



Health priority: Aboriginal health

What do we mean?

We draw our understanding of Aboriginal Health from the words of the original National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989):

'Aboriginal health' means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being, thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.

These words remain relevant today and have been reiterated in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023.

Why is this a priority?

Over 20,000 people are identified as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander in our catchment, or 3.5% of our resident population. Local Aboriginal people experience significantly poorer health outcomes than non-Aboriginal people and have done so for many decades. This inequality is unacceptable. We believe there is a role for all services, whether Aboriginal community-controlled or mainstream, to work together to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people in the region.

What has the data told us?

Key points from our analysis of the specific health needs of Aboriginal people living in south eastern NSW include:

Health status needs

- poorer social determinants of health, being more likely to experience unemployment, inadequate housing, lower educational attainment, vulnerability to childhood development risks and poverty
- higher prevalence of most health and lifestyle risk factors and consequently a higher prevalence of most major long-term conditions including arthritis, asthma, cancer, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, diabetes, heart disease, chronic kidney disease and mental health issues

Health service utilisation

- high rates of hospitalisation for a range of conditions
- high rates of potentially preventable hospitalisations, including chronic and vaccine-preventable conditions
- lower uptake of Aboriginal health assessments in primary care

What have our stakeholders told us?

Feedback from service providers tells us:

- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) provide holistic care to their consumers and value the ability to determine their own priorities, in consultation with their communities
- general practices and other mainstream services want to provide culturally-sensitive and respectful services to Aboriginal people and look for support to do so

Consultation with Aboriginal consumers has commenced, with an initial focus on consumers' experience of self-management of chronic conditions. Personal stories of experiences of racism when accessing mainstream health services were of particular concern.

What is our approach?

Our goals for Aboriginal health are:

- better access to primary care for all Aboriginal people, ie:
 - culturally appropriate primary care through ACCHOs
 - culturally sensitive and respectful primary care through general practice and other mainstream primary care providers
- enhanced service capacity and evaluation capability within local ACCHOs
- local communities are involved in shaping service delivery

To achieve this, we will work across our four levels of person centred interventions as outlined in our Business model:

