



NATSIHWA

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Health Worker Association

Strategic Plan

2020 – 2023



Message from the Chairperson

As we launch NATSIHWA's fourth strategic plan we are entering a rapidly changing world. The year started with a bushfire season that devastated our Country and destroyed many of our sacred and cultural sites. Now only a couple of months down the track the coronavirus, COVID-19, has spread to our shores and we find ourselves in the midst of a global health pandemic.

It has been rewarding supporting NATSIHWA to respond. We have proven to be an agile organisation with the capabilities required to serve our members and communities from across Australia. Our resolve to professionalise, promote and expand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce and address health inequity and disadvantage has strengthened.

The COVID-19 crisis has reinforced the pivotal role that our workforce plays in the public health response. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners are rarely part of the fly-in fly-out workforce but instead live and work in the communities they serve. Their combination of clinical, cultural, social and linguistic skills generates an engagement capability and community reach that sets them apart from other health professionals. They are a vital resource equipped to lead effective health promotion and disease prevention strategies, deliver culturally safe care and assist their communities navigate the health care system. With entry to many communities now restricted and stringent quarantine measures in place, the community leadership demonstrated by our resilient and valued workforce is needed now more than ever before.

Responding to the pandemic has underlined the importance of the four strategic focus areas outlined in this plan and going forward we will continue to:

- » target and support professional development opportunities for our members
- » progress a national scope of practice
- » support the growth and recognition of these professions, and
- » ensure the voices of our members are heard and the needs of our workforce are addressed.

The pandemic has also unfortunately served to highlight the enduring discrimination and inequities within our society and how the failure to adequately address the social and cultural determinants of health have placed our communities at heightened risk. Conversely, it has also demonstrated that our Governments are capable of coming together, of sharing decisions and of accelerating solutions to complex and intractable problems quickly.

As we start to chart our post-pandemic future this is a lesson that we will not forget. As overwhelming and disheartening as the pandemic has been it does provide a significant opportunity to heed this lesson, to take stock and to examine how we can build a better society that ensures the health, well-being and prosperity of all Australians.



Going forward our continued membership on the National Health Leadership Forum and the Coalition of the Peaks will help us to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices at the front and centre of Government policy and program design. Our knowledge and cultures must be viewed as integral to improving not only the health and wellbeing of our people but of our nation. We cannot afford further repetition of the mistakes of the past.

Yours in health,

David Follent
Chairperson



About our logo

The NATSIHWA logo represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people coming from all parts of the country to form the association and uses colours that reinforce our cultural identity - who we are. The u shape represents all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of our country. The small boomerangs represent our people's toughness and resilience to handle all situations. The bigger boomerangs are windbreaks and shields that provide safety, stability, education, guidance and vision towards the future.

About us

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association (NATSIHWA) is a national peak workforce association committed to ensuring Australia's health care system meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

We have been funded by the Australian Government since establishment in August 2009 to:

- » promote the prevention and control of disease and other health conditions in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- » improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- » address the impacts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and
- » address the under representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working within Australia's health care system.

We achieve this by:

- » delivering and collaborating on initiatives to promote, professionalise and expand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce
- » recognising, addressing and promoting the social and cultural determinants of health
- » establishing and maintaining networks, partnerships and alliances with key government agencies, other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, researchers, academic institutions, and other national health bodies
- » participating in a range of key strategic initiatives to influence the design and delivery of policies, programs and services and
- » role modelling the benefits of community control, self-determination and implementing rights-based best practice principles and approaches.

A key part of our role involves directly supporting a national membership network of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners. In this respect we

- » support and promote policies to ensure the effective utilisation and professional integration of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioner workforce

- » provide support, training and resources to improve the prevention, diagnosis, treatment and management of disease and chronic health conditions
- » deliver professional development forums, conferences and symposiums
- » liaise with regulators, training authorities and employers to ensure the recruitment and retention of a skilled and competent workforce and
- » actively promote education and career pathways.

NATSIHWA's national membership network comprises the following five categories:

- » **Full Members:** All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers (A&TSHWs) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners (A&TSHIPs) are welcome to join as a Full Member of NATSIHWA if they meet the minimum qualification requirements, regardless of where they work.
- » **Associate Members:** Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are not Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers or Health Practitioners, but are studying or working in the health field, can be Associate Members
- » **Student Members:** All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are currently studying to become an A&TSHW or A&TSHIP.
- » **Friends of NATSIHWA:** Individuals and organisations, whether Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, or Non-Indigenous, who wish to support the work of NATSIHWA may become Friends of NATSIHWA.
- » **Honorary Members:** Individuals who the board considers has made an outstanding contribution to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner professions.

Our vision

An association, founded on the cultural and spiritual teachings of our past and present leaders, which best serves our members in their important role in achieving physical, social, cultural and emotional wellbeing for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our values

Our values are consistent with those passed on to us by our Ancestors:

- » cultural integrity
- » cultural respect
- » the importance of connection to community
- » strong leadership
- » resilience and determination
- » honesty and transparency
- » dedication and passion
- » commitment to quality workforce and service delivery
- » diplomacy and sensitivity

Our purpose

The objects of NATSIHWA are to:

- » promote the prevention and control of disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
- » improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in pursuit of the objectives to 'Close the Gap' in life expectancy
- » address the impacts of disadvantage on the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- » assist Health Workers and Health Practitioners in delivering holistic health care within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in order to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and
- » to do all such lawful things as may be incidental or conducive to the attainment of the above objectives, and in pursuing the above objectives, the Association will:
 - encourage career support to facilitate a larger Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce (including through recruitment, retention, networking, mentoring, information sharing and career pathways)
 - increase public awareness of and support for the contribution that Health Workers and Health Practitioners make in improving the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
 - advocate for and represent Health Workers and Health Practitioners at peak regional, state and national forum
 - advocate for and contribute to the development and maintenance of education, training and developmental needs of Health Workers and Health Practitioners to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' self-determination
 - promote and facilitate cultural capability, safety and respect within the health workplace, to better enable Health Workers and Health Practitioners to provide effective and appropriate care, and
 - ensure that NATSIHWA is efficiently managed, is financially and ethically accountable to Members and funding bodies, and maintains high standards of excellence and innovation.

Advancing our profession and the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Over the next three years NATSIHWA will pursue this strategic direction:

To improve understanding in the health system of the role, scope and effective deployment of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners, as a vital and valued component of a strong professional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce needed to close the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Our strategic focus areas

The work to address the strategic direction is organised under four focus areas. Each has an objective and several key strategies that we will implement over the next three years:

- 1 **Scope of practice for the workforce**
- 2 **Professional support and development for Members**
- 3 **Representation and promotion of workforce needs**
- 4 **Recruitment and retention of the workforce**

Indicators to track progress

We have identified 'impact' and 'process' indicators to determine how well we progress toward our objectives and implement our strategies:

- » **Impact indicators** are used to judge progress toward or achievement of objectives and focus on difference or change.
- » **Process indicators** are used to judge the effectiveness and appropriateness of strategies, and focus on issues of satisfaction, quality, audience and reach.



Scope of practice for the workforce

Objective 1

To increase the appropriate use of the full range of skills and integration of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners into health services across all sectors in the health system.

Impact indicators

Impact 1.1 Stakeholders from all sectors of the health system report high interest in and improved ability to develop a scope of practice for best utilisation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners.

Impact 1.2 Stakeholders from all sectors of the health system report both knowledge and use of the good practice models on the effective utilisation of and expanded career pathways for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners.

Rationale

An achievement for NATSIHWA over the 2014–2018 period was the development and launch of the *National Framework for Determining Scope of Practice for the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner Workforce*. This framework provides the basis for documenting the full range of knowledge and skills of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs in order to utilise their full potential in all health contexts and jurisdictions (subject to legislative constraints). The evaluation of NATSIHWA's 2014–2017 Strategic Plan demonstrated there is an appetite for this work to be extended and enhanced by identifying, developing and promoting a range of models of practice that provide good practice exemplars for the effective utilisation of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs.

This is an excellent opportunity for external stakeholders, including Government, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health, non-Government and private health services and organisations, to collaborate with NATSIHWA. The outcome of this will:

- » promote greater understanding of the capabilities of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs among all health professionals and staff in the health workforce
- » strengthen **the evidence base for best practice regarding the significant role** that A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs can and do undertake within the health workforce.

Ultimately, this will promote recognition of, and respect for, the professional identity of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs as a critical part of addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health needs and priorities. It will also foster more flexible approaches to the construction of multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary teams, and enhance career pathways for the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce.

Linked to this work on the recognition of skills appropriate for different types and levels of work, NATSIHWA has sought to enhance the current Modern Award for improvement of the career structure for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people entering these professions.

The Modern Award reflects the advent of A&TSIHPs in addition to A&TSIHWs, but does not adequately reflect the breadth of expertise and specialisation for either professional stream. NATSIHWA continues to have a significant role in engaging relevant unions, supporting the ongoing Fair Work Commission process and informing Members.

STRATEGIES	PROCESS INDICATORS
<p>1.1 Support understanding and application of the <i>National Framework for Determining Scope of Practice for the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner Workforce</i>.</p>	<p>Process 1.1 NATSIHWA uses multiple opportunities and a diverse range of methods to facilitate understanding and application of the <i>National Framework for Determining Scope of Practice</i>.</p>
<p>1.2 Identify, document and promote exemplar models of practice in different health contexts that demonstrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> » the effective utilisation of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs » how to support and retain A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs. 	<p>Process 1.2a External stakeholders collaborate with NATSIHWA to identify and document exemplar models of practice that represent good practice.</p> <p>Process 1.2b The good practice exemplars are easily accessible and represent diverse regions, health sectors and contexts.</p>
<p>1.3 Provide ongoing advice and information dissemination regarding the implications of the Modern Award for the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce.</p>	<p>Process 1.3 NATSIHWA Members are satisfied with the role NATSIHWA undertakes regarding the Modern Award.</p>

Professional support and development for Members

Objective 2

To improve the accessibility and quality of professional support and professional development opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners.

Impact indicators

Impact 2.1 Members report that NATSIHWA's professional information and support, including the online portal, professional networking forums, conferences and symposiums:

- » are relevant to their professional needs and expectations
- » are of high quality
- » are offered in accessible formats and/or locations.

Impact 2.2 Members report that NATSIHWA's information about professional development opportunities:

- » is relevant to their professional needs and expectations
- » offers them valuable options for skill development and new career pathways.

Rationale

The provision of professional information and support is a core function of any health professional association, along with identifying, advising on and promoting continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities. This must be built on an understanding of Member needs and priorities that reflect the diverse health contexts in which they work in all sectors of the health system, as well as the roles they undertake.

NATSIHWA has developed several approaches to providing professional information and support, and promoting CPD opportunities to Members. The most effective mechanisms have been a regular online newsletter, NATSIHWA-led professional networking and development forums, and promoting and/or facilitating access to professional development opportunities available through other stakeholders.

The focus for improvement over the next three years will be matching Member needs and priorities to available or new professional support and development opportunities, and coordinating with employer groups to facilitate their support and/or collaboration. A continuing focus will be bringing opportunities closer to where Members are located, either through the location of forums and/or making videos of events and programs that can be accessed via NATSIHWA's website.

STRATEGIES

PROCESS INDICATORS

2.1 Identify and provide relevant information on professional support and professional development opportunities for Members on a regular basis.

Process 2.1 NATSIHWA Members report that information on professional support and development opportunities is provided on a regular basis via the online portal and newsletters.

