

A History of the QAAMS Program

2019-2024

By the QAAMS Management Team

qaams

IMPORTANT NOTICE

First Nations Peoples should be aware that this booklet may contain the names, images and references to people who have returned to the dreaming.

We acknowledge their contributions to the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and to the wider community of Australia's health care system.

A History of the QAAMS Program (continued)

Authors: Tamika Regnier, Audrey Smith, Christopher O'Brien, Jade Kelly, and Professor Mark Shephard OAM
© QAAMS Management Team 2024

All rights reserved. Except under the conditions described in the Australian Copyright Act 1968 and subsequent amendments, no part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording, duplicating or otherwise, without the prior permission of the copyright owner. Contact the author for all permission requests.

Table of Contents

01 Foreword

03 The QAAMS Story

05 A History of the QAAMS Program 2019

06 QAAMS 2019

09 QAAMS 2020

13 QAAMS 2021

15 QAAMS 2022

19 QAAMS 2023

22 QAAMS 2024

23 Final Remarks and Reflections



QAAMS Artwork 2011 by Illawarra and Shoalhaven Aboriginal artist Jasmine Sarin

Foreword

What a remarkable journey it has been for the QAAMS Program and what an achievement to celebrate the 25th anniversary of the Program at the 2024 QAAMS Workshop. I personally know of no other health program that has been funded continuously by the Australian Government for 25 years! It just seems like yesterday when the program began as a pilot with a series of training workshops around Australia in July 1999. There were 48 health services enrolled in that pilot and, incredibly, 32 of these original services (67%) are still participating in the program a quarter of a century later!



QAAMS pilot training session Mt Druitt NSW 1999



QAAMS pilot training session Swan Hill VIC 1999



QAAMS pilot training session Alice Springs NT 1999

There have been many significant milestones along the journey including the first workshop in 2001; Medicare rebates for the HbA1c and urine ACR point-of-care tests; the introduction of a QAAMS Indigenous Leaders Team (as it was originally known) in 2008, training workshops held across the length and breadth of Australia; continuing demonstration that the quality of point-of-care testing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical services is equivalent to that expected of an accredited pathology laboratory; significant improvements in glycaemic control among clients with diabetes; high stakeholder acceptability of the program; and a state-of-the art website featuring immediate feedback on quality assurance testing results.



Mark Shephard

But most of all it has been the mutual camaraderie and respect between the thousands of Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners trained as point-of-care testing operators, their clients with diabetes and the many members of the QAAMS Management team that has been the cornerstone of the Program's success, sustainability and scalability. Long may the Program continue …

Professor Mark Shephard OAM

Founding Director

Inaugural QAAMS Program Manager (1999-2019)
International Centre for Point-of-Care Testing
Flinders University, Adelaide, South Australia

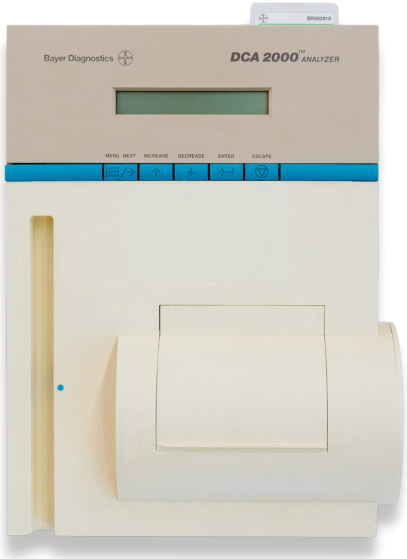
The QAAMS Story

Where it all began

The story of the Quality Assurance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Medical Services (QAAMS) Program began with a chance meeting of two strangers on a bus trip at Uluru, in the centre of Australia, 27 years ago…

In 1997, Mark Shephard attended a conference on renal disease in Indigenous peoples at Uluru in the Northern Territory. The conference dinner was held among red sand dunes under the stars, and a bus was chartered to transport delegates to the location. Mark sat next to Janet Streatfield, who worked with the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. Her section was responsible for enacting recommendations of the National Diabetes Strategy, 1998.

One of those recommendations was that 'a trial of the DCA 2000 point-of-care testing (POCT) device for measuring haemoglobin A1c (HbA1c) should be conducted in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in Australia.'



DCA 2000

The concept for the ‘QAAMS’ Program was seeded at this fortuitous meeting, and funds were secured from the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care to implement a pilot program over a 12-month period. Mark Shephard was appointed as the QAAMS Program Manager. The funding also supported an administrative assistant, Karen Lavender, to help kick start the program.

In March 1999, the Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, in partnership with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), formally introduced ‘QAAMS’ for on-site HbA1c testing on the DCA 2000 by Aboriginal health workers. The pilot aimed to evaluate the DCA technology's acceptability, usefulness, and reliability within 48 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) across urban, rural, and remote Australia.

The rest as they say, is history...



Mark Shephard



Karen Lavender

A History of the QAAMS Program

1999-2019

By Professor Mark Shephard

The first edition of *A History of the QAAMS Program* was released at the 20th anniversary QAAMS training workshop in 2019.

To read the first edition, which covers key Program milestones and events from 1999 to 2019, scan the QR code or visit: https://qaams.org.au/about-us/history

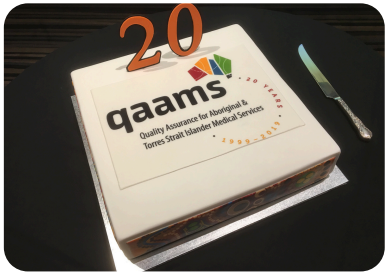


QAAMS 2019

20th Anniversary Workshop

The celebratory 20th Anniversary Workshop in Tarndanya (Adelaide) on the 8th and 9th of May 2019, was a huge success with past and current participants, leaders and management teams, and program partners coming together to reflect and celebrate.

77 participants, along with special guests, attended the two-day event, which featured training sessions, historical presentations, displays, networking opportunities, and celebrations.







Feedback from participants about the celebrations and training was positive:

'I genuinely had a good time. Thank you to the management team for organising a really good event, especially marking the 20 years.'

'Had a good informative last couple of days. thanks for a great workshop!'

'Bloody deadly.'

Awards and Conferences

Spirits were high following the success of the milestone Anniversary. The celebrations didn't stop there, with the QAAMS National Leadership Forum and Management Team continuing to achieve success over the remainder of the year.

Northern Territory Leader, Elizabeth Dhurrkay, was awarded the 2019 NT PHN Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner of the Year. A truly commendable achievement!

In August, Queensland Leader Ann-Marie Mitchell and Training Coordinator Ffion Jones attended the Aboriginal Chronic Conditions Network Conference hosted by the Agency for Clinical Innovation (ACI) NSW. The conference focused on 'power in partnerships' and the importance of building trusting relationships between Aboriginal community-controlled health services and service providers.



Elezabeth Dhurrkay 2019 NT PHN Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner of the Year



Ann-Marie Mitchell and Ffion Jones - Aboriginal Chronic Conditions Network Conference

In October, QAAMS Quality Coordinator Tamika Regnier attended the annual Australasian Association of Clinical Biochemists Conference in Adelaide with Rizzi De Leon, Sam Shepherd, and Peter Graham from the team at the RCPAQAP. Alongside the RCPAQAP, Tamika delivered a poster and presentation titled 'Establishment of a real-time external quality assurance program'.



Peter Graham, Rizzi De Leon & Tamika Regnier

Changes To The QAAMS National Leadership Forum

In July 2019, Priscilla Elmendorp from Nunkuwarrin Yunti was appointed as QAAMS Leader for South Australia, succeeding Jerome Ah-Kit Burgoyne, who stepped down to pursue further study. Robyn Willock from Geraldton Regional Aboriginal Medical Service and Shondelle De Stefano from Moorditj Koort Aboriginal Corporation joined the QAAMS National Leaders Forum, in newly created positions, as the Western Australian Deputy Leaders for the Northern and Southern Districts.



