



# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2016–2023

Prepared for the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council  
by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group



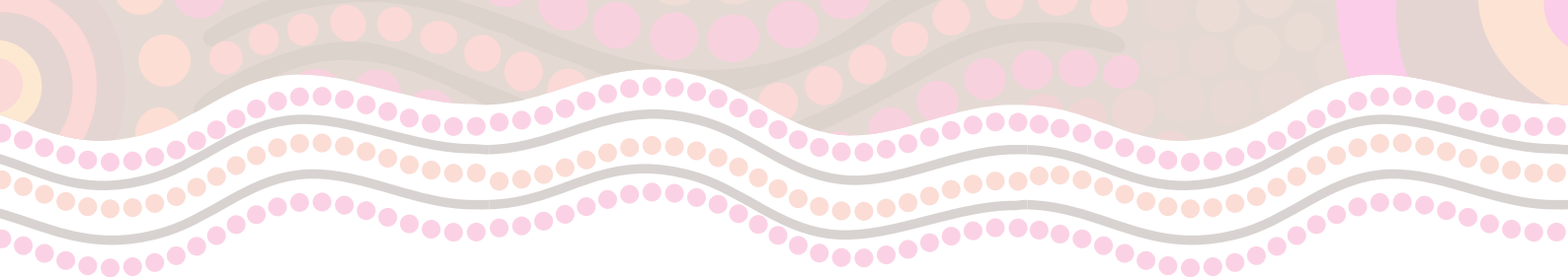
**Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council**



# Contents

Introduction.....	1
Aim .....	2
Key policy linkages.....	2
Cross portfolio linkages for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce .....	3
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums.....	3
State and Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce plans.....	3
Cultural Respect Framework.....	4
Higher education .....	4
Vision and Principles .....	6
Vision .....	6
Principles.....	6
Centrality of Culture.....	6
Health Systems Effectiveness.....	6
Partnership and Collaboration .....	7
Leadership and Accountability.....	7
Evidence and Data.....	7
Key Strategies.....	8
Strategy 1: Improve recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals in clinical and non-clinical roles across all health disciplines.....	8
Strategy 2: Improve the skills and capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in clinical and non-clinical roles across all health disciplines .....	8
Strategy 3: Health and related sectors be supported to provide culturally-safe and responsive workplace environments for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. ....	9
Strategy 4: Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying for qualifications in health .....	9
Strategy 5: Improve completion/graduation and employment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students.....	10
Strategy 6: Improve information for health workforce planning and policy development.....	10
Monitoring and Reporting .....	11





## Introduction

This National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2016 - 2023) (the Framework) is a mechanism to guide national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce policy and planning. The Framework focuses on prioritisation, target setting and monitoring of progress against growing and developing the capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

It will assist in contributing to the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce across all service delivery areas (both public and private), including: social and emotional wellbeing; drug and alcohol; and the mental health workforce.

The Framework has been developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Working Group (ATSIHWWG), a working group of the Health Workforce Principal Committee of the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, with input from key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health stakeholders.

The structural approach to the Framework has been to define a vision, guiding principles and strategies for action. The vision is the direction in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce effort should be focused, the principles are the underlying fundamentals that will guide strategic action to achieve the vision and the strategies are the planned actions that will deliver the vision.

The principles are the core of the Framework and the application of the principles to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce policy will be critical to the Framework's success. The purpose of the principles is to provide a set of guidelines that will be applicable to all stakeholders, and applied by all stakeholders to health workforce policy.

The strategies outline actions that can be used to implement the vision. The strategies are deliberately broad to encompass the wide range of actions that may be undertaken by stakeholders nationally, within jurisdictions, within particular locations and within sectors of the health system.

Stakeholder partnership and collaboration will be essential to the delivery of the vision and the implementation of the Framework principles. It is anticipated that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce policy will be better coordinated across government, service settings, professional groups and the education, training and regulation sectors so as to maximise investment in its health workforce.

