



CATSINaM

February 3, 2014

Senator The Hon Fiona Nash  
Assistant Minister for Health  
Minister.Nash@health.gov.au

Dear Minister

**Re: Assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery applicants to meet the English language standard**

We believe that nurses and midwives are the backbone of the Australian health system and play a pivotal role in providing culturally safe health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As nurses and midwives often work in frontline positions, their capacity to do this effectively is critical.

We welcome the review and refinement of the English language skills registration standard recently undertaken by the Nursing and Midwifery Board of Australia. However the revised standard does not address the issue that there are Australian citizens, particularly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, who struggle to meet initial registration requirements by virtue of not having completed or having the necessary documentation to meet the secondary education component of the English language standard. This is a result of past government policies and their intergenerational effects which is widely acknowledged in the Closing the Gap targets for numeracy and literacy.

We would like to propose that applicants undertake either the Occupational English Test (OET) or the International English Language Testing System (IELTS). Our members, particularly Enrolled Nurses who are re-entering the workforce, support the need for the standard and are prepared to undertake these tests as an alternative option to meeting the current registration standard, however they find the cost of these tests, approximately \$500, to be prohibitive.

A strategic direction for CATSINaM is to strengthen our effectiveness in supporting the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in nursing and midwifery. This contributes to the well-recognised and broader need for Australia to improve recruitment and retention of nursing and midwifery students and employees in order to meet the health care needs of the future. Our policy statement proposes that:

*Affirmative action strategies are adopted to support the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and a range of support needs are provided to those students.*

To ensure this occurs, we seek your support and approval of funding \$50,000 annually. This will enable CATSINaM to provide financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students to meet this aspect of registration without financial duress.

We trust that serious consideration is given to supporting our request and we would be more than happy to meet with you to discuss this matter further.

Yours sincerely

Mr Shane Mohor  
President