



Australian High Commission

Samoa

PRESS RELEASE



## Friendship in times of crisis

Providing support for each other in times of crises is a hallmark of Samoa and Australia's partnership, especially as we continue to respond to COVID-19 together. This has deepened personal connections between our two countries. Australian Medical Assistant Teams (AUSMAT) Senior Clinical Nurse and Mission Lead, Bronte Martin, and Tupua Tamasese Meaole Hospital (TTMH) Senior Nurse Specialist, Patea Natasha Mamea, are an example of this, having formed a strong friendship following their work together on the 2019 measles outbreak in Samoa. A friendship that has put them both in good stead to respond to challenges faced due to COVID-19.

Bronte initially came to Samoa as the mission lead for AUSMAT to work closely with Samoa's Ministry of Health and develop a plan for how AUSMAT could support Samoa's response to the 2019 measles outbreak. It was during this initial trip that she first met Patea. "She was able to show me very quickly around TTM, took me through the challenges they were experiencing, and we worked together to plan ahead," said Bronte.

Subsequent deployments back into Samoa further solidified Bronte and Patea's professional and personal friendship. "Bronte and I grew close quite quickly," said Patea. "She's an emergency and ICU nurse, and I am an operating theatre nurse – I learned a lot from her, she's been a wonderful mentor especially during our measles response. She really helped build my skills and confidence in my work."

Both Bronte and Patea reflect on how the measles outbreak informed their response to COVID-19. "As distressing as measles was, the lessons learned were significant as it applied to an outbreak setting – those lessons really helped build our COVID-19 planning," said Bronte.

"Bronte gave us the tools that were helpful in preparation of an emergency team," said Patea. "And of course, all the lessons we learnt during measles had been the basis of our two-year clinical preparations for COVID-19." This personal connection has carried into the present, with Bronte continuing to provide technical advice and support remotely for Patea and some of the health staff at TTMH.

"The resilience of Samoa's healthcare workers I'll never forget," said Bronte. "Such care and joy even in their darkest hour – it truly was a privilege to work alongside Natasha (Patea) and the rest of the team at TTM."

While we will always work together in times of crises, our partnership in health extends beyond health emergencies. In support of Samoa's goals to improve the health and wellbeing of all Samoans, Australia and Samoa have worked together to upskill health workers, expand access to critical services and strengthen the basic building blocks of the health system. For example, Australia's Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) tests samples of medicines and other pharmaceuticals for Samoa to ensure medicine quality. This complements Australia's support to Samoa's new electronic logistics management system to reduce stockouts of essential medicines across its health system. Partnerships such as these offer the opportunity to work together, as the health of our region is a shared endeavour.

Australia will continue to support the Ministry of Health to strengthen Samoa's health system, now, and into the future.

Tasi le aiga, e tutu malosi fa'atasi