan involves raising awareness of key protocols including the institute’s Guideline for Acknowledging Traditional Owners and Welcome to Country and the Guideline for Ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.</td>
<td>Welcome to Country ceremonies were performed at several key events, including the launch of our RAP, the opening of the institute’s centenary program and the NRW film screening. We were also pleased to receive a traditional Torres Strait Islander sung blessing at our Centenary launch. This was the first time such a performance had been given at the institute. The use of Acknowledgements has been cemented in several key institute forums, such as institute board meetings, all staff meetings and scientific seminars.</td>
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### Lessons learned

**Winning hearts and minds:** Gaining buy-in and engagement from staff and students is an endeavour that will require an ongoing focus. Offering multiple rather than one-off opportunities to increase cultural knowledge is important, as is providing opportunities to get involved in interesting and exciting activities that celebrate the achievements and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**The long path to understanding:** The RAP Barometer survey indicated that although our staff and students are at an early stage of their learning, there is an enormous amount of enthusiasm to learn more about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history. It is important that this gap in understanding is acknowledged and addressed through both informal learning opportunities and structured cultural awareness training.
### Opportunities

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<td><strong>Consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment</strong></td>
<td>A business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and studentships within our organisation is scoped. Baseline data on current Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees is captured to inform future developments.</td>
<td>The business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and training has been fully accepted by the institute, which is reflected in our Strategic Plan 2015-2020. The institute recognises that the collection of equality data is an ongoing process being mindful of issues regarding disclosure. To begin the process, baseline data has been collated.</td>
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<td><strong>Consider supplier diversity</strong></td>
<td>A business case for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity and how our organisation can develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity program is scoped.</td>
<td>The institute’s procurement policy has been amended to encourage the use of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses wherever possible. The procurement team attended a Supply Nation conference and the institute has become a member of Supply Nation. Team members will work with Supply Nation to try to increase our spend with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned and run businesses.</td>
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<td><strong>Other opportunities</strong></td>
<td>A paper is presented to the RAP Working Group outlining other opportunities, such as those around education, training and employment that have been identified through our consultation with internal and external stakeholders. This paper will assist in defining actions for subsequent RAPs for our organisation.</td>
<td>An opportunities paper has been presented to the Reconciliation Committee and will provide a framework for the institute’s next RAP.</td>
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### Lessons learned

**Creating meaningful and sustainable employment opportunities:** The employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will need to be a long-term strategy given the starting point for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment at the institute. Two streams will be developed for our scientific and professional service workforces. To achieve good outcomes, we will aim to work with stakeholders in the Parkville precinct and expert organisations, such as CareerTrackers.

**Feeding the pipeline:** In recognition of the small numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tertiary students studying science, the need to get more involved in education outreach work with secondary students is essential. The institute has a great resource to draw on for these activities – our talented students. We are now investigating how we can contribute to programs running within our field of expertise.
## Tracking progress

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<th>Build support for the RAP</th>
<th>The Reconciliation Committee has been allocated and manages a discrete annual budget to undertake its activities.</th>
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<td>1. We have defined available resourcing for our RAP.</td>
<td>Our participation in the RAP Barometer survey provides a solid baseline for us to measure our progress and successes. In addition, the People and Culture department has modified the staff monitoring form to include a question on whether staff and students identify as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.</td>
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<td>2. Our data collection is able to measure our progress and successes.</td>
<td>The annual report has been submitted and the Impact Measurement Questionnaire completed.</td>
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<td>3. We have submitted our annual report, and the Impact Measurement Questionnaire on our achievements to Reconciliation Australia.</td>
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New work streams

CareerTrackers

Our partnership with the CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program forms a key plank of our reconciliation commitment both now and into the future. In 2014/15, the institute offered internships to two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander science undergraduates. The institute is delighted to report that the program is a success and we are proud to be leading the way in offering opportunities for Australia’s talented Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university science students. Looking forward to the 2015/16 summer, our two interns will be returning to the institute and we will also be welcoming three new interns to work in our labs.

The following article appeared in our external newsletter Illuminate in March 2015.

Internship program recruits talented budding scientists

Two promising young scientists joined the institute in the past months as part of a new partnership between the institute and the CareerTrackers Indigenous Internship Program.

CareerTrackers is a national non-profit organisation that creates multi-year internship opportunities for high performing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander university students.

Students Kristy Meiselbach and Nancy Fintic were awarded internships with scientists in the Inflammation and Infection and Immunity divisions.

Meet our CareerTrackers

Kristy, a Biomedicine undergraduate student at RMIT, joined Dr Tracy Putoczki’s laboratory in the Inflammation division. She is working to understand why some people are more susceptible to inflammatory bowel disease than others.

