

Northeast Health Wangaratta - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategic Framework

The Acknowledgement of Country and local context contained within this draft framework are based on Northeast Health Wangaratta's current understanding and have been included to support consultation and discussion. We welcome feedback from Elders, Traditional Custodians, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and community members to ensure the final framework appropriately reflects local cultural knowledge and perspectives.

Acknowledgement of Country

Northeast Health Wangaratta acknowledges the Bpangerang People as the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we live, work and provide care. We also acknowledge the enduring connections and cultural influence of Yorta Yorta Peoples across our region and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

In the spirit of reconciliation and self-determination, we are committed to partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver culturally safe, equitable and respectful healthcare for all.

Acknowledgements

Northeast Health Wangaratta acknowledges the many individuals and organisations who contributed to the development of this Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategic Framework.

We particularly acknowledge the guidance, cultural expertise and strategic advice provided by Jenni Walke and EITR Consulting throughout the development of this Framework. Their support has helped strengthen our understanding of cultural safety, community engagement and meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

We also acknowledge the valuable contributions of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, community representatives, Elders, staff and stakeholders whose insights have informed this work

CEO message

At Northeast Health Wangaratta, we recognise that improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is both a responsibility and a privilege. As a health service, we acknowledge the profound impact that colonisation, dispossession, and systemic inequities have had—and continue to have—on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

This Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategic Framework reflects our commitment to listening, learning, and working in genuine partnership with Aboriginal communities to create a health service that is culturally safe, respectful, and responsive. It provides a clear direction for how we will strengthen cultural safety across our organisation, deepen relationships with community, increase Aboriginal workforce participation, and support Aboriginal economic development.

Importantly, this Framework is not intended to be a standalone initiative. It represents a long-term organisational commitment that will influence how we deliver care, make decisions, develop our workforce, and engage with the communities we serve. We understand that meaningful change requires sustained effort, accountability, transparency, and a willingness to be guided by the voices and experiences of Aboriginal people.

As Chief Executive Officer, I am committed to ensuring that Northeast Health Wangaratta continues to strengthen its understanding of cultural safety and embeds this understanding into every aspect of our work. We will measure our progress, report openly on our achievements and challenges, and remain focused on continuous improvement.

Together, we can create a health service where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel welcomed, respected, safe, and empowered, and where equitable health outcomes are not an aspiration but a reality.

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Chief Executive Officer
Northeast Health Wangaratta

1. Purpose

To strengthen the health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within our community— and in particular **Bpangerang** and **Yorta Yorta** peoples— by embedding cultural safety, equity, and Aboriginal leadership across all Northeast Health Wangaratta services.

2. Local Context

Our Health service is located on **Bpangerang Country**, part of a landscape shaped by deep cultural, spiritual, and historical connections to the Ovens, King, and Murray river systems. Bpangerang people maintain an enduring relationship with this land, its waterways, plants, animals, and ancestral places. Their custodianship continues today, guided by cultural knowledge passed through generations.

We also recognise the strong presence and cultural influence of **Yorta Yorta peoples** across the broader region. Many Yorta Yorta families live, work, and receive care in Wangaratta, and maintain longstanding connections to the rivers, wetlands, and cultural sites that link their Country to Bpangerang Country.

We acknowledge that Aboriginal identity, clan relationships, and Country boundaries in northeast Victoria are complex and understood differently by different groups. Our role as a hospital is not to define these relationships, but to **respect them**, listen to community voices, and ensure our services honour both **People** and **Country**.

Our commitment is to work in genuine partnership with Bpangerang and Yorta Yorta Elders, organisations, and communities to ensure culturally safe, equitable, and responsive healthcare for all Aboriginal people

3. Guiding Principles

- **Respect for cultural authority** — Elders guide decisions, protocols, and cultural governance.
- **Self-determination** — Aboriginal communities shape hospital policies and models of care.
- **Cultural safety** — Every patient interaction is free from racism and is culturally respectful.
- **Holistic health** — Care recognises physical, emotional, spiritual, cultural, and family wellbeing.
- **Partnership** — Strong and meaningful collaboration with local Aboriginal Controlled Community Organisations (ACCOs) and Aboriginal-led organisations.
- **Place-based accountability** — Transparent reporting of outcomes and progress to local communities.

4. Our Commitment Pillars

NHW recognises that reconciliation and improved Aboriginal health outcomes require collective action. Our greatest impact lies within four interconnected pillars which reflect our sphere of influence and form our commitments to strengthen reconciliation and the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.



Culturally Safe Healthcare

Our goal is to deliver culturally safe, respectful, trauma-informed healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across our services.

NHW recognises that cultural safety is not a program with a start and end date. It is a continuous, organisation-wide commitment to dismantling structural barriers, building genuine relationships with community, and ensuring that every Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who walks through NHW's doors experiences care that is safe, respectful and responsive to their needs.

