

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council

Submission

**Consultation on: Residential Aged Care
Accommodation Pricing Review**

November 2025



NATSIAACC



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National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council



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Acknowledgement of Country

NATSIAACC acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands and waters on which we work, live and gather, as well as Country throughout Australia, and their enduring connections to land, sea and community. NATSIAACC acknowledges that these lands and waters were never ceded, and we acknowledge the sovereignty and self-determination of the Traditional Owners.

NATSIAACC pays its deepest respects to Elders past and present and recognise the continued cultural and spiritual connection to Country and/or Island Home, community, culture and knowledge.

NATSIAACC thanks them for their wisdom and courage, and for sharing their ways of knowing, being and doing – teachings that guide us to cherish and protect our Elders and Older People.

This always was, and always will be Aboriginal Land.



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About

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ageing and aged care. NATSIAACC works to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People can access support and care that is culturally safe, trauma aware and healing-informed recognising the importance of their connections to community, culture and Country and/or Island Home.

NATSIAACC's membership base includes:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers of ageing and aged care, and
- Organisations committed to improving cultural safety and quality of life for Elders and Older People.

NATSIAACC's founding Directors are all leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ageing and aged care provision.

Our Vision

All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are thriving, healthy, strong, with ongoing cultural connections in their older years.

Our Purpose

NATSIAACC supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older peoples, their families, and communities to identify, engage in, advocate for, and lead systemic reform to embed culturally safe practices across the aged care and ageing sector.

With thanks

NATSIAACC thanks its members, stakeholders, and other peak bodies for their valuable contributions to this submission and for generously giving their time to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Funding

NATSIAACC is funded by the Commonwealth Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the Department). NATSIAACC has been in operation since 2022. In the context of the current aged care reforms and the need for extensive advocacy, input, and leadership in the sector, it will be necessary to provide additional funding to support NATSIAACC to provide the input and engagement required to ensure that the reforms deliver much needed support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People.



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Executive Summary

NATSIAACC welcomes the opportunity to contribute to the Residential Aged Care Accommodation Pricing Review.

This submission reflects NATSIAACC's commitment to equitable, culturally safe, and place-based accommodation outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People, especially those on low incomes or living in regional, rural and remote communities.

The Review provides an important opportunity to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not left behind in aged care reform. For too long, structural funding inequities have resulted in fewer culturally safe facilities, under-investment in Country/Island Home-based services, and limited access to high-quality accommodation for Elders and Older People.

Under the Aged Care Act 2024, cultural safety is a legislated principle that must guide quality, access and accountability across the aged care system. Embedding cultural safety and equity obligations within accommodation pricing reform is essential to operationalising this legislative intent and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People receive care that aligns with their cultural rights and community expectations.

NATSIAACC calls for the introduction of a Cultural Safety and Remoteness Adjustment within the Accommodation Supplement framework to ensure equitable access, sustainable investment, and quality outcomes for low-means residents, particularly in community-controlled or remote service contexts.

This submission aligns with:

- The National Agreement on Closing the Gap (CTG), particularly *Priority Reform One (shared decision-making)*, *Priority Reform Two (building the community-controlled sector)*, and *Outcome 16 (Elders are supported to live long and healthy lives)*.
- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031, which emphasises culturally safe, holistic and person-centred care.
- The Aged Care Reform Agenda and Royal Commission recommendations, which highlight equity, access and cultural safety as core to system transformation.

NATSIAACC Recommendations

1. Introduce a Cultural Safety and Remoteness Adjustment

The current Accommodation Supplement does not adequately reflect the true cost of delivering or maintaining culturally safe residential accommodation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, particularly in regional, rural, and remote communities.

NATSIAACC recommends introducing a Cultural Safety and Remoteness Adjustment as an additional adjustment within the Accommodation Supplement framework.



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This adjustment should apply to facilities where:

- The majority of residents are of low means and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage.
- Geographic, cultural or workforce factors significantly increase the cost of delivering culturally appropriate accommodation.

The adjustment would recognise that:

- Rural and Remote Facilities accommodate a higher proportion of low-means residents, often reliant on the Supplement for viability.
- Costs of construction, materials, and maintenance are substantially higher due to distance, freight, workforce shortages, and logistical barriers.
- Cultural Design Requirements, such as connection to Country/Island Home, communal spaces, and culturally symbolic architecture, require additional investment but deliver demonstrably better health and wellbeing outcomes.

