

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council

Submission

Feedback on Draft Fee Waiver Application Form

October 2025



NATSIAACC



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National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council



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, and recognises the importance of their personal connections to community, Country and/or Island Home.

NATSIAACC is building a membership base of:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled providers of ageing and aged care, and
- Entities with an interest in culturally appropriate ageing and aged care services.

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.



Executive Summary

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback on the draft Fee Waiver Application Form developed by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (the Commission).

NATSIAACC is the national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, Older People and the organisations that support them across the ageing and aged care sectors. Our advocacy is grounded in self-determination, cultural safety, and community-led governance, consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031.

We commend the Commission's intent to reduce financial and administrative barriers for Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCHOs) and remote service providers seeking aged care registration. However, to achieve equitable outcomes and strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ageing and aged care sector, the waiver process and supporting form should better reflect the distinct governance, operational realities, and community obligations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Policy and Framework Alignment

National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Priority Reform 2 and Clause 44)

NATSIAACC strongly supports the inclusion of Clause 44 in the form, defining Aboriginal community control as an act of self-determination. However, the waiver process should go further by explicitly aligning with Priority Reform 2 – Building the Community-Controlled Sector.

This reform commits Governments to strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) through fit-for-purpose, sustainable funding and regulatory models. To uphold this commitment, fee waivers should not only encourage 'entry into the market', but also sustain existing ACCOs that deliver culturally safe care across all Modified Monash Model (MMM) regions, including urban, regional, remote and very remote areas.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031

The Health Plan emphasises self-determination, culturally safe, and holistic wellbeing. Administrative and regulatory processes must uphold these principles by:

- Minimising administrative complexity.
- Accepting flexible, culturally valid forms of evidence (e.g., community endorsements, cultural governance statements).
- Recognising the authority of community-led decision-making.

The fee waiver process should therefore reflect these values through simplified attestation pathways, plain language guidance, and recognition of community authority in evidence requirements.



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Aged Care Reform and Strengthened Quality Standards (2024-2025)

The new Aged Care Act 2024 and the Strengthening Quality Standards require that aged care providers embed partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and ensure cultural safety is an explicit outcome.

Accordingly, the fee waiver process should support this by:

- Encouraging ACCO participation and sustainability in the aged care sector.
- Embedding culturally safe communication, guidance, and decision-making.
- Including consultation protocols with NATSIAACC when ACCO eligibility requires clarification.

Other Relevant Frameworks:

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework – reinforces the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led models of care, governance, and service access.
- National Aged Care Workforce Strategy – highlights the need for workforce and regulatory enablers that reduce barriers for ACCOs to operate sustainably.
- Commonwealth Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Framework – underscores the responsibility of all agencies to ensure culturally informed engagement and regulatory design.

Feedback on the Draft Waiver Application Form

Section	NATSIAACC Feedback	Policy Alignment
Purpose and Intent	Broaden the stated purpose beyond 'encouraging market entry' to include enabling sustainable, culturally safe service delivery by community-controlled ACCOs in all MMM (1-7) models.	National Agreement on Closing the Gap – Priority Reform 2
Eligibility Criteria	Expand eligibility to include existing and emerging ACCOs that demonstrate community governance but may not yet be ORIC-registered or fully ACNC recognised.	ACCO Capacity Building and Priority Reform 2
Evidence Table	Simplify documentary requirements. Introduce a short-form attestation or community endorsement option for small ACCOs.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031 – Self-determination.
Plain Language and Accessibility	Translate the form into plain, accessible English with visual examples of evidence. Provide a First Nations-specific contact point for support, ideally through NATSIAACC.	Aged Care Reform – Cultural Safety.
Decision and Notification	Include a commitment to consult with NATSIAACC on ACCO eligibility determinations, ensuring decisions are culturally informed and transparent.	Closing the Gap Priority Reform 3.
Data and Monitoring	Capture data on outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Older People benefiting from the fee waiver to inform future reform.	Continuous Improvement and Accountability.



Broader System and Implementation Considerations

To create long-term impact, the Commission should embed this fee waiver process within a co-designed ACCO Verification and Support Framework, jointly developed with NATSIAACC to streamline future applications. Integrating the waiver process into broader Commonwealth efforts will assist in reducing the compliance burden on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations under the new Aged Care Act.

This would:

- Streamline future registration and compliance processes for ACCOs.
- Ensure consistency across funding and regulatory systems.
- Build a sustainable foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ageing and aged care leadership under the new Aged Care Act 2024.

NATSIAACC also recommends the Commission develop a Culturally Safe Implementation Guide to accompany the form, outlining:

- Definitions of cultural safety and community-control in practice.
- Acceptable types of evidence, with examples.
- Pathways for applicants to seek culturally informed support.

Implementation should also capture data on outcomes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and service reach in remote areas.

Summary of Recommendations

1. Explicitly link the waiver process to Priority Reform Two of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
2. Broaden eligibility to include existing and emerging ACCOs demonstrating community governance and service delivery capacity.
3. Simplify evidence requirements through attestation or community endorsement options.
4. Embed plain-language guidance and culturally safe support mechanisms, including examples.
5. Establish consultation protocols with NATSIAACC for determinations involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations.
6. Develop a standing ACCO verification framework, co-designed with NATSIAACC, to reduce duplication and streamline compliance and reporting.



Conclusion

NATSIAACC appreciates the Commission's commitment to supporting culturally safe aged care through mechanisms such as the fee waiver. To fully realise the intent, the process must go beyond administrative efficiency to embody the principles of self-determination, equity, and community-led governance.

A culturally responsive and accessible fee waiver process will not only uphold the commitments under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021-2031 but will also contribute meaningfully to the systemic transformation of aged care envisioned under the new Aged Care Act 2024.



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