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Title:

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Date:

2021-03-01

Citation:

Stewart, K., Imms, C., McIntyre, S., Kilgour, G. & Clayworth, K. (2021). Better Together: the Australasian Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine champions equity. *Developmental Medicine and Child Neurology*, 63 (3), pp.356-. <https://doi.org/10.1111/dmcn.14752>.

Persistent Link:

<https://hdl.handle.net/11343/276658>

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Article type : Letter to the Editor

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Better Together: the Australasian Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine champions equity

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Editor–Martin Smith, in his eloquent editorial,¹ discusses the turbulence of the past 12 months: the global COVID-19 pandemic that has changed the way we work and play, escalating climate change that influenced unprecedented and devastating bushfires and then floods across Australia, and the global Black Lives Matter movement. He challenges us all to be at the forefront of positive change.

This is the author manuscript accepted for publication and has undergone full peer review but has not been through the copyediting, typesetting, pagination and proofreading process, which may lead to differences between this version and the [Version of Record](#). Please cite this article as [doi: 10.1111/DMCN.14752](https://doi.org/10.1111/DMCN.14752)

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People in Australasia also experience discrimination and systemic racism and have poor access to culturally safe health services. Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Māori, and Pasifika peoples experience subsequent disadvantages across the lifespan, including increased numbers of preterm births, poorer health outcomes, and reduced life expectancy. There is a disproportionate number of our Indigenous populations incarcerated, with many of those being very young, with mental health issues and intellectual and physical disabilities. The Australasian Academy of Cerebral Palsy and Developmental Medicine (AusACPDM) has a role to speak out against systemic failures. We also need to educate ourselves about the on-going effects of colonization, ensure that we provide culturally safe health and disability services, more effectively advocate and embrace diversity, and encourage our educational and health institutions to engage a more diverse student cohort and workforce, all with a view to ensure equity of health care for all.

How can an academy authentically reach, support, and engage with more diverse populations? The recent International Alliance of Academies of Childhood Disability (IAACD) COVID-19 Task Force World Cerebral Palsy Day 24-hour Listening sessions (<https://iaacd.net/iaacd-covid-19-task-force/>) provided the opportunity for global online engagement and demonstrated that we can effectively connect, share, learn, and support each other in meeting the challenge to achieve equity. COVID-19 has unfortunately not only highlighted the vulnerabilities and poorer access to culturally safe services for many of our Indigenous population, but has also been the impetus for many Indigenous-led community responses across Australasia. These were quick, decisive, and extremely effective, providing us with an opportunity to learn from Māori and Aboriginal led health prevention services.²⁻⁴

The AusACPDM 5-year Strategic Plan includes a drive to expand and diversify our membership and increase our activity in low-resourced communities. Currently, our organization reflects a lack of diversity on our Board, in our membership, and across our professions. Opening the AusACPDM to community membership and those with lived experience is one positive step in the process of meeting with communities on an equal footing and broadening the opportunity to share expertise. Now we need to reach and engage more broadly to make our plan a reality.

Embracing opportunities, such as engaging with those with lived experience and professionals from more diverse backgrounds as research partners⁵ is another meaningful step toward genuine partnership, respect, and inclusion.

Greater diversity and equity of access is a key aim for the upcoming joint AusACPDM/IAACD 'Better Together' conference in Melbourne, Australia in March 2022 (<https://bettertogether2022.org/>). To increase our reach and enable people from rural and under-resourced communities to participate we will provide national and international scholarships, and plan to deliver this hybrid conference in person (COVID-willing) and virtually. We look forward to welcoming you to Melbourne as we continue to champion positive change because we are 'Better Together'.

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