



CATSINaM

Recruitment and Retention Position Statement

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) was founded in 1997. It is the national peak body that represents, advocates and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives at a national level. We are a membership-based organisation and are governed by a nationally elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board.

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.

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 position

1. CATSINaM believes that the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the nursing and midwifery workforce is an essential element in closing the life expectancy gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within a generation.
2. CATSINaM is committed to working with key stakeholders to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in primary school and to ensure a seamless transition through secondary and tertiary (vocational and/or university) education to employment in the health system.
3. CATSINaM supports affirmative action by industry leaders, employers and other key stakeholders to increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently in the nursing and midwifery workforce or considering entering the professions.
4. CATSINaM supports the advancement of individual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurse and midwife leaders as a means of achieving a sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery workforce.

Recruitment - we resolve to:

1. Work with key stakeholders - including local communities, schools, students and families - to promote, advise and support the establishment of new and innovative pathways for the transition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school students into careers in nursing and midwifery through vocational education and training, and/or through undergraduate and post graduate studies in the university sector.
2. Promote the recruitment of mature aged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the nursing and midwifery professions by working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other stakeholders, to ensure appropriate cultural support processes, flexible learning, and recognition of prior learning processes are accessible to all.
3. Engage with relevant bodies to explore how current and emerging technologies may increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' access to education and training.
4. Engage with Commonwealth, state/territory Chief Nurse and Midwifery Officers, universities and research institutes, and other key stakeholders to research innovative strategies that increase the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students and employees, including increasing the number of scholarships and cadetships available.

Retention - we resolve to:

1. Raise awareness amongst key stakeholders of the essential need for excellence in student and graduate support services, including the provision of culturally safe learning environments, academic support, mentors and role models, and financial incentives to study.
2. Establish partnerships with Commonwealth, state and territory governments, education providers and industry groups to provide advice on the implementation of appropriate support services.
3. Work in partnership with the vocational education and training sector, university schools of nursing and midwifery, and other key stakeholders to promote the delivery of quality and effective cultural safety training to all academics and students.
4. Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery leaders to establish, promote and support programs for emerging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders/champions in nursing and midwifery.
5. Work with education providers, health and hospital services to ensure availability of appropriate clinical placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and graduates (see the CATSINaM Position Statement 'Clinical Placements').

6. Direct strategies towards increasing participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives in the full range of health related employment options.

We recommend that:

1. State education departments and their regional entities, together with primary and secondary schools:
 - adopt an affirmative action approach to the promotion of nursing and midwifery as a career for male and female Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through their careers strategies and/or career pathways programs
 - work with health service providers to provide work experience placements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
 - work with nursing and midwifery education providers to establish innovative pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to enter nursing and/or midwifery tertiary courses.
2. Universities and other education providers of nursing and midwifery education and training programs:
 - adopt an affirmative action approach to the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff
 - actively engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and their representatives in curriculum planning and review committees
 - explore the use of innovative and/or new technologies to improve access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students living away from major centres
 - ensure the curricula of all nursing and midwifery courses meets the standards set for regulatory purposes by the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council regarding inclusion of the “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ history, health, wellness and culture”, including cultural safety
 - work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to establish and monitor appropriate support systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students
 - advocate for the establishment of a national ‘Leaders in Indigenous Nursing and Midwifery Education Network’ (LINMEN), then actively support and engage with its activities within tertiary indigenous education units.
3. Australian, state and territory health departments:
 - provide policy and funding support to enable the provision of work experience by health industry providers for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school and mature age students

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- provide additional scholarships to support the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students
 - fund continuing professional development programs on cultural safety for all health professionals
 - require their funded organisations to provide evidence of culturally safe environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students and employees.
4. Nursing and midwifery professional colleges and associations:
- develop and/or update position statements on the importance of increasing the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students and employees
 - develop and implement joint advocacy initiatives with CATSINaM on the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students and staff
 - actively identify and address the needs of their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander members
 - engage with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations in addressing their members' needs
 - advocate for the establishment of a 'Leaders in Indigenous Nursing and Midwifery Education Network' (LINMEN)
5. Health industry providers (government and non-government):
- establish and monitor culturally safe support systems and working environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students and employees
 - fund continuing professional development programs on cultural safety for all staff
 - set employment targets for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, including nurses and midwives, which reflect the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people utilising health services.
 - engage with schools and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to provide 'work experience' in the health system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander school or mature age students.

