



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CAMP

Sydney Pharmacy First Nations Camp

Pathways for Aboriginal and/or
Torres Strait Islander Students into
Sydney Pharmacy School



SEPT 2025



We recognise and pay respect
to the Elders and communities –
past and present– of the lands
that the University of Sydney's
campuses stand on. For
thousands of years, they have
shared and exchanged
knowledges across innumerable
generations for the benefit of all.

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Access to high-quality,
culturally-safe pharmacy
services is essential in
addressing health disparities
and supporting the health and
wellbeing of Indigenous
communities.

”

Pharmacy Guild of Australia

Executive summary

The current pharmacist workforce in Australia is 99.6% non-Indigenous¹, highlighting an underrepresentation that needs addressing if Australia is going to meet its target of increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation to 3.43% of the national health workforce by 2031² and improving health outcomes.

At the University of Sydney, we are committed to providing diverse opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander youth to thrive. Our School of Pharmacy, renowned for its excellence in education and research, offers comprehensive programs that equip students with a competitive edge in their careers.

However, despite producing highly sought-after graduates, the University alone cannot rectify the low enrolment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students in pharmacy studies.

This camp is a pathway to engage and inform Year 9 and 10 students about the opportunities and benefits of pursuing a career in pharmacy.

This program has the potential to build cohorts of educated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to enter the future profession of pharmacy - who may in turn make this important health service more accessible to Australia's First Nations populations.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples were our first pharmacists. As part of the oldest surviving culture in the world they've understood the pharmacopoeia and pharmacology of what is happening within their environments for thousands of years. Their practices are worth learning and embracing.

We need more pharmacists who are able to deliver culturally safe care to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are receiving healthcare on their terms - not how western society determines it to be.

While we work on building our workforce, our strategy forward is to ensure that all pharmacy graduates and pharmacists can practice in culturally safe ways.”³

There are currently 1,600 students enrolled in a pharmacy-related course at the University of Sydney and only four identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

This represents just 0.25 percent of the student population.

Current challenges

The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare highlights that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have lower life expectancy, lower quality of life and higher burden of disease compared to the general population. This includes higher rates of poor mental health and hospitalisation. Other prominent health issues affecting Aboriginal communities include cardiovascular disease, poor nutrition and substance addiction.⁴ Access to culturally appropriate health services (including Indigenous health workers) is one of the key determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.⁵

The Department of Health, National Health Workforce Data Set (2023), demonstrates that there is a shortage of Indigenous pharmacists throughout Australia, with an estimate of 115 people who identify as Indigenous pharmacists in Australia out of a total employed pharmacist workforce of over 29,000¹ – making up 0.4% of the profession and highlighting the vast underrepresentation compared to the national population at 3.8%.⁶

We believe the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists can be attributed in part to a lack of engagement with high school students about career options in pharmacy. Many students either choose to study a different health science (medicine or nursing) or simply don't think they are capable of getting into a university course.

There are currently only four Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students enrolled at the University of Sydney School of Pharmacy and the recruitment of future students needs your urgent support to change this statistic, in an effort to reach population parity of 3.8%.

Kimberley Pharmacy Services owner, Hannah Mann MPS, has provided pharmacy services to some of Western Australia's most remote communities for 13 years. She says a lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists is 'a real problem' that must be addressed, starting with promoting pharmacy as a profession to high school students and raising awareness that there are multiple pathways to study pharmacy.

'It's not even just that we don't have enough Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists. We also don't have enough Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dispense technicians or pharmacy assistants,' she says.⁷

Case study

The Sydney Pharmacy School ran an inaugural camp for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students in 2013 as a pilot program. With 23 participants from across Australia, the camp was designed to encourage students to study Pharmacy.

The learnings from this camp identified where changes are needed to improve the outcomes of the program.

For example, the camp was originally opened to applicants from across Australia however this camp will be focused on students in NSW due to travel logistics of the students for their future studies.

The camp also focused on young people who were currently studying in year 11 or 12 and it was determined that this is too late in the school career to target future pharmacists as they need to consider appropriately aligned subject choices prior to commencing the HSC. This camp will therefore be suitable for students who are commencing year 9/10 in 2027.

Success story

Alexander Burke, a proud Wiradjuri male, graduated in 2021 with a Bachelor of Pharmacy degree with First Class Honours. He has now recently submitted his PhD where he has continued to shape the way pharmacy and health students are taught about Aboriginal culture and health.

Alex attended the inaugural pharmacy camp in 2013 which ignited an interest and a pathway into Pharmacy. After completing his HSC in 2015, Alex was offered a place in the Bachelor of Pharmacy program.

Alex's honours research project reviewed the pharmacy curricula where he "yarned" with academics about their perceptions of how Aboriginal health content should be taught to inform the new Pharmacy curricula that are currently underway.

Alex is passionate about continuing to shape the way pharmacy and health students are taught about Aboriginal culture and Indigenous health and has now completed his doctoral studies in the Sydney Pharmacy School.



Pictured: L to R - Professor Rebekah Moles, Alexander Burke and Professor Andrew McLachlan



Pharmacy Camp

Goals

The camp has been developed with two specific goals listed below in order of importance:

- 1. Motivate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students towards a career in pharmacy.
- 2. Motivate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students to study any health - related degree, which could be used for entry into graduate pharmacy.

The Camp

At the Sydney Pharmacy School, we have developed a four-day camp program for year 9 and 10 students during the January school holidays - (17th-21st January)

The students will be recruited from urban, regional and remote NSW communities and would be transported to and from the university campus for the camp. All accommodation, food and materials would be provided.

A sample schedule of activities for a day is as follows:

Activity	Time
What is a pharmacist?	8:30am - 9:30am
Site visit – Pharmacy	10am - 12noon
Lunch	12noon – 1pm
Compounding tableting	1pm - 4pm
Free time and more tours	4pm – 5:30pm
Dinner	5:30pm – 6:30pm
Movie night	6:30pm - 9pm
Wind down/Bed	9pm - 9:30pm

Why us

High Performing

The University of Sydney School of Pharmacy is a trusted and respected institution with a proud 100-year history.

It has established itself as a leader in pharmacy education and research, enjoying an outstanding reputation both in Australia and internationally. The School is currently ranked 19th in the world for its innovative research and high-quality education.

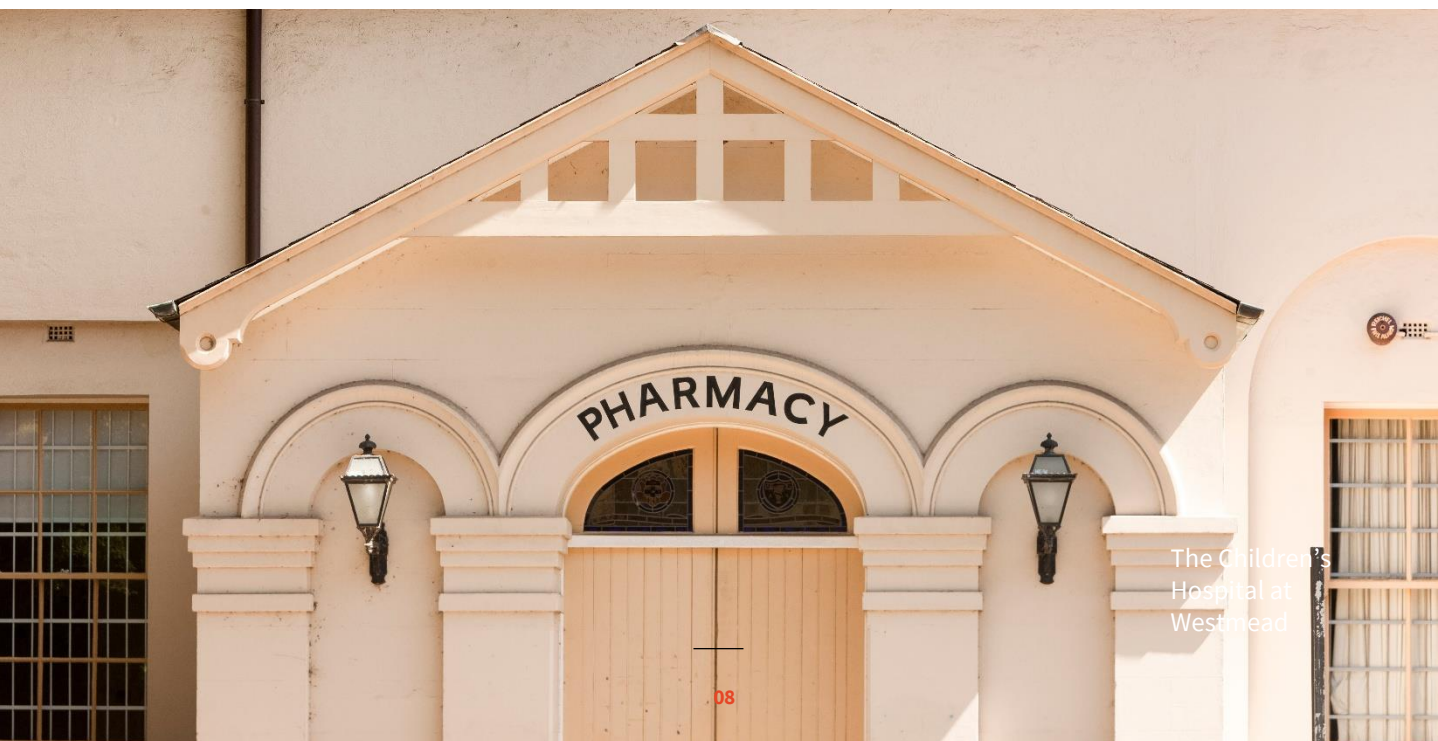
Students benefit from a comprehensive range of programs that include teaching modules, placement opportunities, and voluntary business skills programs—providing them with a strong competitive edge in their careers.