Priscilla Elmendorp



Robyn Willock



Shondelle De Stefano

QAAMS 2020

Training and COVID

In 2020 the COVID-19 pandemic swept the world. Whilst earlier in the year, visits were made to Katungul Aboriginal Corporation Regional Health and Community Services, Umoona Tjutagku Health Service, Pika Wiya Health Service Aboriginal Corporation, and Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service, travel restrictions unfortunately resulted in the Garamilla (Darwin) Workshop being cancelled.

QAAMS National Leadership Forum

COVID restrictions necessitated a shift to virtual video-conference trainings and meetings, with the biannual leaders' meetings also being conducted virtually.

The National Leadership Forum developed a new "6-7 minutes with your client" poster, designed to increase patient engagement during test wait times. The National Leadership Forum also worked closely with the QAAMS Management Team to update the QAAMS Program brochure.



Tamika Regnier training staff at GYHS



Sue Matthews training staff at Umoona



Virtual biannual leaders meeting

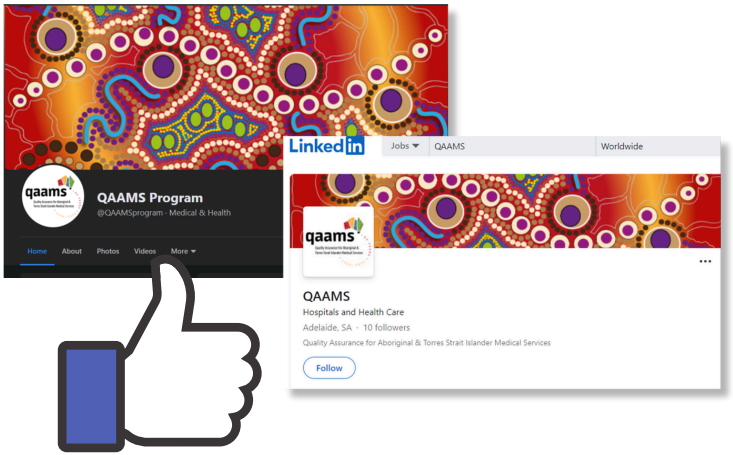


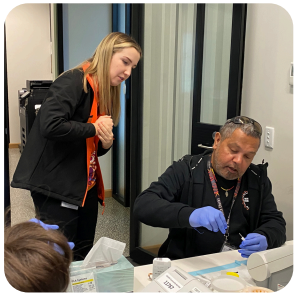
New resources

Perseverance and Achievements

August marked a turning point with travel restrictions easing and the team resumed travel within SA. The first training trip was held at Southern Adelaide Local Health Network Aboriginal Family Clinic Noarlunga.

In the midst of isolation, the team turned to social media activation, launching Facebook and LinkedIn pages for further community reach, to keep QAAMS participants in the loop regarding program activities.





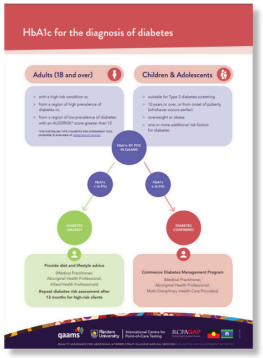
Isabelle Haklar training at Noarlunga SALHN



Isabelle Haklar with staff at Noarlunga SALHN

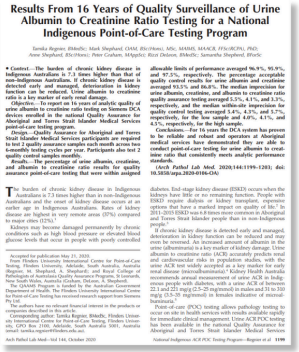
Scientific changes during this period included a transition from dual HbA1c reporting units to percentage units, streamlining the reporting processes.

With the approval of the Australian Government QAAMS guidelines for HbA1c diagnosis were also expanded to include children ten years or older, allowing the program to help address the growing concern of diabetes amongst children and adolescents.



