



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

NATSIAACC Position Statement – 1st May 2026

New Culturally Safe Aged Care Home Design Guidelines for First Nations Only First Step for Improved Lived Experience

INTRODUCTION

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) welcome the *Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People* guidelines published by the Department of Health, Disability, and Ageing as an important and necessary step for the Ageing and Aged Care of Elders and Older People.

NATSIAACC acknowledge the significant input from First Nations perspectives in the development of the guidelines – including a cultural safety definition from NATSIAACC – and is ready to work in partnership during its implementations with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to improve the lived experience of our Elders and Older People. Ensuring culturally safe Aged Care design is embedded as primary inputs into guidelines and standards is essential to improving the long-term outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders Elders and Older People.

Embedding cultural safety into the design guidelines is a positive step for communities and government in closing the Ageing and Aged Care inequality between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People and Non-Indigenous Older People. We ask that for long term and sustainable reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People, the Australian Government embed cultural safety in design and implementation not only in non-prescriptive guidelines, but throughout Aged Care legislation.

OUR POSITION

For the Australian Government to continue to build on the positive foundation of this guideline and improve the lived experience of Elders and Older People, NATSIAACC ask the following:

- **Cultural Safety to be embedded across the Aged Care System:** Embedding cultural safety as core design inputs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People from the outset must be translated across the Aged Care system and into the structural redesign of Aged Care standards, regulations, and funding models which genuinely benefit our people and have been codesigned from initial design through to implementation. This counters a broader system pattern – where First Nations perspectives are engaged after key design decisions are made, rather than shaping those decisions from the outset. Without being embedded in standards, regulation and funding, there is a real risk that culturally safe design remains intent, rather than consistent lived experience. We ask that the government embed cultural safety as a measurable requirement which, through the lived experience of Elders and Older People, is actively monitored and verified to ensure it is genuinely delivered in a culturally safe manner.
- **Transition from Guidance to Genuine First Nations Implementation:** The lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People will not improve through siloed



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consultation without tangible Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led delivery and implementation. The launch of guidelines informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives is an important step, but to truly make an impact in practice, genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives must be embedded beyond design and into implementation through explicit funding directed to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. While First Nations input has informed this work, the opportunity remains to move beyond participation toward genuine partnership — where First Nations organisations are resourced and positioned to lead both design and implementation.

NATSIAACC Chief Executive Officer, Kim Whiteley, says that to continue to improve the lived experience of Elders and Older People, the positive reform intent shown in the guidelines must translate to the wider Aged Care system and be embedded to ensure implementation.

“NATSIAACC welcome the release of the guidelines for designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People,” says Ms. Whiteley.

“Culturally safe and trauma-informed Aged Care environments are integral to ensuring the lived experience of our Elders and Older People improve – particularly for members of the Stolen Generation. The launch of the guideline is a necessary step forward in achieving system-wide culturally safe care beyond guidelines and embedded in the Aged Care system. With cultural safety embedded into the Aged Care system and genuine financial investment tied to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure implementation, we could see consultations genuinely translate into practice.”

“Cultural Safety is not a one-time afterthought to tick a box; it is a genuine opportunity to improve the lived experience of our Elders and Older People. Embedding cultural safety across the Aged Care system means our People would experience self-determination in practice, not just as a promise.”

CONCLUSION

The release of the guidelines for culturally safe Aged Care homes is an important step in closing the gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People and Non-First Nations Older People. The intent from the Australian Government to include First Nations input into these guidelines must now be shown across the Aged Care system to ensure design translates to implementation. Long term, grounded solutions must include First Nations at the centre of implementation decision making across the Aged Care system.

NATSIAACC is ready to work collaboratively with the Australian Government and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to ensure codesigned documents and guidelines can be translated into community-controlled implementation across the Aged Care System to improve lived experience for Elders and Older People.

If this is not addressed, the system risks continuing to deliver care that meets compliance but does not feel safe, familiar or right for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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