



**NACCHO**

National Aboriginal Community  
Controlled Health Organisation  
*Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands*

[www.naccho.org.au](http://www.naccho.org.au)

# Aged Care Data and Digital Strategy

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Submission to  
Department of Health and  
Aged Care

December 2023

## About NACCHO

NACCHO is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Australia. We represent 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and assist several other community-controlled organisations to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Our sector has more than fifty years' collective service. In 1971, Aboriginal people established the first Aboriginal medical service in Redfern, NSW. Mainstream health services were not working and there was an urgent need to provide decent, accessible health services for the medically uninsured Aboriginal population (pre-dating Medicare (1975)). Similar Aboriginal medical services quickly sprung up around the country. In 1974, a national representative body was formed to represent these Aboriginal medical services. That body has grown into what NACCHO is today.

NACCHO liaises with its membership (ACCHOs) and eight state/territory affiliates, governments, and other organisations, to develop policy, provide advice and advocate for better health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Together we address health issues including service delivery, information and education, research, public health, financing, and programs.

ACCHOs range from large multi-functional services employing several medical practitioners and providing a wide range of services, to small services which rely on Aboriginal health practitioners and/or nurses to provide the bulk of primary health care services. Our 145 members provide services from about 550 clinics. Our sector provides over 3.1 million episodes of care per year for over 410,000 people across Australia; about one million of these episodes of care are delivered in very remote regions.

ACCHOs contribute to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing by providing comprehensive primary health care, and by integrating and coordinating care and services. They provide home and site visits; medical, public health and health promotion services; allied health; nursing services; assistance with making appointments and transport; help accessing childcare or dealing with the justice system; drug and alcohol services; and help with income support.

ACCHOs build ongoing relationships to provide continuity of care. This helps chronic conditions to be better managed and provides more opportunities for preventative health care. Through local engagement and a proven service delivery model, our clients 'stick'. Cultural safety in our services is a key factor of our success.

ACCHOs are also closing the employment gap. Collectively, we employ about 7,000 staff – 54 per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders. This makes us the third largest employer of Aboriginal or Torres Strait people in the country.

Enquiries about this submission should be directed to:

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## National Agreement on Closing the Gap

At the meeting of National Cabinet in early February 2023, First Ministers agreed to renew their commitment to Closing the Gap by re-signing the National Agreement, first signed in July 2020. The reforms and targets outlined in the National Agreement seek to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians.

This Government's first Closing the Gap Implementation Plan commits to achieving Closing the Gap targets *through implementation of the Priority Reforms*. This represents a shift away from focussing on the Targets, towards the structural changes that the Priority Reforms require, and which are more likely to achieve meaningful outcomes for our people in the long term.

The four Priority Reforms offer a roadmap to meaningfully impact structural drivers of chronic disease for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

### Priority Reform Area 1 – Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

This Priority Reform commits to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress against Closing the Gap.

### Priority Reform Area 2 – Building the community-controlled sector

This Priority Reform commits to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap. In recognition that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services are better for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, achieve better results, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and are often preferred over mainstream services.

### Priority Reform Area 3 – Transformation of mainstream institutions

This Priority Reform commits to systemic and structural transformation of mainstream government organisations to improve to identify and eliminate racism, embed and practice cultural safety, deliver services in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, support truth telling about agencies' history with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and engage fully and transparently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when programs are being changed.

### Priority Reform 4 – Sharing data and information to support decision making

This Priority Reform commits to shared access to location-specific data and information (data sovereignty) to inform local-decision making and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations to support the achievement of the first three Priority Reforms.

NACCHO recommends that the Aged Care Data and Digital Strategy aligns with the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform Areas.

## Acknowledgements

NACCHO welcomes the opportunity to provide this submission to the Department of Health and Aged Care. We would be pleased to elaborate further to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have better access to culturally appropriate Aged Care services.

We support the submissions made by NACCHO Members and Affiliates.

## Feedback on the draft strategy

- NACCHO welcomes the strategy's focus on person-centred care via data and digital innovation and its focus on addressing recommendations from the Aged Care Royal Commission. As such, we welcome an Aged Care Data and Digital Strategy that supports:
  - a person-centred approach, as this aligns with the ACCHO model of care<sup>1</sup>
  - an aged care system where all services are centred around and culturally appropriate for the person receiving care
  - aged care services that are free of discrimination and racism and delivered flexibly to optimise health outcomes for the person receiving care
  - aged care services that respect and acknowledge the collective, holistic view of family, community, relationships with Elders, and connections with Country as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing
  - an aged care system where Aboriginal Community-Controlled aged care providers are supported to determine and deliver an integrated model of care to meet the aged care, disability care and primary health care needs within their community.
- NACCHO is concerned that the strategy is silent on how it will contribute to implementation of the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- Given the government's commitment to the National Agreement and its four Priority Reforms, it is concerning that the only references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the draft strategy are the Acknowledgement at the beginning and a cursory mention of the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan (p29).
- It is not sufficient that the Strategy defers responsibility for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and communities to the First Nations Digital Inclusion Plan (FNDIP). Consideration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be explicit in *this* Strategy, as should linkages of this Strategy to the FNDIP.
- It is also critical that the Strategy align with the First Nations Aged Care Framework currently under development. The draft framework aims to provide the pathway to improve aged care experiences for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. It acknowledges that to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have positive engagement with aged care, there is a need to simplify the aged care system and improve navigation processes.
- It remains unclear how the Strategy will intersect with and support the broader reforms to the aged care system currently being undertaken.

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<sup>1</sup> NACCHO Core Services and Outcomes Framework <https://csof.naccho.org.au/>

- While the Strategy describes four high-level outcomes and associated strategic priorities for aged care, it is light on specific detail about how and when it will address data and digital matters to achieve these outcomes in the aged care ecosystem. Specific strengths, shortcomings or gaps in the existing data and digital aged care environment are not identified, and there is no discussion about how or when these will be determined. Further, it's unclear what problems the strategy is aiming to address.
- The strategy describes action areas and an intention to develop and implement an associated living action plan, with timeframes and accountabilities. However, with no timeframe to deliver the living action plan and no identified concrete actions or indicators of success, achieving the outcomes in the proposed '2023-2028 and beyond' timeframe seems ambitious.
- To ensure equity of access for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, an Aged Care Data and Digital strategy needs to address factors such as financial capacity, connectivity and cultural needs that may limit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' access to digital health tools.<sup>2</sup>
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) play a central role providing culturally safe, trauma-informed primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They are trusted and accessible. Their person-centred approach to care prioritises individual client needs and incorporates wraparound services which help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to overcome barriers that can make it difficult to access care. The Strategy must ensure the ACCHO workforce has the necessary digital literacy and access to digital health and aged care systems to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access aged care services.
- In line with Priority Reform 4, the Aged Care Digital and Data Strategy should enable shared access to location-specific data and information to inform local-decision making by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations. The Strategy should ensure that data is presented in a way that is accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations.

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<sup>2</sup> Henson, C., Chapman, F., Shepherd, G., Carlson, B., Rambaldini, B., Gwynne, K. (2023). Amplifying older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's perspectives to promote digital health equity: co-designed qualitative study. *Journal of Medical Internet Research*, 25. Retrieved from: <https://doi.org/10.2196/50584>