ATSIHWWG acknowledges and appreciates the commitment of all stakeholders in developing the Framework.





## Aim

The Framework aims to contribute to the achievement of equitable health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through building a strong and supported health workforce that has appropriate clinical and non-clinical skills to provide culturally-safe and responsive health care.

Implementation of the Framework is expected to contribute to the delivery of the following outcomes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being strongly represented across all health disciplines;
- The representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the health workforce being proportional to the composition of the total population;
- A health workforce that is able to adapt to changing health needs and service delivery environments;
- Health workforce planning that optimises access to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Workplaces that attract, encourage and develop the talents of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals;
- A collaborative approach to health workforce development that involves all relevant stakeholders;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals are supported to lead the development of social, human, economic and cultural capital within the health workforce;
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals playing a vital role in enhancing the Aboriginal health workforce capability through a range of career pathways;
- Non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals recognise the trained skill sets and cultural knowledge of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce; and
- Best-practice training to build a culturally-safe and responsive health workforce.

Achieving these outcomes will require leadership at all levels of government and across the health service delivery and education sectors. Through leadership, effective resources are allocated and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and relevant organisations are developed and maintained.

## Key policy linkages

The Framework has been developed within the overall policy context of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* (the Health Plan), and its specific goal to ensure that Australia has a health system that delivers clinically appropriate care that is culturally-safe, non-discriminatory and free from racism, high quality, responsive and accessible for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Health Plan provides a long-term, evidence-based strategic policy framework as part of the overarching Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) approach to closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage, which was set out in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) signed in 2008.





The NIRA was established to frame the task of closing the gap in Indigenous disadvantage. It sets out the objectives, outcomes, outputs, performance indicators and performance benchmarks agreed by COAG. The Agreement is centred on five priority areas: tackling smoking; providing a healthy transition to adulthood; making Indigenous health everyone's business; delivering effective primary health care services; and better coordinating the patient journey through the health system.

The Health Plan is complemented by its Implementation Plan, which addresses the broad changes needed to make the health system more comprehensive, culturally-safe and effective. The Implementation Plan recognises that building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce capability is a key component of building health systems effectiveness. The Framework is acknowledged as the principal reference for supporting, growing and increasing the capability of the current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

### ***Cross portfolio linkages for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce***

There are links at the Commonwealth level between the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Department of Education and Training, Department of Human Services and the Department of Health and corresponding Ministries within states and territories.

The Department of Education and Training is the policy lead on Indigenous higher education. The Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet is responsible for administering programs that support the Government's policy objectives in this area.

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Partnership Forums***

Members of the Forums include the Commonwealth Department of Health, state and territory governments, and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health peak bodies. Other invited guests include Primary Health Networks, and representatives from the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

### ***State and Territory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce plans***

States and territories have developed jurisdictional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce strategies and action plans. ATSIHWWG provides a forum for states and territories to articulate and report against jurisdictional work plans to address health workforce development strategies. Through ATSIHWWG, jurisdictions report annually to the Health Workforce Principal Committee against agreed performance indicators, including the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in health roles and the numbers training towards health workforce qualifications.







## ***Cultural Respect Framework***

This Framework is consistent with the Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health, which commits the Commonwealth government and all states and territories to embedding cultural respect principles into their health systems; from developing policy and legislation, to how organisations are run, through to the planning and delivery of services. The Cultural Respect Framework will guide and underpin the delivery of culturally-safe, responsive, and quality health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and contribute to progress made towards achieving the Closing the Gap targets agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).

## ***Higher education***

For the purpose of the Framework, ‘higher education’ refers to all post-secondary study, including vocational education and training.


The publication *Pathways into the Health Workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: A Blueprint for Action* was prepared for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council in 2008, and remains a key policy reference for maximising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in the health workforce. It discusses strategies for promoting and improving pathways between school, vocational education, training and higher education; and retaining and building the capacity of the existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.

