



NEW SOUTH WALES NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION
AUSTRALIAN NURSING AND MIDWIFERY FEDERATION NEW SOUTH WALES BRANCH



POSITION STATEMENT ON THE HEALTH OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLES

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NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association
50 O'Dea Avenue Waterloo NSW 2017

P 02 8595 1234 (metro) • 1300 367 962 (regional)

www.nswnma.asn.au

Position Statement on the Health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

The NSW Nurses and Midwives' Association supports the commitment to closing the gap that exists between the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. The problems that have evolved through generations of accumulated loss and dispossession cannot be resolved without the cooperation of governments and non-government organisations, as well as the Australian community as a whole.

Nurses and midwives have a vital role to play in improving the quality and accessibility of health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The NSWNMA is committed to working to address the inequalities experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to help achieve self-determination and health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION RECOGNISES THAT:

According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) outcomes have improved in some areas however there has been little change or worsening outcomes in other areas of concern for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The crude death rate for Indigenous Australians in 2014–2018 was 418 per 100,000. Between 1998 and 2018, the age-standardised death rate for Indigenous Australians decreased significantly by 32%. However, most of the decline occurred between 1998 and 2006 (a 27% decrease) and there was a slower rate of decline from 2006 to 2018 (by 10%). There was no change in rates of death from respiratory disease or injuries between 2006 and 2018.

Perinatal death rates among Indigenous Australians declined over the past 20 years, but most of this decline was for the period 1998 to 2007 and there has been little or no change in the 10-year period to 2018. In 2008, the perinatal death rate was 9.7 per 1,000 births, compared with 9.0 per 1,000 births in 2018.

Cancer is currently the leading cause of death among Indigenous Australians. Between 2006 and 2018, the age-standardised death rate from cancer among Indigenous Australians increased from 205 to 235 per 100,000. A decrease in the cancer death rate among non-Indigenous Australians occurred over the same period, leading to a widening of the gap. Indigenous Australians have lower cancer screening rates



and are more likely to be diagnosed with cancer at more advanced stages resulting in lower cancer survival rates.

In 2014–2018, the suicide rate for Indigenous Australians was 24 per 100,000. There was an increase (49%) in suicide rates for Indigenous Australians between 2006 and 2018 from 18 to 24 per 100,000 with the highest rate of suicide being among those aged 35–39. From 2004–05 to 2016–17, the rate of hospitalisation due to intentional self-harm increased by 120% for Indigenous females (from 2.2 to 4.5 per 1,000) and increased by 81% for Indigenous males (from 1.6 to 3.3 per 1,000).

Between 2004–05 and 2016–17, the age-standardised rate of Indigenous Australians hospitalised after an assault increased from 4.2 to 6.9 per 1,000 population for females and from 1.6 to 2.4 per 1,000 population for males. In the period July 2015 to June 2017, the hospitalisation assault rate (age standardised) was highest in Remote areas (25 per 1,000 population).

THE NSW NURSES AND MIDWIVES' ASSOCIATION ADOPTS THE POSITION THAT:

- Self-determination must be a key characteristic of measures aimed at improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and therefore we support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community control in health as a key means of reducing health inequalities.
- The NSWNMA has an important responsibility to raise nurses and midwives awareness of the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their cultural context and to advocate for health services and systems that improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- The NSWNMA is committed to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to develop a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture within the NSWNMA and its members.
- The NSWNMA supports efforts, in consultation with the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM), to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives to become involved in the NSWNMA.
- Aboriginal Health Workers are a vital component of multidisciplinary teams delivering health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples undertaking nursing and midwifery training must be encouraged and supported.

REFERENCES:

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2020. [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2020 summary report](#). Cat. No. IHPF2. Canberra: AIHW