

RHDA AMBASSADOR PROGRAM

Acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD) are preventable conditions which have been largely eliminated from developed countries, yet Australia has one of the highest rates of ARF in the world.

ARF and RHD primarily affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, many living in remote areas. Despite the high rates of this disease in communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not getting the critical health care that is needed. Many reasons have been identified for this, including:

- delayed access to care;
- cross-cultural miscommunication; and
- racism and discrimination.

All these issues present an enormous challenge in providing optimal health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the RHD continuum. Early treatment and prevention, secondary care and follow up and tertiary and ongoing management require practise for successful navigation in the health care system. Ambassadors can help individuals and communities to understand the importance of knowing about ARF and RHD. Ambassadors have the 'lived experience of ARF and or RHD' and can provide first-hand experience of what it is like to navigate the health system. This helps to creating connections between communities and health services. Ambassadors are also in a unique position to provide emotional and social support and education to individuals and families.



Meet Kenya McAdams

Kenya has been living with RHD for over 10 years and is passionate to make a difference to other young Aboriginal women who have RHD. Kenya is particularly interested in helping women who are pregnant or planning a baby. Kenya has helped RHDA develop very important videos for Aboriginal women with RHD highlighting the importance of staying healthy during pregnancy and planning for pregnancy.

Kenya is making a difference for her people. She has spoken at workshops and is an inspiration to her family and community.



The RHDA Ambassador program is led by volunteer Ambassadors with the support of RHDA staff. RHDA provides the tools, education and support that the Ambassadors need in their role that best suits them. The program is dependent on community members who have a lived experience of ARF/RHD and who are willing and able to:

- share knowledge about culture and health care, relationships and health access;
- act as patient advocates and help connect patients and their carers to health services and local resources;
- learn and teach about ARF and RHD;
- promote the importance of early prevention and treatment of ARF within their communities; and
- help RHDAustralia develop culturally appropriate resources.

Community elders will also be an important part of the program, reinforcing culture knowledge and sharing their lived experience.

For more information please contact
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