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Best in Australian primary health care recognised at national awards

A QLD founder of a not-for-profit organisation helping refugees access health care, a VIC rehab team treating patients with acquired communication disabilities and a QLD Oral Health Therapist who developed a free dental cleaning service for homeless youth received top honours at the 2017 HESTA Primary Health Care Awards last night.

The Awards recognise the innovation, dedication and professionalism of individuals and teams working across primary health care.

HESTA CEO Debby Blakey said this year's winners were selected for their outstanding leadership, improving patient health outcomes and for increasing access to health services in communities across Australia.

"This year's winners stood out from an exceptional group of finalists for their outstanding leadership," Ms Blakey said.

"They have implemented innovative services that has improved patient access to health care, contributing to enhanced health outcomes for those they treat and their communities.

"We are honoured to support these professionals and organisations through the Awards and are proud to be able to provide recognition of their amazing work."

Proud Awards sponsor **ME** – the bank for you, generously provided the \$30,000 prize pool, divided among the winners in the three award categories. Winners will receive \$10,000 in a **ME** Everyday Transaction account to use for further education or team development.

The 2017 Award winners are:

Individual Distinction Award

Dr Claire Jones
Australian Refugee and Migrant Care Services Limited (ARMCare)
Arana Hills, QLD

Claire is recognised for founding the not-for-profit Australian Refugee and Migrant Care Services Limited (ARMCare), which helps refugees in QLD attain equality of access to health care services.

Working as the executive director of ARMCare, Claire volunteers her time working as a liaison between refugees and doctors, increasing health parity for refugees facing barriers such as language, culture and lack of education when accessing health care.

Claire's outstanding leadership has positively impacted the community, reducing mental health stigma, increasing community health literacy, and increasing the use of preventative health services by refugees.

Claire said the refugees she helps often come from diverse backgrounds sometimes with little health care knowledge.

"Having a health care system is often foreign to the individuals we serve, and frequently when refugees arrive in Australia they suffer complex health issues related to trauma. There are so many

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barriers in accessing health care. I enable and inform health care providers so that they can provide quality cross-cultural care," Claire said.

Claire said the Award win and prize money is motivation to keep continuing to develop ARMcare's life-changing services.

"It's a huge encouragement there are many challenges when setting up an organisation, to have this recognition inspires me to keep going and do more. This is going to ensure we can continue this service until we can make ARMCare sustainable," Claire said.

Team Excellence Award

**Austin Aphasia Integration Program
Royal Talbot Rehabilitation Centre, Austin Health Melbourne
Kew, VIC**

Awarded for researching and implementing the Austin Aphasia Integration Program (AAIP) which improves the wellbeing, social participation and communication of people recovering from aphasia, an acquired communication disability commonly caused by stroke.

Patients who participated in the program experienced improvements in mood, social participation and increased community integration. Initial evidence demonstrates the program was successful in bridging the gap between the hospital's rehabilitation services and community-based networks.

Speech Pathologist, Lauren Kovesy said being recognised at the Awards acknowledges the team's hard work and helps to raise public awareness of aphasia.

"The public awareness of aphasia is really poor, even though it's more common than Parkinson's and Multiple Sclerosis combined. Hopefully this award will help raise more awareness for the sector," Lauren said.

Lauren said the team plans to use the prize money to further develop the program and deepen their knowledge through research.

"We would like to formalise a lot of our processes so the program can be transferrable to other health services, we would also like to continue to explore research opportunities," Lauren said.

Young Leader Award

**Nicole Cockburn
The University of Queensland
Herston, QLD**

Nicole is recognised for developing Dental Rescue Week — a free dental service providing homeless youth dental treatment and oral health education.

Run four times a year by volunteer dental practitioners, the clinic provides homeless youth with dental examinations, cleans, fillings, oral hygiene education and referral information for more extensive treatment. The free service has successfully provided dental practitioners the opportunity to volunteer their expertise, in addition to a framework to inform other professions on how to implement a low cost, sustainable service using the same format.

Nicole said she worked closely with homeless youth organisation, Brisbane Youth Service, to successfully secure funding to set up the free week, which is run within their existing service framework.

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“The primary aim of the program is so the dental clinic could be integrated into an existing service that homeless youth are comfortable with and already know. This was achieved through integrating the week with Brisbane Youth Service who now have the education to run the week themselves,” said Nicole.

Nicole said winning the Award not only highlights her work but also the work of other oral health therapists.

“This award is not just recognising me, it also recognises other people in my profession who also provide similar services to disadvantaged communities across Australia,” Nicole said.

Nicole said she plans to use the \$10,000 prize money from the Award win to further her education and attend research conferences around Australia.

Find out more at hestaawards.com.au.

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