The School is engaged in pioneering research across a wide range of fields, including cancer, eHealth, immunology, and mental health. It is also deeply committed to the ongoing development and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Collaboration

The School of Pharmacy is collaborating with Pfizer Australia to build a transformative program that increases the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists across Australia.

By creating opportunities for high school students to understand and engage in the School of Pharmacy at this point in their high school career, we pave the way to increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists. →



Leadership

The camps will be led by **Dr Alexander Burke** who was an inaugural camp member in 2013. Alex is a proud Wiradjuri/Dhurag pharmacist from Western Sydney, with a passion to share his experiences of the camp with a new generation of future leaders.



Dr Alexander Burke

This camps will be co-led by **Professor Rebekah Moles** who is the current Deputy Head of the Pharmacy School, and mum of two children. She is a medication safety researcher, with a passion for improving the health of all patients through targeted pharmacy interventions. She is particularly focused on improving services for vulnerable populations such as the very old, children and those from disadvantaged backgrounds. She has supervised several research initiatives around Indigenous health.



Professor Rebekah Moles

The delivery of the program will be supported by **Susie Welch** BPharm, Cert Pharm Prac, FSHPA, FANZCAP (EmergMed, Research). Susie is Senior Pharmacist (Research) at St. Vincent's Hospital, Sydney and is Clinical Lead for the Critical Care pharmacy team (Emergency Medicine and Intensive Care). She is an Associate Lecturer (Teaching and Research) at Sydney Pharmacy School. She is currently a PhD candidate (pharmacy) at USYD, investigating Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health and hospital pharmacy.



Susie Welch

Several young adult pharmacy student ambassadors will also be looking after the students at the camp. These will include our current First Nations pharmacy students (L-R Isaac, Jazmyn, Noah, Amirah)



Potential impact

Supporting increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in the Pharmacy workforce

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is integral to ensuring that the health system can address the needs of all Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals can align their unique technical and sociocultural skills to improve patient care, improve access to services and support the provision of culturally appropriate care in the services that they and their non-Indigenous colleagues deliver.⁸

While the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce plays an important role in the provision of culturally appropriate services, it is the responsibility of the health-care system to ensure that mainstream health services are culturally competent through high quality professional development and training, appropriate management where cultural respect is lacking, and staff developing awareness of their own unconscious bias.⁹



What the camp includes

Travel from any NSW location to The University of Sydney and accommodation

- Return economy airfares or train/bus covered by the Sydney Pharmacy School
- Meals and accommodation on Camperdown campus all included
- Welcome pack on arrival

Experience life at University

- Participation in labs, lectures and tutorials
- Free time and Sport on campus
- Supervised exploration of Sydney University surrounds

Site Visits

- Camp participants will have opportunity to visit various pharmacy related locations in Sydney as part of their camp experience. Coaches will be provided. Visits include: Pfizer Australia, and various community and hospital pharmacies

Engagement opportunities

- Pharmacy stakeholders will have opportunities to engage with camp participants at multiple timepoints throughout the camp (e.g. welcome event, site visits, and networking events)

How you can apply

Application forms have been sent to your school. These must be completed by the following:

1. Potential student participant
2. Parent/Guardian
3. School principal or head of science

All forms are to be submitted via email to:

alexander.burke@sydney.edu.au by September 25th 2026.

You may also wish to contact Alex, if you have additional queries.

After you have submitted your forms, the team will review your application and make a decision on your suitability for the camp.

Offers will be based on merit and given to the top candidates. Preference may be given to students entering year 10 in 2027, if there are many applicants, however we still encourage those entering year 9 and 11 to apply.

If you are selected to attend the camp in January 2027, you will receive an official acceptance letter and additional forms to complete by October 31st 2026.

Following this, we will be in touch to organize your transport to the camp and provide additional details.

GOOD LUCK WITH YOUR APPLICATIONS!!!!

Thank you

The University of Sydney is looking forward to working with Pfizer Australia (sponsor), to welcome students to the Pharmacy Camp program and to support the pathway of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students into the School of Pharmacy. Together, we have the potential to unlock a future where there is population parity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pharmacists working in urban, regional and remote communities across Australia.



We are deeply grateful for your consideration of this opportunity and look forward to engaging with you further.



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For more information

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