



anf position  
statement

# australian nursing federation

## indigenous health

The health status of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people is considerably poorer than any other social group in Australia.

While the life expectancy of non-Indigenous Australians has risen over the last three decades, the life expectancy of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people has remained relatively constant: 12 years less for males and 10 years less for females, than for non-Indigenous Australians.<sup>1</sup>

Hospitalisation rates for chronic and communicable diseases including heart disease, diabetes, cancers, trachoma and tuberculosis exceed those of non-Indigenous Australians across all age groups.

Contributing factors to the health inequality of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people include: unequal access to primary health care and infrastructure; poor nutrition and unsanitary living conditions; lack of cultural safety and culturally appropriate health facilities; human rights and social justice issues and insufficient or poorly targeted funding to meet health care needs.

The Australian Nursing Federation recognises the nursing and midwifery professions play a significant role in improving the health of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people and that addressing health inequality is a priority. Essential to improving the health of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people, is implementation of the recommendations of the *Report of the Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group 2002*,<sup>2</sup> the human rights based approach outlined in the Social Justice Report 2005,<sup>3</sup> and the subsequent *Close the Gap* campaign messages.<sup>4</sup>

It is the position of the Australian Nursing Federation that:

1. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal and affordable access to primary health care and health infrastructure.
2. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal access to adequate nutrition, fresh food and clean water; education to support healthy lifestyles; safe housing, and employment.
3. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander community controlled health services are supported and promoted within their communities.
4. All health services should focus on improving accessibility for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people.

5. Cultural rights, beliefs and values of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are respected and incorporated into the delivery of health care.
6. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are afforded the same rights to refuse or accept treatment and care as other Australian citizens.
7. Mandatory health assessments do not include invasive procedures.
8. The rights of children are protected and their families supported to achieve better health outcomes.
9. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are assisted in the reduction and abolition of abuse and violence in their communities, particularly against women and children.
10. Culturally appropriate strategies are developed in conjunction with Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander people to address abuse and violence including sexual abuse of children in their communities.
11. There must be an urgent focus on primary health care such as education and screening to address poor health outcomes for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people through programs for early childhood development, maternal health, chronic illness and disease.
12. Content relevant to the history, culture and health of Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people and including social justice issues are integrated in all undergraduate curricula for nursing and midwifery students as well as other health professions.
13. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in the development of guidelines for Indigenous content in undergraduate nursing and midwifery curricula.
14. The role of nursing and midwifery in Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander communities is acknowledged and supported by governments.
15. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander people have equal access to nursing and midwifery education through an Australian Government commitment to further incentives and assistance to attract Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to a career in nursing and midwifery.
16. Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives have a voice at state and national levels.
17. Funding for Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander health must remain a priority and be aligned with needs.

18. The commitment to Indigenous Australian and Torres Strait Islander health is ongoing.

*endorsed by federal executive august 2007*

*reviewed and re-endorsed by federal executive february 2011*

## references

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. 2010. *Australia's Health*. Cat. No. AUS 122. Canberra. Available at: <http://www.aihw.gov.au/publications/aus/ah10/ah10.pdf> Chapter 5.
- 2 The Indigenous Nursing Education Working Group. 2002. *'gettin em n keepin em'*. Report to the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). Available at: [http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-oatsih-pubs-gettinem.htm/\\$FILE/gettinem.pdf](http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-oatsih-pubs-gettinem.htm/$FILE/gettinem.pdf)
- 3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner. 2005. *Social Justice Report*. Report No. 3/2005. Available at: [http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social\\_justice/sj\\_report/sjreport05/pdf/SocialJustice2005.pdf](http://www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/sj_report/sjreport05/pdf/SocialJustice2005.pdf)
- 4 Close The Gap website: <http://www.closesthegap.com.au/organisations.php>