

NZHPA Education Grant Report

Aboriginal Health Conference, Perth, Western Australia

August 15-16, 2026

Conference theme: Healing Ourselves, Healing Country, Healing Community

The purpose of the grant was to attend and present at the Aboriginal Health Conference.

My workshop covered Indigenous rural health experiences. My published scoping review was discussed – this looked at experiences of rural health for Indigenous populations throughout Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. A qualitative analysis was then developed from these findings, during which I had the privilege of interviewing eleven Māori and their whānau. I gathered knowledge of their experiences as people accessing healthcare on the West Coast, the most sparsely populated region in Aotearoa.

My research findings were well received by the audience. I had taken a piece of aotea with me to support my mahi (aotea is a taonga found only in the Makaawhio river in South Westland)

Attending this conference allowed me to gain insights into Indigenous health challenges and cultural approaches in Australia.

The keynote speaker surprised me. I thought that there were going to be intense and meaningful conversations about Indigenous health care and how we can learn from past generations. Instead, I enjoyed listening to Peter Salmon, aged 92, and Rosie Sitorus sing and create music to tell stories (this is known as yarning in Indigenous culture). Peter spoke and sang in a mixture of English and his Indigenous tongue, and Rosie translated. Members of Peter's family were present and touched on their own journeys of re-learning their language, their culture, and Country.

It was just so clear how important it is to keep culture alive. Peter, he's ninety two. He's been through a lot. He's seen a lot. He's been marginalised in society for much of his life. And he was physically beaten for speaking his Indigenous language growing up, which draws parallels with experiences in Aotearoa only a few decades ago. That really sat with me and changed my perspective of my expectations, to be more open-minded and just allow space for pondering, curiosity, and listening to conversation.

One of the workshops I attended was where a cultural competency framework was presented, focusing on an Aboriginal-led pathway to cultural safety and transformation. This was heavily grounded in Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, with the core message that healing begins with self-awareness and extends to the way that organisations, services, and systems engage with Aboriginal people and communities. Storytelling and sharing lived experience were strongly encouraged.

I attended a session titled “Connecting with clay”, which piqued my curiosity. It was presented by social worker Devinia Wainwright. She introduced the session as sensory motor expressive art therapy – a safe and creative way to reconnect with yourself, build resilience and restore balance to the body. As participants, we went through a journey of self-exploration through emotions, identifying tension and where the body holds stress.

Creative healing opportunities arise to help shift negative energy from the body. This form of art therapy aims to help process trauma and life challenges, promote mindfulness and relaxation, build confidence and self-awareness, and strengthen connection to self and community. I feel this healing modality has similarities to rongoā as holistic therapy. I see real value in having this available for our Indigenous populations in Aotearoa.

I am incredibly grateful to the New Zealand Hospital Pharmacy Association for providing education grants, and to be a recipient of one. This grant meant that I could attend this conference with reduced financial pressure.

Nāku noa, nā

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<https://www.aboriginalhealthconference.com.au/>