Background

Various reports have identified that the capacity to recruit and retain skilled health professionals is critical to the sustainability of health services, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care services.^{1, 2, 3} Recently, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2011)⁴ articulates that an increased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce will lead to better access and improved health outcomes, and play a vital role in closing the life expectancy gap within a generation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, despite the release of 'A Blueprint for Action' in 2008 to develop pathways into the health workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, only 1.8% of the national health workforce is made up of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.⁵

While nursing remains the largest health professional group, making up almost 57% of the total number of people employed in direct health-care occupations, in 2011 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives made up only 0.8% of the total nursing and midwifery workforce in Australia.⁶ Although these numbers are small, research indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are a valuable asset to the nursing and midwifery professions, providing leadership in the provision of high quality and culturally safe health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as other Australians.

CATSINaM and other key nursing and midwifery organisations⁷ recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives are also valued as role models, teachers

¹ Indigenous Nurses Working Group, 2002, *gettin em n keepin em: report of the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group*, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

² Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2012, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012 Report*, AHMAC Canberra, viewed 30 January 2014, <[http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/F766FC3D8A697685CA257BF0001C96E8/\\$File/hpf-2012.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/Publishing.nsf/Content/F766FC3D8A697685CA257BF0001C96E8/$File/hpf-2012.pdf)>.

³ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, 2008, *A blueprint for action: pathways into the health workforce for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, viewed 30 January 2014, <<http://www.limenetwork.net.au/files/lime/AIDA%20blueprint%20for%20action%20pathways.pdf>>.

⁴ Australian Health Ministers' Advisory Council, 2011, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework (2011–2015)*, AHMAC Canberra, viewed 30 January 2014, <<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/publications/publishing.nsf/Content/work-pubs-natsihwsf-toc-work-pubs-natsihwsf-rev>>.

⁵ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council, *op cit*.

⁶ Mason, J 2013, *Review of Australian Government Health Workforce Programs*, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra, viewed 30 January 2014, <<https://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/review-australian-government-health-workforce-programs>>.

⁷ Australian Nursing Federation and Royal College of Nursing, 2006, *Joint position statement: Indigenous Australian people and nursing education*, viewed 4 February 2014, <www.anf.org.au>.

and mentors to their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery colleagues and students.

Increasing the numbers of practising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives is an imperative. The work done to date in establishing pathways to encourage school students to enter enrolled nursing programs through local colleges and registered nursing and/or midwifery programs in the University sector needs to be extended. The Orima Report identified a need to actively promote health careers on an ongoing basis to primary and secondary students, as there is limited awareness of the benefits, diverse range of work and pathways for entry into health professions.⁸ Local positive personal or family experiences with health professionals and services were identified as key factors in influencing students to consider a career in the health sector.

Retaining these students and graduates is also vital, with research indicating the importance of providing a range of support services. Key determinants include feeling culturally safe, having access to a range of personal and financial supports that assist individuals during their studies and early in their careers, and access to additional local support provided to families and communities.^{9, 10, 11}

⁸ Orima Research, 2010, *A report on developmental research to inform communications activities designed to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander secondary school students to work in health*, Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

⁹ Mason, J 2013, *op cit*.

¹⁰ West, R 2013, 'Developing a policy and research agenda', paper presented to the 2013 CATSINaM National Conference, Canberra, viewed 9 January 2014, <<http://catsin.org.au/conference/papers/>>.

¹¹ Giddy, K, Lopez, J & Redman, A 2009, *Guide to success for organisations in achieving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide.