

Engaging School Students: Health Inspirations

Health Inspirations is an Australian program modelled on a successful UK business-led initiative called Work Inspiration, which enables businesses to showcase their work and employment opportunities, engage with the future workforce and support their local community. This successful model has been replicated and adapted in several regions within Australia, including the Darling Downs in Queensland and Blue Mountains in New South Wales. Both initiatives illustrate the power of a collaborative approach.

The Darling Downs Health Inspirations program was developed in partnership with the Health Pathways Alliance Darling Downs South West Steering Committee, which has representatives from the Darling Downs Hospital and Health Service (DDHHS), West Moreton Hospital and Health Service, TAFE, the University of Southern Queensland, the Department of Employment, Small Business and Training and Department of Education (Formerly the Department of Education and Training), and the Darling Downs West Moreton Primary Health Network.

Aim

Since 2015 schools across the region have been annually invited to nominate students to take part in the workshop, which is targeted at Year 10 students. The timing of the workshop is specifically chosen to precede their subject selection deadlines. To enable optimal engagement, participant numbers are limited and students are selected through a competitive application process. The aim is not only to motivate the students to consider a health career but also to inform their decisions about their senior subjects or school-based apprenticeship options that will support their future health career intentions.

Program design

During the workshop students are exposed to a variety of potential health careers and obtain first-hand practical experience of what it is like to work in the health sector through simulated patient scenarios and panel discussion sessions with health professionals. These health professionals work in an array of health fields in the Darling Downs, including medicine, nursing, midwifery, para-medicine, allied health, mental health, pharmacy, social work, aged care, dentistry, radiography, pathology and operational and administration roles. The interactive and engaging experiences provided during the workshop encourage students to reflect on their interests, skills and personal attributes, and how these may complement their career choice.

Engaging School Students: Health Inspirations continued

Adaptation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students

The Health Inspirations model can be adapted to suit local needs. In 2015, following two successful pilots, the Nepean Blue Mountains Local Health District (NBMLHD) tailored the model to specifically target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander high school students, after it was identified that there was a need to expose Aboriginal high school students to health careers available in the local area. Called Koori Kids Futures, it is hoped that the program will have long-term employment and health benefits for the broader Aboriginal community.

NBMLHD currently runs three five-day Health Inspirations programs each year, one of which is Koori Kids Futures. The number of participants is limited to 24 students per program, with students selected via a competitive application process that includes the submission of an online expression of interest form and a reference from a careers advisor, school principal or Aboriginal Education Office.

Participant feedback indicates that Health Inspirations is highly regarded by students, careers advisors, parents and staff from NBMLHD alike.

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