Our Cultural Safety Framework details the principles, domains and values that guide NHW's approach to culturally safe healthcare and includes our key actions and measures of success against this commitment.

Our Cultural Safety Playbook is a further practical guide which aims to help our staff understand what culturally safe care looks like in practice.

Partnerships & Community Engagement

Our goal is to strengthen trust, continuity of care, and shared decision making through genuine partnerships with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

NHW recognises that genuine community engagement is the foundation of a health service that earns and maintains the trust of the communities it serves. Culturally safe healthcare cannot be achieved in isolation; it requires ongoing dialogue, co-design, and shared accountability with Aboriginal people and organisations.

To this end, NHW commits to working alongside ACCO's, community leaders and regional health partners to strengthen Aboriginal health outcomes across the region.

Key Actions
Establish and finalise documented partnership agreements with local ACCOs, namely Albury Wodonga Aboriginal Health Service and Mungabareena.
Establish regular Aboriginal engagement forums in accordance with the NHW Community Engagement Strategy
Bi-annual cultural safety walkarounds of NHW areas with community representatives.
Establish formal partnership meetings with ACCO's (minimum 3 annually)
Establish Community feedback loop with documented responses.
Develop our NHW Reconciliation Statement of Intent in partnership with Aboriginal community and stakeholders.

Success Measures
Partnership agreements developed and signed by all parties.
Minimum 2 engagement forums annually
90% of community feedback items actioned or formally responded to
Diversity of representation at forums tracked and reported.
Public launch of our Reconciliation Statement of Intent
Public launch of our Community Engagement Strategy.

Aboriginal Workforce Participation

Our goal is to increase Aboriginal employment, leadership, and career development across the health service.

NHW acknowledges and continues to develop our understanding of the gaps experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across many domain areas. We recognise the importance of creating meaningful employment and development opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This employment has the potential to transform their lives, their families and local community, whilst supporting NHW to strengthen culturally safe health care across our service.

Our focus on this commitment is captured in our Aboriginal Employment Plan which details our actions across three key areas:

- Attraction and retention.
- Career Progression
- Cultural safety

The table below outlines our expected outcomes across these three areas.

Key Area	Outcomes:
Attraction and Retention	• Increase the employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to 3% of our employees by 2030, including a phased approach of increased representation from 1.2% to 1.9% by 2027 and 1.9% to 2.4% by 2028. • Develop, foster and grow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within the hospital in both clinical and non-clinical roles • Increase the number of work areas with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed. • Provide ongoing cultural support for staff.
Career Progression	• Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff retention. • Improve staff satisfaction and engagement. • Increase representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in senior leadership and Board Roles.
Cultural Safety	• Increase cultural competency of staff. • Ensure all NHW workforce demonstrate culturally respectful behaviour. • People feel safe to identify as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Procurement and Economic Participation

Our goal is to support Aboriginal economic development by increasing procurement from Aboriginal-owned businesses and creating economic opportunities for local communities.

NHW acknowledges that supporting Aboriginal businesses contributes to economic participation and community development. In alignment with the Victorian Government's Social Procurement Framework and NHW's Social Procurement Strategy, NHW will seek

opportunities to engage Aboriginal businesses where possible, particularly within non-clinical procurement areas such as:

- Facilities services
- Cleaning and environmental services
- Office supplies and consumables
- Furniture and equipment
- Cultural training and consulting services.

5. Governance and Reporting

The CEO is ultimately accountable to the Board for NHW's cultural safety performance and monitoring of this framework. The NHW Board receives an Aboriginal Health quarterly report which monitors our progress against our four commitment areas.

Each of our commitments have been allocated an Executive Lead as follows:

- Culturally Safe Care – Director of Allied Health
- Partnerships and Community Engagement – Chief Executive Officer
- Aboriginal Workforce – Executive Director People and Corporate Operations
- Procurement and Economic Participation – Executive Director People and Corporate Operations.

Operational responsibility sits with clinical and corporate leaders who integrate the framework priorities into everyday practice.

NHW recognises that governance of this framework is anchored in shared leadership between the health service and the Aboriginal communities it serves. This will be achieved through the various mechanisms outlined in our commitment to partnerships and community engagement.

NHW also commits to transparent, place-based reporting through an annual Aboriginal Health Outcomes Report, ensuring that community voices remain central to decision-making and continuous improvement

6. Reconciliation Statement of Intent

Our commitment to reconciliation and improved health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People is also evident in our Reconciliation Statement of Intent available at www.northeasthealth.org.au

Our Statement of Intent outlines the areas where NHW will focus its efforts to contribute meaningfully to reconciliation. Our approach aligns with the principles of the Reconciliation Action Plan framework while ensuring that our commitments reflect the areas where NHW can have the greatest impact.