

Our Aboriginal Health Plan 2018 -2022 at a glance

The Women's and Children's Health Network acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of country throughout South Australia and that we respect their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We also pay our respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from other areas of Australia who reside in South Australia.



'I feel honoured to have been a part of this journey with the Aboriginal Health Division. The responsibility for improving Aboriginal health outcomes requires collaboration and partnership from staff and key stakeholders across all levels of the WCHN. I am incredibly proud of our Aboriginal Health Plan 2018-2022 and if we all work together I am confident our new plan will bring us closer to making a real impact on closing the gap in life expectancy for Aboriginal babies, children, young people and women'.

Lisa Lynch
Acting Chief Executive Officer

We use the term 'Aboriginal' to refer to people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. We do this because the people indigenous to South Australia are Aboriginal and we respect that many Aboriginal people prefer the term 'Aboriginal'. We also acknowledge and respect that many Aboriginal South Australians prefer to be known by their specific language group(s).

Our Commitment

The Women's and Children's Health Network (WCHN) is committed to ensuring the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal women, children, young people and their families is a priority action. Aboriginal people are exposed to higher life risk factors, poorer health and less acceptable outcomes in a range of life domains when compared with other South Australians. As a result, Aboriginal people are the most disadvantaged population group in our community.

WCHN aims to:

- > Improve Aboriginal health outcomes
- > Develop a culturally safe responsive health system
- > Promote Aboriginal community health and wellbeing

Our Enablers

Our enablers are fundamental to achieving the strategic priorities and improving Aboriginal health outcomes.

Leadership – WCHN is highly regarded for its leadership in Aboriginal Health, notably for its establishment of the Aboriginal Health Steering Committee (AHSC). The AHSC is a Tier One B (1B) Committee, chaired by the Chief Executive Officer and reporting directly to the WCHN Strategic Executive Committee.

Reconciliation – Reconciliation is a priority for the WCHN, which is evident through the well-established Reconciliation sub-Committee. With the renewal of its Reconciliation Action Plan in 2017, the WCHN has committed itself to take a lead role in the SA Reconciliation journey by building on education, awareness and leadership for dialogue and understanding.

Workforce – WCHN recognises that our commitment to growing and developing our Aboriginal workforce is essential to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal babies, children, young people and women. Providing a more culturally responsive, culturally accountable and culturally safe service for Aboriginal people and communities is at the forefront of this commitment.

Cultural Competence – WCHN acknowledges the importance of a culturally competent workforce and since 2011 has provided Aboriginal Cultural Respect Training to its staff. It provides the WCHN workforce with an understanding of the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal health outcomes, increasing recognition and respect for Aboriginal culture, improved communication with Aboriginal people and development of cultural self-awareness.

Our Strategic Priorities

Tackling Racism and Discrimination

Racism and discrimination are key social determinants of health for Aboriginal people. Closing the gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal life expectancy will be impossible if racism and discrimination is not addressed.

The First 1000 Days

The period from conception to the end of the child's second year is the earliest stages of child development. This period has become known as the first 1000 days, a catchphrase that has become the rallying point for a number of Australian and international initiatives. The reason for focusing on this specific period is the growing body of evidence which shows that experiences during this period can have life-long consequences for health and wellbeing.

Engaging Aboriginal People, Families and Communities

Building strong, genuine and meaningful relationships between Aboriginal people and the WCHN is important to developing a culturally inclusive, responsive and respectful organisation that will achieve improved Aboriginal health outcomes. We will increase the roles of Aboriginal consumers and communities in the design of services and broader policy decisions that impact them.

Closing the Gap

On 20 December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG), which includes the leaders of federal, state and territory, and local governments, committed to 'closing the gap' in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians. Importantly, COAG agreed to be accountable for reaching this goal within a specific timeframe. The strategy initiated at this time by COAG has become known as Closing the Gap.

Monitoring and Accountability

The Women's and Children's Health Network is accountable for the culturally safe and competent services that it provides. Failure to deliver improved Aboriginal health outcomes is an identified risk. We will reduce the risk by strengthening governance and operational processes and by ensuring that structures are in place for regular monitoring, reporting and reviewing of the quality and effectiveness of what we do.

Our Future

The WCHN Aboriginal Health Plan 2018 – 2022 provides the strategic directions and priorities for Aboriginal health highlighting the leadership commitment required to ensure that the targets to address the Aboriginal health inequities are achievable, managed and monitored. The WCHN Aboriginal Health Division will work in partnership with divisional heads to ensure accountability measures are developed, implemented and managed at all levels guided by the WCHN Aboriginal Health Plan 2018 – 2022 strategic priorities.

By 2022 we aim to achieve:

- > An increased Aboriginal workforce to 4% as a minimum
- > A scorecard to mitigate the strategic risk of failure to improve Aboriginal health outcomes
- > The establishment of clear Aboriginal engagement protocols for WCHN
- > Closing the Gap funded initiatives embedded as core business for WCHN
- > The implementation of a zero tolerance to racism and discrimination campaign
- > Structures and mechanisms established to support staff and consumers to identify, report and take prompt action against racism and discrimination
- > The development and implementation of a cultural governance framework
- > The ability to measure the effectiveness of our Aboriginal Family Birthing Program
- > The integration of the Aboriginal Health Impact Statement as standard policy practice
- > 15% of the Youth Advisory Group will be Aboriginal consumers or community members
- > A WCHN Aboriginal health corporate identity and branding which is recognisable
- > Attendance at 2-3 community events focused on promotion of services to the Aboriginal community.

To treat Aboriginal people as equal ignores situations of inequity and therefore perpetuates that inequality. Aristotle explains this succinctly, 'There is nothing so unequal as the equal treatment of unequals'.

So too does the Pan-American Health Organisation, 'Equity is the means, equality is the outcome'.

For more information

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