



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

NATSIAACC's Position Statement

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CONSULTATION A NON-NEGOTIABLE IN HOSPITAL BED BLOCK SOLUTION

INTRODUCTION:

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) acknowledges the federal government's \$115million funding for the construction of new Aged Care Beds and urges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are considered.

As the national peak body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Ageing and Aged Care, NATSIAACC provides leadership and advice to ensure Aged Care systems recognise the cultural, social and community determinants that shape the wellbeing of our Elders and Older People.

Across Australia, 3,100 Older Australians wait in hospital, some up to 245 days for Aged Care Beds to become available. Without publicly available disaggregated data and instead using Lived Experience from our Elders, Older People and the Members we represent, we know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People make up a portion of this statistic. When implementing the funding to develop the Aged Care Beds as "quickly as possible" across the four locations selected by the Government (Adelaide, Perth, Hunter and Illawarra regions), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People must be a central part of decision making. Their needs, choices, rights, and protections must inform the Aged Care they receive.

New infrastructure projects alone won't support a sustainable Bed Block solution for our Elders and Older People.

To create a long-term solution for Bed Block and to improve outcomes for our Elders and Older People, NATSIAACC believe more must be done to mandate cultural safety training to equip workers with the skills and knowledge to care for our Elders and Older People. Cultural safety in this context means care that recognise identity, connection to Country/Island Home, family, language and community as essential elements of wellbeing, rather than optional considerations. Without mandatory cultural safety training, combined with the [predicted potential shortfall](#) of more than 110,000 direct-care workers within the decade, there is significant risk that the needs of our Elders and Older People will not be adequately met, further widening existing gaps in culturally safe care.

With no consultation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led initiatives during this time of extreme duress for the sector, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders cannot be promised improved outcomes, particularly without an Aged Care outcome in the 'Closing the Gap' initiative.

OUR POSITION:

We urge the Australian Government to consider the following needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders when addressing Bed Block:



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

- **Cultural Safety to be Respected as a Foundational Principle:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are experiencing avoidable physical and mental decline while waiting in hospitals for Aged Care placements. Recognising cultural safety as a foundational principle, particularly the importance of connection to Country and/or Island Home, is essential to facilitating independence and enabling Elders and Older People. Without culturally safe pathways into Aged Care, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are more likely to delay access to services, disengage from care, or remain in hospital settings longer than clinically necessary.
- **Self-Determination at the Forefront:** We must work to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are placed at the centre of decision-making that affects their Aged Care journey. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People should have the ability to make choices which allow them to age with dignity through culturally safe, appropriate and accessible Aged Care. This includes recognising the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Aged Care Providers in delivering services that are trusted, culturally grounded and responsive to community needs.
- **Pathways must be Co-designed and Transparent:** The design and delivery of culturally safe, high-quality Aged Care, must occur through genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Organisations. Co-designing ensures that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are informed about services in a way that is easy to understand and are supported to make their own decisions about when, how, and what Aged Care they receive.

If the cultural and community needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are not considered in Bed Block funding, the Aged Care system risks continuing to overlook the unique needs of our Elders and Older People.

Addressing these issues is consistent with the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, particularly strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled services and ensuring shared decision-making in policies that affect our communities.

“The needs of our Elders and Older People must not be forgotten during this challenging period for the Aged Care sector. Our Elders and Older People are the holders of knowledge, customs, beliefs and cultural authority within our families and communities. When they are left waiting in hospitals not designed to support their care, and where their cultural needs are not properly recognised, it becomes harder to achieve better health and wellbeing outcomes. Self-determination and genuinely co-designed Aged Care pathways are essential to keeping our Elders and Older People connected to Country/Island Home and receiving care in their communities rather than in hospital beds.”

- Kim Whiteley, CEO of NATSIAACC.



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

NATSIAACC's Position Statement

CONCLUSION:

Meaningful consultation is essential to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People age with the respect and dignity they deserve. Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices into decision-making provides a critical opportunity to ensure culturally safe solutions which strengthen outcomes for Elders and Older People and facilitate sustainable Bed Block solutions.

NATSIAACC and its membership stand ready to work collaboratively and constructively with the Australian Government and the Department of Health, Disability, and Ageing to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People.

Ensuring culturally safe and community-informed Aged Care pathways is not only a matter of respect and rights, but also a practical solution to reducing avoidable hospital stays and improving system efficiency.

FOR INQUIRIES:

Cassara Hardie
Director of Operations and Company Secretary
+61 0419 913 064
cassarah@natsiaacc.org.au

Sam Harding
Communications and Marketing Officer
+61 0487 631 645
samh@natsiaacc.org.au

