



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

NATSIAACC Position Statement

REVIEW OF IAT ONLY PART OF THE SOLUTION; ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDERS FAILED ACROSS AGED CARE SYSTEM

INTRODUCTION:

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) welcomes the Commonwealth Ombudsman's decision to investigate the Integrated Assessment Tool (IAT) as a critical reform opportunity for the new *Aged Care Act 2024*. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People subject to the IAT are not being failed by technical oversight. The IAT is operating within a model that must change to embed cultural, relational, and community context from the outset. This is not an implementation issue – it is a failure of national system design.

NATSIAACC is seeing consistent, national patterns across jurisdictions, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People being failed by the Integrated Assessment Tool as part of the *Aged Care Act 2024*. This is not isolated – it is systemic and repeatable across the country. The IAT assumes neutrality and standardisation which does not reflect the realities of Ageing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People, who are not entering the system from the same baseline.

Without embedding cultural and community context as core inputs, the tool risks reinforcing inequity at scale. Human override will not be sufficient if system parameters are wrong. The IAT reflects and reproduces the assumptions of the system it was built within – a system that has not been designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People at its centre. Standardisation in this context does not produce equity – it systematises inequity.

When system inputs fail, outcomes are predictably unsafe. Without cultural and community context, Elders and Older People are faced with avoidable hospitalisations, premature entry into residential care, and disconnection from Country/Island Home, family and identity. Across our Membership, we're seeing Elders and Older People not adequately assessed within the mainstream system who are forced off Country/Island Home and into hospitals where their health deteriorates significantly. We're seeing inadequate access to appropriate Aged Care and the inability to assess whether care is Culturally Safe.

For Elders and Older People, poor outcomes are not isolated, one-off events. They are the result of life-long and consistent failures across the system - not limited to the lived experience of some - but a national pattern hurting many.

NATSIAACC expects the Australian Government to use this investigation to drive system-level reform to the *Aged Care Act 2024*. This is an opportunity to move beyond incremental fixes and towards sustained investment in long-term community-controlled delivery to embed Cultural Safety.



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OUR POSITION:

We assert the following:

- **Embed Cultural Safety Throughout the Aged Care System:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People are facing lower Aged Care uptake compared to Non-First Nations Older People due to incorrect assessments from unknown assessors entering their communities, or engaging online, without an established relationship or cultural authority. We ask that Government embed cultural safety as a measurable requirement within assessment frameworks to ensure assessment outcomes cannot override cultural, clinical or contextual judgement, but also actively monitor and verify, through the lived experience of Elders and Older Peoples, whether those assessments are being delivered in a culturally safe manner. This must be supported by compliance mechanisms embedded within assessment frameworks, including performance monitoring, outcome validation, and accountability for culturally unsafe assessments.
- **Require the Use of Community-Connected Assessors:** We urge the Government to mandate the use of culturally appropriate, community-connected assessors, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, to ensure assessments are grounded in trust, context and cultural authority.
- **Genuine Investment into Community Controlled Delivery:** Elders and Older People are forced to leave Country/Island Home to receive Aged Care because of a lack of community-controlled services in communities. The Australian Government must mandate and fund community-controlled delivery as a core component of the Aged Care system, with investment explicitly directed to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations to ensure culturally safe, place-based service provision. This must be reflected through structured investment mechanisms that prioritise Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations as core delivery partners, rather than supplementary providers within the system. Funding must be explicitly directed and protected to support community-controlled service delivery in areas of need, particularly in thin markets and remote communities. Program intent alone is insufficient – investment must be systemically aligned to enable culturally safe, place-based care.
- **Self-Determination to be Practised, not just Promised:** Decisions made without understanding community context, kinship, or cultural obligations are prohibiting improved outcomes for Elders and Older People. Positioning Elders and Older People at the centre of decision-making through investment tied to community-controlled delivery will shift cultural authority and form genuine partnerships with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations. This requires formal embedding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making authority within assessment and care planning processes. Assessment frameworks must require and demonstrate how cultural, kinship and community context have



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informed decisions, ensuring that cultural authority is not secondary to clinical or administrative inputs but recognised as a core determinant of care outcomes.

“Our Culture can’t wait,” Says Kim Whiteley, NATSIAACC Chief Executive Officer, “There is no ‘waiting period’ – the Aged Care system either has cultural safety embedded, or it fails our People. The IAT, and the wider system, is structurally not designed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People. This isn’t a matter of human oversight; this is system failure and cultural neglect. This review of the IAT marks a critical inflection point for reform, which must be approached with redesign, not adjustments. Incorporating genuine partnerships and co-design which shift cultural authority, enables Elders and Older People decision-making, and champions community-controlled involvement is essential for the future of our People and Culture.”

CONCLUSION:

This is a decisive moment for Aged Care reform – one that will determine whether the system continues to entrench inequity or is fundamentally redesigned to deliver culturally safe outcomes. While intent for reform is strong, system readiness is uneven and design gaps are now materialising. The Act fails to embed Cultural Safety across decision-making. It fails to enable self-determination, and it fails to genuinely invest in Community-Controlled Programs.

The evidence is clear, consistent, and nationally observed.

NATSIAACC is ready to work collaboratively with the Australian Government and the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing to redesign a broken mainstream Aged Care system and improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People.

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