This reform would promote parity across the system by ensuring low-means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People can access accommodation of comparable quality and amenity regardless of location.

Introducing a Cultural Safety and Remoteness Adjustment will also generate broader system benefits. By supporting workforce retention, reducing service failure rates and preventing facility closures in remote areas, this adjustment helps stabilise the aged care system and protects against costly disruption. Over time culturally safe, community-anchored accommodation models contribute to improved resident wellbeing, reduced acute-care demand, and more efficient use of public resources.

2. Embed Cultural Safety in Pricing and Quality Standards

Cultural safety must be a core component of the national accommodation pricing and quality assurance framework.

NATSIAACC recommends that:

- Cultural design principles, connection to Country/Island Home, and community governance be recognised as measurable indicators of accommodation quality.
- Pricing reviews incorporate cultural safety standards developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peaks and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers, ensuring that financial frameworks uphold cultural rights and needs.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers receive guidance and accountability mechanisms aligned with the Aged Care Quality Standards (2024 update) and National Cultural Safety Framework currently under development.

Implementation of these reforms must be guided by an Elders Council or equivalent First Nations governance structure, ensuring sustained cultural oversight and alignment with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of quality, safety and wellbeing.



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3. Strengthen Data Sovereignty and Evidence

Funding and policy decisions must be informed by Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, consistent with *Maiam Nayri Wingara* and *AIATSIS Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research*.

NATSIAACC calls for:

- Regular, co-designed data collection on accommodation access, affordability and quality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People.
- Public reporting against Closing the Gap Outcome 16 and Outcome 17 (*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to culturally safe services*).
- Departmental collaboration with NATSIAACC to establish culturally governed data frameworks and research partnerships.

4. Recognise Community Control and Place-Based Models

The Review should explicitly prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled, place-based, and sustainably funded models of accommodation and care.

This includes:

- Supporting investment in community-controlled facilities on Country and/or Island Home.
- Funding capital and maintenance projects through flexible, block-funded arrangements to ensure sustainability.
- Quarantining funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers to ensure they are not forced to compete with mainstream providers for grant funding.
- Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance in all future pricing reforms, consistent with *Priority Reform Two* of the Closing the Gap Agreement.

This will enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers to operate sustainably within a culturally safe model of care, maintain community trust, and uphold cultural integrity in service delivery.

5. Ensure Co-Design and Partnership in Implementation

Reform design, implementation and evaluation must occur in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies, including NATSIAACC, NACCHO, and the Coalition of Peaks.

This partnership approach would:

- Strengthen alignment across aged care, housing, and health reforms.
- Ensure consistent, culturally grounded definitions of “quality” accommodation.
- Uphold shared decision-making under Priority Reform One of the Closing the Gap National Agreement.



Conclusion

Introducing a Cultural Safety and Remoteness Adjustment, alongside quarantined and dedicated funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled Aged Care Providers, is essential to achieving equitable access to high-quality accommodation for low-means Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People. These reforms recognise the higher costs and structural inequities faced by community-controlled and remote services and provide a stable foundation for culturally safe, community-led care models to thrive.

By aligning accommodation pricing reform with the legislated cultural safety principles under the Aged Care Act 2024, the Review has an opportunity to embed cultural rights, equity and accountability into the core of the aged care system. Incorporating economic and system sustainability impacts, such as improved workforce retention, reduced service failure, and prevention of facility closures, strengthens the case for a dedicated adjustment that reflects the true cost of delivering culturally anchored, place-based accommodation.

These changes are necessary to deliver on the Commonwealth's commitments under the Closing the Gap National Agreement, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 and the broader Aged Care Reform Agenda. For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People, culturally safe accommodation is not an optional feature, it is a fundamental right tied to identity, culture, safety, connection and wellbeing.

NATSIAACC urges the Department to ensure that implementation of the Review's recommendations is informed by sustained First Nations governance, including the voice and leadership of Elders. NATSIAACC looks forward to working in structured partnership with the Department to co-design the implementation of the Review's recommendations, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is embedded from the outset.



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