



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health position statement

1. Purpose

The nursing and midwifery professions play a significant role in improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This position statement sets out the principles and measures the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation (ANMF) considers must underpin this work.

2. Definitions

Closing the gap refers to the Australian Government strategy to reduce Indigenous disadvantage in life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement, and employment outcomes.

3. Context

The health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is poorer than any other group in Australia.¹ For example, the life expectancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is significantly lower than that of non-Indigenous Australians and hospitalisation rates for chronic and communicable diseases and mental health issues are significantly higher.

Contributing factors to the health inequality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people include:

- unequal access to primary healthcare and infrastructure
- poor nutrition and living conditions
- lack of culturally safe and culturally respectful health services and health education
- human rights and social justice inequities including the effects of racism
- insufficient or poorly targeted funding to meet health care needs
- poor access to secure and meaningful work.

4. Position

Health care

It is the position of the ANMF that:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have equitable and affordable access to health services and the same choices and rights to refuse or accept treatment and care as other Australians.
2. Closing the gap on health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians must remain a national priority until the gap is closed.
3. Funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health must remain an ongoing national priority and enable full implementation of the recommendations of the *Report of the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group 2022*; the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031* and the *Closing the gap* initiatives.²

¹ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. 2019. Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status, 2018. Perth, WA: Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet. Available at <https://healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/healthinonet/Overview+of+Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+health+status+2018>.

² Goold S, Turale S, Miller M, and Usher K. 2002. 'Gettin em n keepin em' - Report of the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia. The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031* is available at <https://www.health.gov.au/resources/publications/national-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-health-plan-2021-2031?language=en>. For more information about *Closing the gap* see <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/>.



4. Governments should focus on trauma-informed primary health care initiatives that address poor health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through early childhood development, maternal health, health promotion, and chronic illness and disease prevention programs.
5. Governments should recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health services for their success and fund and support them.
6. The concepts of community control and cultural rights and the beliefs and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be respected and incorporated into the delivery of healthcare to improve accessibility and safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
7. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be supported to develop and implement culturally safe and respectful strategies to reduce and abolish abuse and violence, particularly against women and children.
8. The rights of children must be protected, and their families supported to achieve better health outcomes.
9. Mandatory child health assessments must not include invasive procedures.

Workforce

It is the position of the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Federation that:

10. The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) is the peak representative body for Indigenous nurses and midwives.
11. Governments should acknowledge and support the role of nursing and midwifery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and its contribution to closing the gap.
12. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have equal access to nursing and midwifery education through Australian Government initiatives and incentives that attract and support them to develop and sustain a career in nursing and midwifery.
13. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives should be involved in curriculum and policy development at local, state and national levels.
14. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be involved in the development of accreditation standards for nursing and midwifery curricula.
15. Content relevant to the history, culture and health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including social justice issues, should continue to be mandatory in all undergraduate and postgraduate curricula for all nursing and midwifery students and in all programs leading to endorsement and notation.

5. Position statement management

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| Document type: Position statement | Review process: Federal Executive every three years |
| Title: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health | Last reviewed: November 2023 |
| Endorsed: August 2007 | Next review: November 2025 |