Tracy said the internship had been a great success. “Kristy has shown great skills in the lab and real potential for pursuing a career in medical research,” Tracy said.

Nancy, a Medical Laboratory Science undergraduate student at James Cook University, Townsville, has been working in laboratories of Dr Alyssa Barry and Professor Ivo Mueller to characterise malaria isolates from Papua New Guinea.

Alyssa said the results would be used to gain a better understanding of how malaria parasites regulate their genes. “Nancy has displayed the aptitude and work ethic necessary to succeed in a scientific career. We are lucky to have her!” Alyssa said.

We look forward to welcoming Kristy and Nancy back later in the year for the second year of their internships.

Implementing the Reconciliation Action Plan

The partnership with CareerTrackers forms a key component of the institute’s reconciliation program, particularly in terms of increasing diversity in our staff and student body.

Institute director Professor Doug Hilton said the institute’s involvement in the CareerTrackers program gave us the opportunity to support two fantastic students.

“The program is intended to give the students an opportunity to see how rewarding a career in medical research can be,” Doug said. “It also allows us to make a long-term investment in increasing the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in scientific research. So it really is a win-win situation.”
Reconciliation Seminar Series

The Reconciliation Seminar Series is now a recognised part of the institute’s scientific seminar program. This series aims to focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research to increase the institute’s collective knowledge. It also encourages our talented scientists to think about how they can apply their research skills to tackle the health issues faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2014, Professor Alex Brown from the South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) delivered a seminar on the challenges in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal people. This presentation was attended by a full auditorium of around 300 scientists from across the institute and the Parkville precinct.

In 2015, Aboriginal health and medical researchers, Associate Professor James Ward from SAHMRI and Dr Misty Jenkins from the Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre gave seminars on their work along with Professor Bart Currie from the Menzies School of Health Research in Darwin.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health conferences

Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT)

In October 2014, institute director Professor Doug Hilton and Reconciliation Committee members Dr Willy-John Martin, Jason Brouwer and Louise Johansson attended the AMSANT Our Health, Our Way conference in Alice Springs. The institute also provided event sponsorship. The conference coincided with AMSANT’s 20th anniversary and reflected on 40 years of Aboriginal community controlled health services in the Northern Territory.

Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) annual conference

In November 2014, Reconciliation Committee members, Dr Willy-John Martin and Louise Johansson attended the national AIDA conference in Melbourne. The theme of the conference was Science and Traditional Knowledge: Foundations for a Strong Future. Dr Martin gave a presentation on his research into acute rheumatic fever in remote Aboriginal communities.

Creating Futures 15: Practice, evidence and creativity in tropical and remote settings

Reconciliation committee members Dr Willy-John Martin and Louise Johansson attended the Creating Futures 15 conference in Cairns in May 2015. The institute was also a sponsor of the event. The conference was attended by a number of leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers from around the country and people from the Pacific region.
Cultural heritage walks

As part of the institute’s cultural learning program, staff and students were offered the opportunity to attend guided cultural heritage walks run by the Koorie Heritage Trust.

The following article appeared in our internal newsletter *WEHighlights* in April 2015.

Koorie Heritage Trust cultural walk

On Monday 23 March, a group of staff and students from the institute took part in a cultural and historical walk along Birrarung (the ‘river of mists’), also known as the Yarra River.

**A personal perspective**

Uncle Len Tregonning, a Gunai Kunai Elder from the Gippsland region of Victoria, led the walk. Uncle Len has a profound depth of knowledge of pre- and post-colonial settlement history of the CBD, especially along the Birrarung.

Uncle Len recounted personal stories of his family’s experience as part of the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal people, and the history of the reserves and missions in Victoria where Aboriginal people were resettled after being moved from their traditional lands.

**A pre-settlement vision**

The walk started at Enterprize Park, which marks the spot where the first white settlers to Victoria came ashore to establish a settlement in 1835. The park is home to the *Scar: A Stolen Vision* Aboriginal art installation, which explores and celebrates themes reflecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, contemporary issues and the reconciliation process.

Uncle Len explained the diversity and richness of Aboriginal culture and language across Australia, including the Kulin Nation of south central Victoria with their defining totems Bunjil (the eagle) and Waa (the crow). The Kulin federation is made up of five distinct communities including the Wurundjeri, the traditional owners of the land on which the institute’s buildings are located.

**Hidden history**

The group then meandered down the river, stopping to see the location of a now extinct waterfall and reef that separated the saltwater bay from the freshwater river. Participants learned about the importance of eels as a food source for the Kulin people and the abundance of fish that the river once supported.

The walk ended in Birrarung Marr, which features art installations paying respect to the Kulin people and leads to the William Barak bridge, named after the famous Aboriginal leader.