QAAMS HbA1c updated diagnosis guidelines

During this time the QAAMS team also published a paper titled “Results From 16 Years of Quality Surveillance of Urine Albumin to Creatinine Ratio Testing for a National Indigenous Point-of-Care Testing Program”. The paper was published in Archives of Pathology & Laboratory Medicine.


Results From 16 Years of Quality Surveillance of Urine Albumin to Creatinine Ratio Testing for a National Indigenous Point-of-Care Testing Program

Urine ACR Quality Surveillance paper

Reference:

Regnier T, Shephard M, Shephard A, Graham P, DeLeon R, Shepherd S. Results form 16 years of quality surveillance of urine albumin to creatinine ratio testing for a national Indigenous point-of-care testing program. Archives of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine 2020; 144: 1199-1203. https://doi.org/10.5858/arpa.2020-0106-OA

Leadership and Management Team Staff Changes

The year was marked by various staff changes with a notable transition amongst the leadership and management teams. Victorian and Tasmanian state leader James Peterson resigned, with Nicole Davis stepping up from deputy to state leader.

The QAAMS management team welcomed fresh talent. Emma Prisk, a recent medical science graduate, took on the role of Northern Territory state liaison in January. Soon after, another recent medical science graduate, Isabelle Haklar commenced training co-ordinator responsibilities in addition to the liaison role for Queensland, Victoria, and Tasmania.

At the end of the year, QAAMS bid farewell to Anne Shephard, who retired after 17 years of service to the Program; Anne commenced as a QAAMS scientist in 2003 and held the role of QAAMS Assistant Program Manager from 2011 to 2020. QAAMS welcomed Christopher Rebeiro as the new Program Manager in her stead.



Nicole Davis



Emma Prisk



Isabelle Haklar



Christopher Rebeiro

QAAMS 2021

QAAMS New Offices

In 2021, QAAMS embarked on a year of exciting transformations. In February, the QAAMS Management Team said farewell to the familiar offices at the Sturt campus (the program's home for the past 12 years) and moved to new offices at the University's main campus.



Isabelle at the new QAAMS office at the main campus



Mark closing the door to the Sturt office for the final time

Introduction to the Atellica DCA

A watershed moment unfolded with the introduction to the program of the Siemens Atellica DCA device, which promised more rapid HbA1c and urine ACR tests, all packaged into a more compact and efficient form.



Atellica DCA

QAAMS Medicare Rebates

The year also brought changes in healthcare coverage, specifically in Medicare rebates. Notably, the ACR rebate changed to include spot urine samples.

Return to Travel

The spirit of exploration returned as interstate travel resumed, exemplified by Katie and Isabelle's journey across the Top End of the Northern Territory. Together with NT Leader Elizabeth, they navigated training sessions across Darwin, Batchelor, Nauiyu, and Adelaide River.



Katie Cundale and Elizabeth Dhurrkay training at Danila Dilba



Isabelle Haklar training at Danila Dilba staff



Evelyn Bennett



Ellen Kambanaros



Katie Cundale

Management Team Staff Changes

In 2021, QAAMS experienced notable staff changes. Long-serving administrative assistant Pauline Rudevics retired, with Evelyn Bennett starting in her role. Katie Cundale temporarily replaced Emma as liaison for the Northern Territory and South Australia. Following Katie's departure, Ellen Kambanaros joined the team to fill this position.

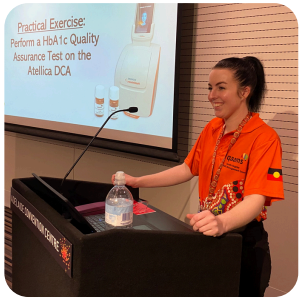
QAAMS 2022

Return of the QAAMS Workshop

With travel restrictions easing, 2022 saw the return of the much anticipated QAAMS Workshop, and excitingly, our first in person preview of the Atellica DCA. The QAAMS workshop was held for the first time since 2019 in Tarndanya (Adelaide) on the 21st and 22nd of June. 42 participants attended from 17 health services across the country to network and upskill. A small group of QAAMS participants were able to receive Atellica training, which ran alongside the regular and established Vantage device sessions.









