

CLOSING
THE GAP

A FRAMEWORK FOR CULTURAL CAPABILITY



Acknowledgements

GP Links Wide Bay acknowledges and pays respect to the traditional owners on whose land we provide health services.

Foreword

GP Links Wide Bay is committed to closing the life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

In order to achieve this, we need to ensure that our organisation is competent in meeting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It requires an organisation that is understanding and respectful towards cultural differences and needs, and applies this to every aspect of health service delivery including governance, policy, communication, funding, quality standards, data collection, human resources, change management, education and training.

It is much more than the delivery of clinical services, it's about delivering long-term sustainable changes to our way of thinking and operating.

Attaining cultural awareness and capability is an individual process that each person must work towards by themselves, it involves learning and gaining insight into another culture, it involves self-awareness and it involves challenging your own perceptions.

GP Links Wide Bay staffs have embraced this as an opportunity to enrich our lives and the community we operate in. We are passionate about providing the best service we can and better meeting the health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

We invite you to take this journey with us, walk with us and work with us, so that together we can close the gap on Indigenous disadvantage.

Shane Dawson
CEO
GP Links Wide Bay

Introduction

GP Links Wide Bay is proud to adopt *Queensland Health's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework 2010 – 2033* in line with our steadfast commitment towards 'Closing the Gap'. The framework provides the foundation and guidance to deliver sustainable health gains for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

The framework requires all staff to understand and respect cultural differences and needs, and to apply this in their various roles.

Our commitment to closing the gap requires GP Links Wide Bay to reflect on the past and take steps to change the way we do business in order to evolve into a culturally competent organisation.

The framework will guide fundamental changes to our education, policies, planning and practices, so that:

- Our services are responsive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- Our staff have the knowledge and skills to deliver care in a culturally capable way
- Our work environments are at all times culturally respectful and supportive of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff
- We can provide more timely care, better prevention and early intervention
- We can improve trust, particularly in health care and self-management, ultimately playing a pivotal role in improving health outcomes and expectancy.

GP Links Wide Bay will act in the spirit of reconciliation, recognising their part and moving forward together towards closing the gap, and a better future and health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. GP Links Wide Bay will use this framework to continually develop and improve its cultural capability.

“GP Links Wide Bay supports and enhances general practice by collaborating with health service providers and the community.”

Closing the gap in Indigenous health outcomes

Indigenous Australians experience the worst health in Australia, as evidenced in research which indicates:

- deaths and low birth weights of newborn babies are twice as likely for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- mortality rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 5 years of age are up to five times higher than non-Indigenous children
- in Queensland the child mortality rate is 2.4 times the total state average
- 12 per cent of the total burden of disease and injury from smoking
- 7 per cent of all deaths and 6 per cent of the total burden of disease from alcohol
- lower rates of access to acute care investigations and procedures
- lower likelihood of being treated for and surviving cancer; and
- discharge against advice for 25 – 44 year olds up to 30 times more than other Australians.

Life expectancy at birth for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Queenslanders is lower by 10.4 years for males and 8.9 years for females than that of non-Indigenous Queenslanders.

Poor health outcomes and premature mortality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the effect of a multifaceted set of factors and many of the contributing factors are preventable.

However, several barriers continue to limit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples access to equitable and quality health care services. Some of these barriers are physical in relation to poor linkages and co-ordination across services, some are social-economic, some are about access and others are cultural.

Cultural barriers may include health care service provider attitudes and service delivery, communication, mistrust of the system/s, lack of cultural understanding and racism.

Health in a cultural context

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples traditionally view their own health in a broad context, including awareness for physical, cultural and spiritual elements of their wellbeing. For Aboriginal people, culture and identity are fundamental to their view of health and ill health. The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), (1989) states:

“Health to Aboriginal peoples is a matter of determining all aspects of their life, including control over their physical environment, of dignity, of community self-esteem, and of justice. It is not merely a matter of the provision of doctors, hospitals, medicines or the absence of disease and incapacity.”¹

The views that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold of their health, the environment and social situations surrounding them can affect:

- the attitudes of the person towards their health
- when and why Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples access health care services
- their willingness to undergo treatment
- the chances of the individual continuing to follow treatment recommendations
- the positive effect of prevention and health promotion strategies
- the assessment of quality of care
- their perception of health care services and health care workers.

¹ (The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA), 1989)

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is everyone's business

All members of staff at GP Links Wide Bay can contribute to closing the gap by continually progressing their individual cultural competency to improve the way they communicate and deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, strengthening the organisation as a culturally competent health care service.

