



anf position
statement

australian nursing federation

indigenous health

The health status of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people is considerably poorer than any other social group in Australia.

While the life expectancy of non-Indigenous Australians has risen over the last three decades, the life expectancy of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people has remained relatively constant and is 17 years less than non-Indigenous Australians¹.

Hospitalisation rates for chronic and communicable diseases including heart disease, diabetes, cancers, trachoma and tuberculosis exceed those of non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups.

Contributing factors to the health inequality of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people include: unequal access to primary health care and infrastructure; poor nutrition and unsanitary living conditions; lack of cultural safety and culturally appropriate health facilities; human rights and social justice issues and insufficient or poorly targeted funding to meet health care needs.

The Australian Nursing Federation recognises the nursing profession plays a significant role in improving the health of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people and that addressing health inequality is a priority. Further, that implementing the recommendations of the *Report of the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group 2002*² and the human rights based approach outlined in the *Social Justice Report 2005*³ is essential to improving the health of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is the position of the Australian Nursing Federation that:

1. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal and affordable access to primary health care and health infrastructure.
2. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal access to adequate nutrition and fresh food; education to support healthy lifestyles; and safe housing.
3. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services are supported and promoted within their communities.
4. All health services should focus on improving accessibility for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people.
5. Cultural rights, beliefs and values of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are respected and incorporated into the delivery of health care.
6. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are afforded the same democratic rights to refuse or accept treatment and care as other Australian citizens.

7. Mandatory health assessments do not include invasive procedures.
8. The rights of children are protected and their families supported to achieve better health outcomes.
9. Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people are assisted in the reduction and abolition of abuse and violence in their communities, particularly against women and children.
10. Culturally appropriate strategies are developed to address abuse and violence including sexual abuse of children in their communities.
11. There should be an urgent focus on primary health care such as education and screening to address poor health outcomes for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people through programs for early childhood development, maternal health, chronic illness and disease.
12. Content relevant to the history and culture of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people and including social justice issues are integrated in all undergraduate curricula for nursing students as well as other health professions.
13. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in the development of guidelines for Indigenous content in undergraduate nursing curricula.
14. The role of nursing in Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander communities is promoted.
15. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal access to nursing education through an Australian Government commitment to further incentives and assistance to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to a career in nursing.
16. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander nurses have a voice at state and national levels.
17. Funding for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander health must remain a priority and be aligned with needs.
18. The commitment to Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander health is ongoing.

endorsed august 2007

¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner *Social Justice Report 2005*.

² The Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group. 2002. '*gettin em n keepin em*'. Report to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH).

³ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner *Social Justice Report 2005*.