2.2 Provide NATSIHWA-led regional and national professional forums for A&TSHWs and A&TSHPs in liaison with providers of relevant professional support and development, and employer groups.

Process 2.2 NATSIHWA's professional forums are:

- » well attended by Members
- » well supported by employer groups and professional development providers.

2.3 Hold a biennial NATSIHWA Conference and Symposium focused on professional support and development, good practice, interdisciplinary approaches and recognition of excellence.

Process 2.3 Both the NATSIHWA Conference and Symposium are:

- » well attended by Members
- » of interest to other health professionals
- » well supported by employer groups and professional development providers.

2.4 Develop, implement and evaluate a sustainable mentoring program for NATSIHWA members.

Process 2.4 Participating NATSIHWA Members are satisfied with the design, availability and value of the mentoring program.

2.5 Scope the need for and viability of a national CPD program for the A&TSHW workforce.

Process 2.5 The decision on whether to develop a national CPD program for A&TSHWs reflects the opinions of NATSIHWA's A&TSHW Members.

Representation and promotion of workforce needs

Objective 3

To increase our influence in the development and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policies and programs relevant to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce.

Impact indicators

Impact 3.1 NATSIHWA advice and position statements are reflected in national and jurisdictional policy development and decision-making processes that impact on the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

Rationale

National and jurisdictional health policies, programs and review processes that are specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services and outcomes. This shapes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce education and training, which has a marked effect on A&TSHWs and A&TSHIPs as unique professions within the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce. As a dedicated voice for A&TSHWs and A&TSHIPs, NATSIHWA must continue to play a strong role in representing and promoting Members' needs and priorities with groups and organisations who develop policy and programs, make funding decisions, and design and/or deliver education and training that is relevant to A&TSHWs and A&TSHIPs.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations and associations, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce have many shared priorities. NATSIHWA has taken an increasingly active role in national conversations, working in partnership with other national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to identify, articulate and promote understanding of these priorities across the health system, along with the system's accountability for addressing them. The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and Implementation Plan, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Plan are examples of this work. Continuing this work at the national level and contributing to the jurisdictional level remains a core role for NATSIHWA.

STRATEGIES

3.1 Review, revise and expand position statements in response to Member priorities and developments in the policy environment.

3.2 Represent the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner workforce in national and, where appropriate, jurisdictional forums.

3.3 Promote and shape solutions that reduce the level of jurisdictional inconsistency in legislation, regulation and workforce conditions for A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs.

3.4 Collaborate with external stakeholders whose work is relevant to and/or aligned with NATSIHWA's priorities.

PROCESS INDICATORS

Process 3.1 NATSIHWA position statements are:

- » easily available to Members and external stakeholders
- » reviewed and, where required, updated on a biennial basis.

Process 3.2 NATSIHWA Members are highly satisfied with NATSIHWA's representation and promotion on their behalf at national and/or jurisdictional levels.

Process 3.3 There is evidence that NATSIHWA utilises and/or creates opportunities to address jurisdictional inconsistencies in legislation, regulation and workforce conditions.

Process 3.4 NATSIHWA gains support from external stakeholders to address its priorities.

Recruitment and retention of the workforce

Objective 4

To increase our influence in the development and implementation of recruitment and retention strategies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners.

Impact indicators

Impact 4.1 Stakeholders from the vocational education and training (VET) sector and all sectors of the health system identify NATSIHWA as a respected source of information and expertise on recruiting and retaining A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs.

Impact 4.2 Stakeholders from the VET sector and all sectors of the health system report they have acted on NATSIHWA's advice and/or implemented the learning gained from their participation in NATSIHWA initiatives on recruitment and retention.