Feedback from participants about the return of the workshop was positive:

'Loved this years workshop great work guys. Loved the new Atellica DCA.'

'Thanks QAAMS Team. As always thoroughly enjoyed attending your workshop, networking and catching up with friends.'

'Lovely venue. Good accommodation. Friendly QAAMS staff. Excellent training.'

National Leadership Forum Staff Changes

A major focus of the 2022 QAAMS Training workshop was a call for volunteers to fill vacancies within the National Leadership Forum.

Jade Kelly assumed the role of Deputy National Leader, and Leader for Victoria and Tasmania. Zemarie Bond joined the leadership team as the first Torres Strait Islander Leader. Georgina Johnson became the Deputy Leader for Victoria and Tasmania, and Gwen Dhamarrandji took on the role of Deputy Leader for the Northern Territory. In December, Victor Simpson was appointed as the Deputy Leader for New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory.



Jade Kelly



Zemarie Bond



Georgina Johnson



Gwen Dhamarrandji



Victor Simpson

Return to Travel

With restrictions easing further throughout the year, the QAAMS National Leadership Forum (QNLF) were able to meet in person, and the QAAMS Management Team were able to pursue more interstate travel for training.

The QNLF met with the QAAMS Program Management Group (QMPG) throughout 2022 for workshop planning and Atellica resource development. The QNLF provides cultural governance and guidance ensuring cultural integrity across the program.

The team were busy with travel throughout May, with Ellen Kambanaros travelling to the Northern Territory to meet with key stakeholders within NT Health, previewing the Atellica DCA and its capabilities. Training was provided to Diabetes and Chronic Disease Educators across Garamilla (Darwin) and Mparntwe (Alice Springs).



QAAMS National Leadership Forum November Meeting



Ellen Kambanaros with Debbie Glover from NT Health Alice Springs Atellica Training





Following the training in the NT, Isabelle and Polina travelled to Queensland and joined the team at Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service for Vantage training.

Management Team Staff Changes

At the start of 2022, Grant White stepped into the role of QAAMS Program Manager. Following this, Polina Mazonka joined to share responsibilities for Queensland, Tasmania and Victoria liaison with Isabelle. Later in the year, Andrea Francis and Fiona Schrader joined as administrative assistants, and Audrey Smith replaced Ellen as liaison for the Northern Territory and South Australia. Diana Tran also joined the QAAMS Team at the RCPAQAP to assist with program quality management.



Grant White



Andrea Francis



Fiona Schrader



Audrey Smith

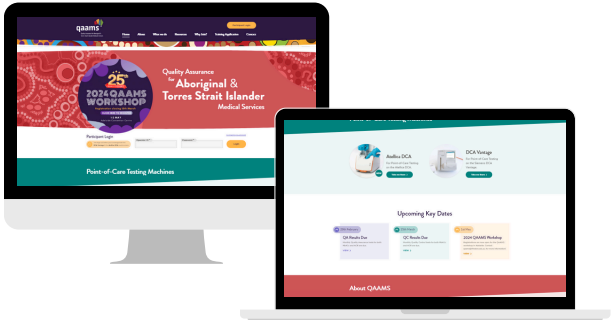


Diana Tran

QAAMS 2023

Website Upgrade

By early 2023, pandemic restrictions were now lifted and a new and refreshed QAAMS website was launched in January, incorporating the new QAAMS Atellica branding.





Atellica Resource Development

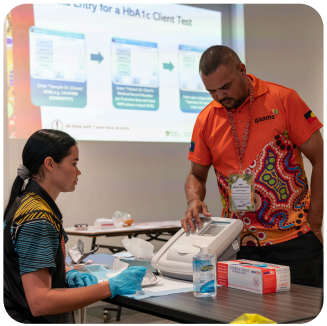
Along with the new website, the QAAMS team spent the first half of 2023 finalising the Atellica training resource suite. This included an A3 training manual, A3 step by step posters, A4 informative posters and 16 training videos. The resources were rolled out on the QAAMS website and utilised at the 2023 QAAMS Workshop and clinic training sessions.

Garamilla - Darwin Workshop

The month of May saw the return of an interstate QAAMS annual workshop to Garamilla (Darwin). The two-day workshop was attended by 60 participants from 26 health services across Australia.

The two-day event consisted of training for both the Atellica DCA and the DCA Vantage. The display booths proved popular, including free SiSU station health checks along with several educational presentations from organisations including Healthy Living NT, and Indigenous Eye Health.











Positive feedback from workshop participants:

'It was a beautiful setting in Darwin. Easy going people who I was comfortable to approach for anything. I loved everything.'

'All good and enjoyed every minute of the two days.'

Management Team Changes

In March, Esin Yilmazbilek joined the program replacing Andrea Francis as an administrative assistant. Soon after, Lauren Keightley joined the team as liaison for Queensland, Victoria and Tasmania, and training coordinator.



Esin Yilmazbilek

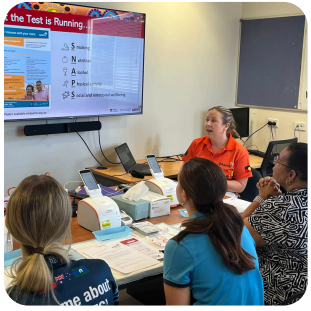


Lauren Keightley

Official Commencement of Atellica Rollout

The official rollout of the Atellica DCA to eligible QAAMS health services began in mid-November. Audrey and Lauren visited Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service to set up the clinic's three devices, and to provide training to 13 participants.

Later in the year the pair flew to Queensland to set up a total of six Atellica devices and provide training for the Cairns Diabetes Centre and Inala Indigenous Health Service. Across multiple training sessions, a total of 35 participants were certified in Atellica testing.



Lauren Keightley presenting at Cairns Diabetes Centre



Audrey Smith presenting at Inala Indigenous Health Service

QAAMS 2024

Atellica Rollout in Full Swing!

The QAAMS team have been busy assisting multiple health services transition from the DCA Vantage to the Atellica DCA. Interest in the new device continues to grow by the day, with over 20 Atellica devices and counting operational in the QAAMS program as of March.

Management Team Changes

Kerrie-Lee Green joined the QAAMS team as an administrative assistant in January.



Kerrie-Lee Green

Celebration Time!

25th Anniversary Workshop

On the 1st and 2nd of May 2024 the QAAMS community will come together in Tarndanya (Adelaide) to celebrate and reflect on the past 25 years.

With invitations extended to many past staff members and participants, the workshop allows us to renew existing friendships and make new ones, as well as enjoying the successes that QAAMS has achieved while looking forward to the years ahead.



Final Remarks and Reflections

25 years of QAAMS is a great achievement, without you all this wouldn't be possible.

When I reflect over the years and my QAAMS journey with my first workshop in 2007, 17 years ago, I am proud of the growth and the positive changes along the way. Being part of the QAAMS leadership team beside brother Chris our National leader and NSW state leader has been an honour.



QAAMS National Leadership Forum



Jade Kelly and Christopher O'Brien

QAAMS continues to play a valuable part of providing care to our First peoples with the use of the DCA Vantage and Atellica DCA providing point of care testing for HbA1c and ACR, getting real time results for Diabetes management and care of our communities, we are able to make clinical decisions in real time while the patient is in the clinic with us.

Thank you all for your ongoing support, here's to another 25 years.

Jade Kelly
Deputy National Leader,
QAAMS National Leadership Forum



Australian Government

Department of Health and Aged Care

Quality Assurance for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Medical Services Program
An Australian Government Initiative

The QAAMS Program is indebted
to the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care,
for their continuous funding support of the program over 25 years.

VISIT US ONLINE

qaams.org.au

Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care

Flinders University | International Centre for Point-of-Care Testing

RCPAQAP
The Royal College of Pathologists of Australasia
Quality Assurance Programs