The *Review of Australian Higher Education (2008)* was established to address whether the higher education sector positions Australia to compete effectively in the new globalised economy. The Review concluded that while the system has great strengths, it faces significant challenges.

The Review recommended major reforms to the financing and regulatory frameworks for higher education and establishment of initiatives to increase both the enrolment of, and success of, students from disadvantaged backgrounds, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The Review recommended that the Government regularly review the effectiveness of measures to improve higher education access and outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The *Review of Higher Education Access and Outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People (2012)* builds on the *Review of Australian Higher Education* and examines how improving higher education outcomes among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will contribute to nation building and reduce Indigenous disadvantage. The Review proposed a profound shift in the way that higher education institutions, governments and other education providers approach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education. The Review envisaged a future with more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals in decision-making roles across government, professions and industry, and in which our higher education institutions value and embed Indigenous knowledges and perspectives. It challenges leaders and policy makers to lift their aspirations and work to establish higher education as a natural pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.





In December 2015, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Advisory Council released its recommendations to progress priority areas in Indigenous higher education. The Council identified the need for better connections between policies and program responses across the education cycle from early childhood, through schooling and post-school education, which clearly places higher education as a natural post-school destination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It also noted the need for better connections between higher education and other Indigenous policy priorities; for example, higher education is the critical component for Indigenous economic development and governance, but is not highly visible in a policy agenda centred on training and employment.

In 2015, the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework* (the Health Curriculum Framework) was completed. Implementation of the Health Curriculum Framework will provide a benchmark towards national consistency for the minimum level of capability required by graduates to effectively deliver culturally-safe and responsive health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Health Curriculum Framework evolved from recommendation 23 of Health Workforce Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project, final report *Growing Our Future*, December 2011:

Embed mandatory cultural competency curricula, including an understanding of the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker, in vocational and tertiary education for health professionals.

The Health Curriculum Framework has been developed specifically for the tertiary sector. Further work will need to be undertaken to adapt the Health Curriculum Framework for use within the vocational education and training sector.





## Vision and Principles

### ***Vision***

This Framework shares the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* vision of an Australian health system that is free of racism and inequality, and where all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to health services that are effective, high quality, appropriate and affordable; and that the health system is comprised of an increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce delivering culturally-safe and responsive health care.

### ***Principles***

The Framework is based on a commitment to the following principles.

#### **Centrality of Culture**

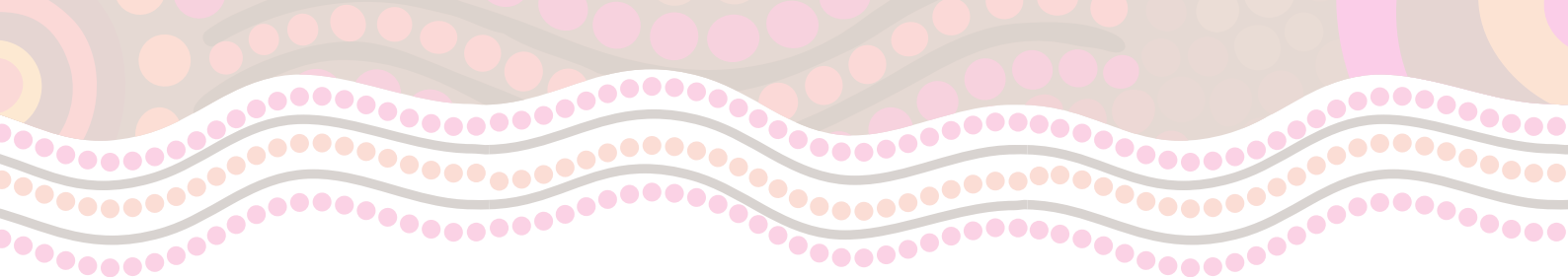
- Effective, comprehensive and culturally-safe and responsive approaches to service delivery should have the flexibility to reflect the local context and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce participation is an essential element within all health workforce initiatives, settings and strategies.
- Cultural diversity, rights, views, values and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are respected in the delivery of culturally-safe and responsive health services.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce initiatives, and the wider health system, acknowledge and respect a holistic view of health that includes attention to physical, spiritual, cultural, emotional and social well-being, community capacity and governance.
- Cultural knowledge, expertise and skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals are reflected in health services models and practice.

