

National Day of Recognition for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners

Why a National Day of Recognition?

- On 07 August 2021, the National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) is inviting all Australians to help celebrate the achievements and evolution of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce.
- Within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community this workforce is renowned as a vital and reliable resource critical to improved health and wellbeing outcomes. Yet, across mainstream Australia few would know, understand or recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners as stand-alone professions or, more significantly, that together the professions comprise the only culturally based health workforce underpinned by national training and registration in the world.
- Unofficial accounts and narratives indicate the workforce was established by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people close to a century ago, in response to the need for geographically accessible and culturally safe health care. And, since this time under the guidance, knowledge and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the workforce has continued to grow and progress.
- Today with:
 - Indigenous led structures in place such as:
 - the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Practice Board of Australia guiding professional standards;
 - an Industry Reference Committee ensuring nationwide training is tailored to the needs of a growing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population; and,
 - evidence directly connecting the workforce to improved health and wellbeing outcomes across the life course, it provides perhaps one of the most significant demonstrations of how inherent self-determination is to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- However, despite the crucial role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners play within Australia's health care system the workforce continues to be under-supported, under-recognised and under-utilised.
- A lack of understanding about the role and value of the workforce, ad hoc inconsistent workforce policies and health system bias, continue to hinder the expansion and development of the workforce nationally.
- Unfortunately, these issues are not new and were first identified over a decade ago, and given the positive sustainable health, education and employment outcomes the workforce delivers, too little is being done to support its growth and professional utilisation.
- A national day of recognition is therefore being held to:
 - promote the unique nature of the workforce
 - develop shared understandings about the vital role the workforce plays and
 - ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners receive the recognition they deserve.

The Roles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioner Workforces

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners work on the frontline of Australia's Health care system. They are rarely part of the fly in fly out workforce but instead have a lived experience in and deep understanding of the communities they serve.
- Their combination of clinical, cultural, social and linguistic skills delivers an engagement capability and community reach that sets them apart from others working in the health care system. They act as cultural brokers; health system navigators; and provide a high standard of culturally safe and responsive primary health care. Their ability to respond to the clinical, social and cultural needs and contexts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities positions them as unique among Health Professionals.
- Of the two professions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners, have a high level of clinical skills and are trained to work autonomously. In recognition, they have been required to meet practice standards and register under the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia since 2012.
- Ensuring the workforce is embedded as a vital, valued and professional component of Australia's health care system delivers significant benefits for stakeholders across the health care system:
 - for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Governments the workforce delivers positive sustainable health, education, and employment outcomes; and
 - for health service providers it delivers:
 - culturally safe and responsive care
 - innovation and improved productivity through greater workforce diversity and
 - financial benefits if models of care that effectively utilise the provider claims process available for these professions through the Medicare system are implemented.¹

Why was the 07 August chosen?

- NAATSIHWP is the peak body with responsibility for ensuring the workforce is embedded as a vital, valued and professional component of Australia's health care system.
- It provides a growing national network of over 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners from across Australia with:
 - professional development support, training and resources and
 - a mechanism to ensure their voices, perspectives and aspirations are incorporated into the delivery of more effective health, social and workforce policies.

The members of this network have collectively agreed that the 7th of August, the day of NAATSIHWP's establishment in 2009, would be appropriate to promote the workforces unique and critical nature and celebrate its ongoing achievement over many years.

How should the day be celebrated?

- If you or your family have benefitted from the care of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker or Health Practitioner or, you are working in the health care system and wish to promote the valuable role the workforce plays please record and share your stories at hashtag **#NAATSIHWPHeroes**.
- If you are member of the mainstream community and know little about this workforce we would encourage you to take steps to find out more. The NAATSIHWP website at: <https://www.naatsihwp.org.au/> is a great place to start.
- In addition, NAATSIHWP is a charity registered with the ACNC, your sponsorship would also help to strengthen the capacity and capability of the workforce and ensure Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners continue to be positioned at the forefront of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. Again, further details in regards to how you can support the workforce in this way can be found on the NAATSIHWP website at: <https://www.naatsihwp.org.au/>.