Rationale

NATSIHWA has been involved in internally and externally driven strategies to address the recruitment and retention of the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce since its inception. This includes its efforts to gain an accurate picture of workforce numbers and distribution during and subsequent to the Health Workforce Australia *Growing Our Future: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project*.¹

Recent research undertaken by NATSIHWA highlighted there is insufficient nuanced data on the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce.² What is known is that the workforce is aging, recruitment efforts need to be directed at younger people and males, and there are several barriers to retention to be addressed for the existing workforce. A NATSIHWA Member-led 2019 study identified the following elements created a supportive workplace for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff: collective self-determination, cultural safety, supportive workplace conditions and policies, support for holistic wellbeing, growth opportunities, recognition of staff contributions, organisational vision and values aligned with cultural values, commitment and accountability.³

Therefore, a high priority for NATSIHWA over the next few years is to influence the development and implementation of recruitment and retention strategies for the workforce, including the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Plan. This needs to consider the workforce pipeline; the role of different stakeholders in education and health, cultural safety and career pathways; and the professional support that NATSIHWA can offer students and qualified A&TSIHW and A&TSIHPs.

1 Health Workforce Australia, *Growing Our Future: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project Final Report*, National Centre for Vocational Education Research, Adelaide, 2011, viewed 11 November 2009, <https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%63A52970>.

2 Wright, A, Briscoe, K & Lovett, R, A national profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, 2006-2016, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health*, vol. 43, no. 1, pp. 24-26, 2019, viewed 11 November 2019, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1753-6405.12864>.

3 AHCSA, Lowitja Institute, University of South Australia and SAHMRI, *Valuing and strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce: a guide to promoting supportive working environments in health and human services for organisations and managers*, AHCSA, Adelaide, 2019, viewed 18 February 2020, https://ahcsa.org.au/app/uploads/2014/11/AHCS321_Managers_Booklet_final.pdf.

STRATEGIES

4.1 Identify, engage and recruit as Members A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs engaged in health sectors and/or regions that are not well represented in the NATSIHWA membership.

4.2 Provide advice and support to the higher education sector in recruiting and supporting A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP students to complete their qualifications.

4.3 Provide advice and support to health services in recruiting, supporting and retaining A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP staff.

4.4 Promote greater understanding of the importance of cultural safety in relation to the work of A&TSIHW and A&TSIHPs.

4.5 Engage in and/or support strategic research that informs recruitment and retention strategies for the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce.

PROCESS INDICATORS

Process 4.1 A comparison of the Member profile from 2019 to 2022 demonstrates growth in Members on a raw numbers and proportional basis from health sectors and/or regions not well represented in 2019.

Process 4.2 Stakeholders from the VET sector regularly seek or accept NATSIHWA advice on recruitment and retention of A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP students.

Process 4.3 Stakeholders from all sectors of the health system regularly seek or accept NATSIHWA advice on recruitment and retention of A&TSIHWs and A&TSIHPs.

Process 4.4 Stakeholders from the VET sector and all sectors of the health system value NATSIHWA advice and/or resources regarding cultural safety.

Process 4.5 NATSIHWA undertakes and/or supports relevant research that informs the provision of advice and recommendations regarding recruitment and retention of the A&TSIHW and A&TSIHP workforce.

Our language

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner: An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker who has gained a Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice or accredited program of study, and has successfully applied for and been registered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker: An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who has gained a Certificate II or higher qualification in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care from the Health Training Package.

All sectors in the health system: The terms 'all health sectors' and 'all sectors in the health system' refers to the following sectors within the broader health system: Government, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health, non-Government and private health sectors.

Health contexts: Different health contexts exist within the sectors of the health system and are broad in range. For example, they include but are not limited to primary health care (including intervention, prevention and health promotion), acute health care, chronic disease management, mental health, alcohol and other drugs, youth, maternal and infant health, sexual health, men's health, women's health, environmental health, aged care, and disability.





NATSIHWA

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Health Worker Association

**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
Worker Association Limited**

Unit 3, Ground Floor
31–37 Townshend Street
PHILLIP ACT 2606
ABN 61 138 748 697

1800 200 800
www.natsihwa.org.au