#### **Health Systems Effectiveness**

- Developing a health workforce with appropriate clinical and cultural capabilities to address the health needs and improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is central to increasing access to health services that are effective, high quality, appropriate and affordable. Appropriate ongoing professional development and training that is recognised, supported and resourced is essential to achieving this.
- Workplaces must be free of racism, culturally-safe, supportive and attractive to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.







### **Partnership and Collaboration**

- Respectful and effective partnerships and collaboration between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, government and non-government sectors (within and outside the health sector) that recognise the need for community-led initiatives, with shared commitment and responsibility, are required when designing and implementing programs to grow and develop the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in both clinical and non-clinical roles.
- Ongoing inter-professional collaboration, education and support is essential to build a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.
- All stakeholders, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and communities, must be actively included in decision making.

### **Leadership and Accountability**

- Strong quality Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at the senior manager and executive levels is essential to planning and designing culturally-respectful health care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Intentional leadership and talent development initiatives are required to advance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in both targeted and mainstream positions.
- Creation of structured career pathways is a vital element in leadership development and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.
- Commitment to achieving a culturally proficient and safe health workforce must come from the top and then filter down through the different levels of each organisation. This is key to growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, and will require sound policy, budgetary directions and strong leadership across governments.
- Strong leadership from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous health professionals is essential in building social participation and eliminating racism from the health system. Commitment and accountability across and between all levels of government and non government sectors are critical requirements to support health workforce strategies.
- Workplaces must be encouraged to attract and develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all levels of the organisation, including management and representation in governance arrangements.

### **Evidence and Data**

- Workforce models and strategies are needed to develop an effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. They must be based on community needs and evidence-based practice, which is supported by meaningful and reliable data.



## Key Strategies

### ***Strategy 1: Improve recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals in clinical and non-clinical roles across all health disciplines***

Suggested mechanisms:


- Develop and implement communication strategies and community awareness campaigns to promote health careers.
- Develop and implement flexible, innovative and culturally-safe recruitment strategies that target Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Use measures intended to achieve equity and increase the representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the health workforce.
- Develop and implement succession plans and clear career pathways, along with associated resources in both targeted and mainstream positions.
- Create supportive and culturally-safe workplaces.
- Develop and implement mentoring programs.
- Where possible, ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals are given the opportunity to work to their full scope of practice.
- Ensure that the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners is understood and valued.
- Support ongoing professional development in strengthening both clinical and non-clinical skills and capabilities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals.

### ***Strategy 2: Improve the skills and capacity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in clinical and non-clinical roles across all health disciplines***

Suggested mechanisms:

- Provide culturally-appropriate clinical supervision.
- Provide professional development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health staff that are tailored to local needs and build inter professional collaboration and networks.
- Provide opportunities for the development of leadership capability, at all levels; from entry to leadership positions, which includes access to ongoing training and work-based experience.
- Provide and resource professional development of both clinical and non-clinical skills of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals.
- Ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are able to participate in management, decision making and governance activities.





***Strategy 3: Health and related sectors be supported to provide culturally-safe and responsive workplace environments for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.***

Suggested mechanisms:

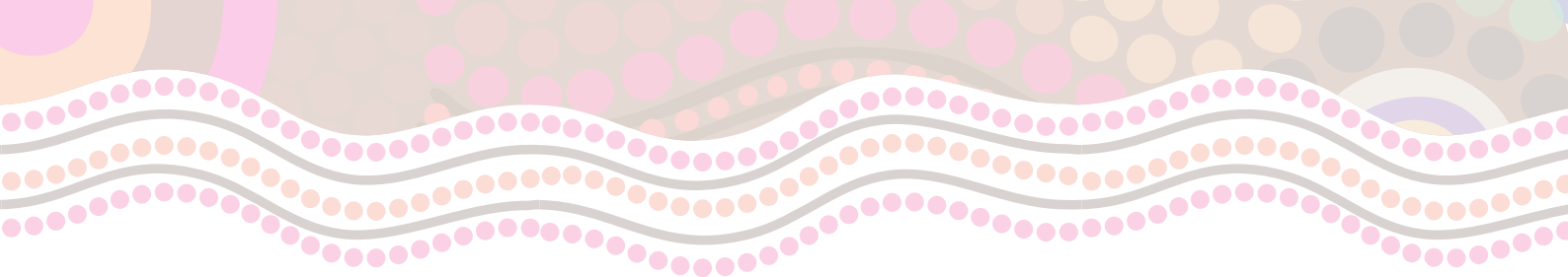
- Ensure health service staff at all levels receive ongoing cultural safety training and embed completion of cultural safety training into performance management and/or professional development requirements.
- Provide and resource appropriate cultural mentoring for non-Indigenous health professionals.
- Provide clinical placements in Aboriginal community-controlled health services and in appropriate mainstream settings for both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous students.
- Embed the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Curriculum Framework into higher education health courses in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Identify and remunerate cultural professionals (cultural brokers, liaison officers etc) to assist in understanding health beliefs and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the service area.
- Work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to co-design and co-deliver workforce programs and initiatives.

***Strategy 4: Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying for qualifications in health***

Suggested mechanisms:

- Develop and implement communication strategies and awareness campaigns and deliver these at primary and secondary school health careers initiatives.
- Offer extended learning opportunities to improve the preparedness of students entering higher education (both at the tertiary and vocational Education and Training levels).
- Provide work experience and work readiness skills programs in the health and wider sector settings where opportunities for health professionals exist, promoting the holistic approach to health and wellbeing.
- Offer and resource scholarships, expanded cadetship and graduate programs, traineeships and internships.
- Develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations at local, regional and national levels in planning and implementing activities to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying for qualifications in health.





### ***Strategy 5: Improve completion/graduation and employment rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students***

Suggested mechanisms:

- Develop, resource and implement mentoring programs that are available from the first year of health studies.
- Maintain scholarship programs that are fair and equitable across health disciplines.
- Develop articulated career pathways.
- Facilitate health services working with education providers at the local level to match training to employer needs and available jobs.
- Work with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to co-design and co-deliver workforce programs.
- Develop relevant and appropriate place-based workforce models to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### ***Strategy 6: Improve information for health workforce planning and policy development***

Suggested mechanisms:

- Create a systematic approach and best-practice guidelines for the establishment, collection, recording, usage, definitions and interpretation of data about and for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce.
- Data collection capacity and mandated performance indicators to ensure cultural safety targets are being achieved and service delivery is improving.
- Collaborate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals to develop and maintain these best-practice guidelines.
- Ensure that the perspectives, aspirations and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals are embedded in these guidelines and reflected in their usage.
- Develop partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to lead community-driven workforce models and policy initiatives.



## Monitoring and Reporting

ATSIHWWG will oversee implementation of the Framework through an annual work plan that is consistent with the Framework and broader government health workforce reform agendas across all sectors. It will include timeframes, targets and milestones for agreed priorities and actions.

ATSIHWWG will monitor and report progress on the Framework at each ATSIHWWG meeting and to the Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council (AHMAC), through its annual report to Health Workforce Principal Committee (HWPC).

Annual reporting will encompass reporting against agreed performance indicators by Commonwealth, state and territory governments, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce professional bodies, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health sector.

Contributing to closing the gap in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the broader population within a generation is a key aim of the health workforce development and reform activities embedded in the Framework. Progress in implementing the Framework will also be guided by, and influence, key bodies such as the Council of Australian Governments (COAG).





**Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council**

All information in this publication is correct as of February 2017