Cultural Capability is defined within the framework as:

"... cultural capabilities [or competency] refers to the skills, knowledge and behaviours that are required to plan, support, improve and deliver services in a culturally respectful and appropriate manner".²

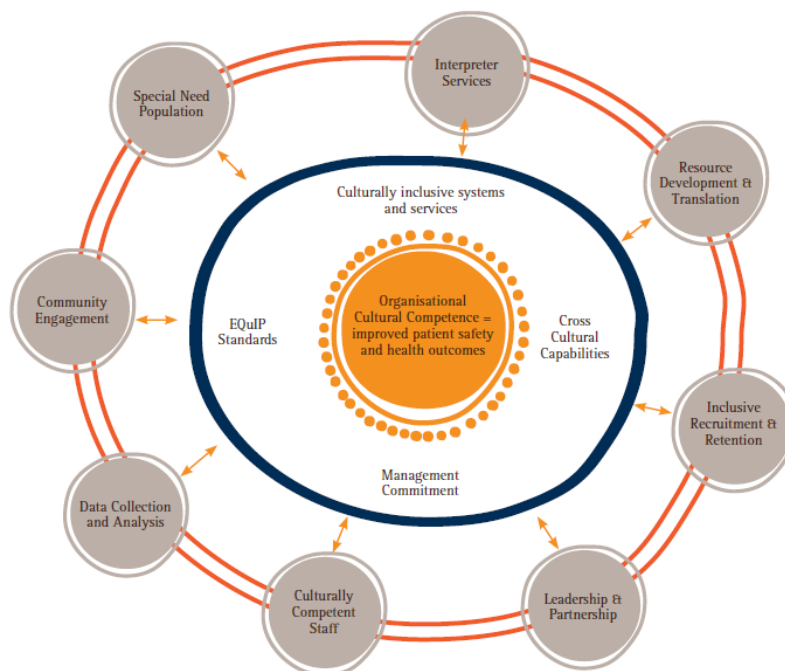
There are many barriers that can prevent health care workers from providing quality, culturally appropriate services:

- in some instances, general insensitivity
- fear of offending
- lack of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander cultural issues relating to history, spirituality, trauma, loss and grief, and
- not enough knowledge and skills in health issues and risk factors.

A framework for cultural capability

There are eight elements that make up the framework and its stated principles of self-reflection, cultural understanding, context, communication and collaboration are embedded within and aligned to the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework 2010 - 2033*.

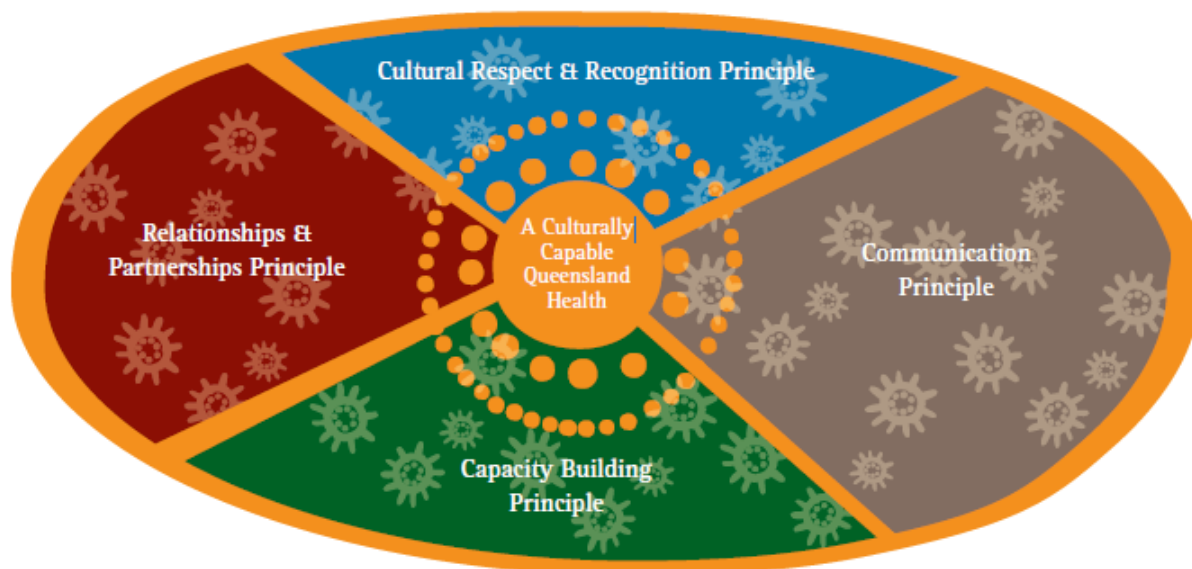
Figure 1: Cultural Competency Framework (Queensland Health, 2010)



² (Queensland Health, 2010)

The framework has four guiding principles, pictured below in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Guiding Principles for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural capability (Queensland Health, 2010)



GP Links Wide Bay will adopt the following philosophies that underpin *Queensland Health's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework 2010 – 2033*.

- Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is everyone's business.
- All GP Links Wide Bay staff are bound by the organisation's commitment to close the gap in health inequality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.
- Service delivery must appropriately address both cultural and clinical needs in order to close the gap.
- We acknowledge and respect the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and peoples and their right to quality, equal, accessible and appropriate health care services.
- Cultural competency requires continuous learning by individuals and organisational improvement, in order to achieve best practice in service delivery.

Four Guiding Principles

Cultural Respect and Recognition is the knowledge, skills, behaviours and systems required to incorporate cultural respect and recognition.

Communication Principle is the knowledge, skills, behaviours and systems required to effectively and sensitively communicate with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Relationships and Partnerships Principle is the knowledge, skills, behaviours and systems required to establish relationships and build effective long-term partnerships with other agencies and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.

Capacity Building Principle is the knowledge, skills, behaviours and systems required to build the capability of the health system so that it provides and fosters culturally responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our journey towards closing the gap

In 2009 GP Links Wide Bay commenced developing and implementing strategies to contribute to closing the gap. To date GP Links Wide Bay has:

- employed an Indigenous Health team
- developed and delivered programs to:
 - improve access to mainstream services by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and
 - to address the risk factors associated with chronic disease by promoting healthy lifestyles, physical activity, and smoking cessation
- secured funding to deliver the Care Co-ordination and Supplementary Services program, which aims to contribute to improved health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with chronic health conditions through better access to co-ordinated and multi-disciplinary care
- secured funding for multi-disciplinary model of care for better coordination of chronic disease management.

GP Links Wide Bay is dedicated to seeing the cultural capability framework adopted by all staff and within all of our policies and practices, we understand that we need to build upon our current strategies and continue to develop our cultural capability and evolve in the way we do business. *Queensland Health's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework 2010 – 2033* gives us this strong foundation to work upon.

The strategies associated with the framework will, over time, embed cultural capability within GP Links Wide Bay. The table below outlines just some of our strategies, existing and planned, towards a culturally competent GP Links Wide Bay.

Cultural Competency Framework element	GP Links Wide Bay response
Culturally competent staff	<p>All GP Links Wide Bay Staff and GP services signing up to the Closing the Gap program must complete a cultural awareness course within twelve months.</p> <p>Participate in visits to cultural education sites in our local communities.</p>
Resource development and translation	<p>Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and culturally appropriate matter on such items as business cards and key documents.</p> <p>Attain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork for GP services to display in their waiting rooms and other common areas.</p>
Community engagement	<p>Invite Elders to a luncheon to meet staff members.</p> <p>Participate in local Indigenous community events.</p> <p>Celebrate NAIDOC Week and recognise other significant cultural events such as 'Coming of the Light' celebrations.</p>

Cultural Competency Framework element	GP Links Wide Bay response
Leadership and partnership	<p>Continue to support our skilled and dedicated staff in their personal growth towards cultural awareness.</p> <p>Provide appropriate resources.</p> <p>Encourage joint interaction with project participation.</p> <p>Invite key Indigenous stakeholders' to meet with staff and have a say in a collaborative setting.</p>
Inclusive recruitment and retention	<p>Strive to be an Indigenous Employer of Choice through improved recruitment and retention programs.</p> <p>Celebrate NAIDOC Week and recognise other significant cultural events such as 'Coming of the Light' celebrations.</p> <p>Invite staff members to social outlets like Bare Foot Bowls.</p>
Interpreter services	<p>Linking up to Queensland Health interpreter support and services.</p>

Our strategies will be reviewed annually in consultation with our Indigenous staff and clients in order to continually improve and grow and we will strive to keep up-to-date with the latest research to meet best practice standards for cultural competency.



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Further information and key resources

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework 2010 – 2033, Queensland Health (2010).

National Indigenous Reform Agreement, Council of Australian Government (COAG) (2007).

A National Aboriginal Health Strategy 1989, The Department of Health and Ageing (DoHA) (1989).

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Islander health is
everyone's business***

