

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health extends beyond the physical wellbeing of individuals. It is holistic through the inclusion of the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community.

Culture is a major determinant for the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These cultural determinants include country and caring for country, language, kinship, self-determination, knowledge, beliefs and cultural expression.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience a significantly higher burden of disease, and poorer healthcare outcomes, with reduced life expectancy and higher child mortality in comparison to other Australians.

Sustained comprehensive action undertaken in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their organisations, is required to address these health inequities.

Racism, both interpersonal and institutional, and intergenerational trauma have a significant impact on both disease levels and healthcare outcomes.

Social determinants and health risk factors account for over half of the difference in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes. Action to address these social determinants requires long-term comprehensive community level programs.

The ability to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues is dependent on the availability of culturally safe health services.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) have an integral role in community-focused service provision.

AHHA POSITION:

- ✦ Commitments outlined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to prioritise and improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander outcomes must be supported by appropriate funding from the Australian, state and territory governments for locally developed responses that complement the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.
- ✦ A holistic approach incorporating ACCHOs/Aboriginal Medical Services and culturally safe mainstream services is needed for effective service provision.
- ✦ Healthy housing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in rural and remote areas is a fundamental determinant of health and requires more Australian Government support. Overcrowded and unhealthy housing is a major factor in the spread of diseases such as rheumatic heart disease that can be fatal or create a lifetime of disability. Affordable accommodation is also needed for people who have to move to the city to receive treatment.
- ✦ Increasing the size of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce is fundamental to close the gap in life expectancy.
- ✦ The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific actions in the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standard should include assessment and reporting on institutional racism.
- ✦ A Makarrata Commission to oversee treaty negotiations, and tell the truth about our history, plus constitutional change to establish a First Nations Voice to the Australian Parliament is required to reduce inequality and improve health and wellbeing.
- ✦ Research funding should be allocated to investigate community-identified service and policy issues.

For information: Alison Verhoeven, Chief Executive, 0403 282 501