**Get involved**

The Koorie Heritage Trust walk was offered as part of the institute’s cultural learning program. Staff and students will have another opportunity to attend a walk during NAIDOC week on Monday 6 July 2015.
Collaborations

The RAP has opened the door for collaborations with local organisations. This work helps us to contribute to initiatives to improve health and education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**ngarra-jarra: Indigenous health student organisation**

Working with the Indigenous Health Equity Unit at the University of Melbourne, the institute has supported the new Indigenous health student organisation, ngarra-jarra. ngarra-jarra aims to provide learning opportunities for medical and allied health students to develop cultural competency and prepare students for employment opportunities with Aboriginal people and communities. The institute will offer a range of in-kind support for the new organisation including developing a communications strategy, hosting seminars, and support for conference attendance.

**Teachabout**

Teachabout is a not-for-profit organisation running a school holiday learning program in Minyerri, a remote Aboriginal community 270km south east of Katherine in the Northern Territory. The institute’s support will contribute to the running of the program, which aims to engage local children in a range of activities in sport, science and art. Institute PhD student Jason Brouwer volunteered as an activity leader in 2014, and PhD student Angus Cowan attended the program in 2015.

**Yalari**

Yalari is a not-for-profit organisation offering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from regional, rural and remote communities across Australia scholarships at some of Australia’s leading boarding schools. The Melbourne-based partner schools include: Methodist Ladies College, Scotch College, St Catherine’s and Geelong Grammar School. Institute staff and students have volunteered in tutoring roles with Yalari, helping with homework and preparation for exams.

PhD student Jason Brouwer (centre) volunteered at Teachabout in 2014, contributing science activities.
Special events

For the first time, the institute held a series of events for NAIDOC week. The events gave staff and students the opportunity to get involved in celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and culture.

This year’s NAIDOC theme, *We all stand on Sacred Ground: Learn, Respect and Celebrate*, highlighted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ strong spiritual and cultural connection to land and sea.

**Standing on sacred ground: an exhibition of our Aboriginal art**

The institute is fortunate to be the custodian of an Aboriginal art collection that was purchased through the generosity of the late Dame Elisabeth Murdoch. The works were brought together in a temporary exhibition for the duration of NAIDOC week.

The collection contained works from prominent artists from the 1960s to the 2000s, including traditional bark paintings from some of the ‘Bark Masters’; paintings from the Papunya artists collective, known as the birthplace of contemporary Aboriginal art; and beautiful pieces from pioneering Aboriginal women artists. The Dreaming Stories that accompanied the works served as a powerful reminder of Indigenous peoples’ connection to this land.

The exhibition was officially launched at an event for all staff and students. The evening was hosted by Professor Doug Hilton and began with an amazing Welcome to Country from Wurundjeri Elder Aunty Diane Kerr. Zenedth Kes Le, a group of Torres Strait Islander musicians, performed a beautiful traditional Torres Strait Islander sung blessing.

**Parkville Community Leaders Breakfast**

On Wednesday 8 July, the institute hosted the Parkville Community Leaders’ Breakfast, which was attended by a number of senior leaders from across the precinct. The morning’s theme was *Taking action to improve Indigenous health outcomes*. The event highlighted the institute’s reconciliation work focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and research being carried out at the institute and across the Parkville precinct.

The morning was co-hosted by Reconciliation Committee members Professor Len Harrison and Ngaree Blow. Dr Willy John Martin presented his research in acute rheumatic fever in remote Aboriginal communities. Professor Kerry Arabena, director of the Indigenous Health Equity Unit at the University of Melbourne, spoke about *First 1000 Days*. This research project investigates the impact of nutrition during the time between a woman’s pregnancy and her child’s second birthday on the child’s ability to grow, learn, and rise out of poverty, and in shaping a society’s long-term health, stability and prosperity.

The presentations were followed by a thought-provoking panel discussion covering topics such as how the precinct can work together to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues, and ways to increase the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in health and medical research.
Awards

The institute is proud to be associated with two outstanding young people who were nominated for prestigious awards in 2015.

Jason Brouwer won the Rotary Club of Melbourne Young Achiever’s Award in March 2015. This award was in recognition of Jason’s research contributions and his dedication to community service. Jason works in our Structural Biology division and has volunteered with the Teachabout and Yalari programs. He has also been an active member of the institute’s Reconciliation Committee.

Ngaree Blow was nominated for the Victorian Young Achiever of the Year award in 2015. Ngaree is one of our external Reconciliation Committee members and has played a major role in shaping the direction of the reconciliation work at the institute. Ngaree was nominated in recognition of her work as an active campaigner and advocate for closing the health and life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.