

Outstanding individual using Aboriginal ways to improve health a winner in national primary health care awards

Don Palmer, founder and chief executive of the Malpa Project, was named Individual Distinction Award winner at the HESTA Primary Health Care Awards in Melbourne last, night for an initiative that trains Indigenous children to be health ambassadors in their communities.

Mr Palmer — a documentary filmmaker and Anglican priest before he founded the Malpa Project — recently developed a project called ‘Young Doctors’ that trains young people between nine and 10 years old to deliver traditional Aboriginal medicine.

“More than 400 ‘Young Doctors’ have been trained in New South Wales, Victoria, South Australia and Queensland this year with projects running within primary school communities”, said Mr Palmer.

“When I had the humility to ask the elders, what is it we need to do to make this work, I listened very closely to their explanation. They said, ‘you’ve got to do it the Indigenous way and you’ve got to involve us’. And the next quest was how we do that. And, the results have astounded me. Urban, regional and remote have managed to do for themselves. They devised their own projects and they achieved astonishing results.”

“We have got to try innovative solutions, and the irony is that the innovative solutions in the communities we work with is timeless — it’s the old Aboriginal way of doing health. So, kids learn the old ways and the new ways, but most of all they learn their own sense of self.”

“When we started Malpa, we never asked for money, we never asked for publicity, our thinking was if this worked out they would tell each other and that’s come to pass and I feel very honoured to be part of that.”

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey presented Mr Palmer with the Award at a dinner in Melbourne on 10 November.

“We are pleased to be supporting professionals showing exceptional leadership and commitment to achieving equality in health across Australia and bringing about positive changes in their chosen areas of work,” Ms Blakey said.

The HESTA Primary Health Care Awards recognise the dedication and professionalism of those working at the frontline of health care, including physiotherapists, dentists, pharmacists, therapists, GPs, rehabilitation professionals, health educators and medical practice managers.

Mr Palmer received a \$5,000 **ME** EveryDay Transaction Account and \$5,000 towards further education, courtesy of proud Awards sponsor, **ME**.

Other Award winners were Young Leader, Matthew Simpson from NSW Ambulance in Rozelle, who also received a \$5,000 **ME** EveryDay Transaction Account and \$5,000 towards further education. The regional podiatry team from Boab Health Services in Broome took out the Team Excellence Award and received a \$10,000 development grant, also courtesy of **ME**.

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