

Joint statement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety at heart of National Law changes



A joint statement between Ahpra, the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Group](#) and the [National Health Leadership Forum](#).

Australia is striving for health equity and to eliminate racism for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. As the regulator for over 800,000 registered health practitioners, the National Scheme has a vital part to play in ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples receive culturally safe healthcare that is free from racism in all forms. Recognising cultural safety as a guiding principle and objective in the National Law is an important step towards this goal.

Cultural safety is not a new concept within the Australian healthcare context – it has been a part of health professionals' training and education for years, is embedded in education curriculum, and is already a requirement of many workplace and regulatory standards. The National Scheme is supporting governments' commitment to embedding cultural safety and eliminating racism in the health system (see the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031](#), the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan](#) and the [COAG Health Council 4 August 2017 Communiqué](#)) and to [Closing the Gap](#).

Self-determination and cultural safety

The National Scheme recognises the principle of self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and is led in its work in this area by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Group (Strategy Group). The Strategy Group consists of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector leaders and representatives from accreditation entities, National Boards, Ahpra and the Chair of Ahpra's Agency Management Committee.

'Cultural safety is very much a prerequisite for health service delivery in providing an environment free of racism that ensures better health outcomes are achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples,' said Mr Karl Briscoe, former co-chair of the Strategy Group.

The Strategy Group in partnership with the National Health Leadership Forum, through public consultation, has established a cultural safety definition for the National Scheme:

Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities.

Culturally safe practise is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.

Former chair of the National Health Leadership Forum Ms Monica Barolits-McCabe stated that, 'the vision of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and the National Workforce Plan is a health care system free of racism, to achieve this we must address the discriminatory policies and practices that exist, instituting culturally safe care is intrinsic to this vision.'

Our commitment

Cultural safety must be embedded at the highest strategic level – in this case the National Law which governs health practitioners in Australia – to ensure a shared commitment across all the partners of the National Scheme.

Its inclusion in the National Law ensures that every part of the National Scheme – practitioners, regulators, accreditation authorities, educators and employers – are working within the same principle and towards the same objective.

There is a new objective:

- to build the capacity of the Australian health workforce to provide culturally safe health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

There is a new guiding principle for:

- The Scheme is to ensure the development of a culturally safe and respectful health workforce that:
 - is responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their health; and
 - contributes to the elimination of racism in the provision of health services.

What this means for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health consumers

This change means that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health consumers can expect that healthcare provision from a registered health practitioner is culturally safe and free of racism.

If the care received fails to meet this expectation, it's within their rights to notify us by submitting a complaint. If the complaint enters the court system, cultural safety is required to be taken into account as defined in the National Law.

It also means that registered health practitioners are required to take steps to educate themselves on cultural safety regarding the accessibility of their services.

The way forward

Registered health practitioners in Australia are familiar with concepts of cultural safety and all members of the National Scheme will continue to support Australia's registered health workforce to practise in a culturally safe way.

This includes the National Scheme's commitment to cultural safety training for all its members – Ahpra staff, National Board members and accreditation partners.

