



NATSIAACC

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Ageing and Aged Care Council

Joint Statement, 29 May 2026

OVERDUE ACTION REQUIRED ON FIRST NATIONS AGED CARE REFORM

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People continue to experience an Aged Care system that was not designed with their lived experiences, cultural needs, realities or aspirations at its centre.

More than five years after the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety delivered its final report, many of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific recommendations intended to improve outcomes for Elders and Older people remain incomplete, delayed or stalled.

While significant mainstream reform implementation is now underway across the Aged Care system, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to experience significant gaps between reform intent and lived reality.

Across communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations continue to witness Elders and Older people experiencing delayed or reduced access to Aged Care, avoiding assessment processes, remaining in hospital longer, ageing away from Country or Island Home, and disengaging from services that do not feel safe, trusted, or culturally connected.

This statement reflects the collective concerns of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership represented across the Inspector-General of Aged Care and Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner advisory, engagement and leadership structures and has been coordinated as a joint initiative led by NATSIAACC.

Through this joint initiative, we are calling on the Australian Government to urgently progress the unfinished implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific recommendations arising from the Royal Commission. In alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, we urge the Government to work directly with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to address growing implementation risks emerging as mainstream Aged Care reforms progress ahead of several unresolved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific reform commitments.

Without urgent action, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People will continue experiencing avoidable inequity in access to care, worsening health outcomes, unnecessary suffering and preventable harm, alongside continued loss of connection to family, community culture, and Country or Island Home.

This is particularly true for our Stolen Generations survivors, with this week marking the 29th anniversary of the tabling of the Bringing Them Home Report, the recommendations for which continue to be inadequately met.



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National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council



ACCOUNTABILITY AND REFORM IMPLEMENTATION

The implementation of Aged Care reform must align with the Priority Reform Areas under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, including genuine shared decision-making and strengthening the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector.

Current reform implementation continues to fall short of these commitments, particularly where key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific reform commitments remain unresolved while mainstream reforms continue progressing nationally.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations must not simply be consulted on reform implementation; they must be embedded as partners in reform design, implementation and accountability.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership represented across the Inspector-General of Aged Care and Interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner engagement and advisory structures are collectively seeking more direct engagement with Government regarding unresolved implementation issues and broader reform accountability.

This includes the need for direct Government engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to address unresolved implementation gaps, reform risks, accountability concerns and the ongoing structural barriers impacting Elders and Older People across the Aged Care system.

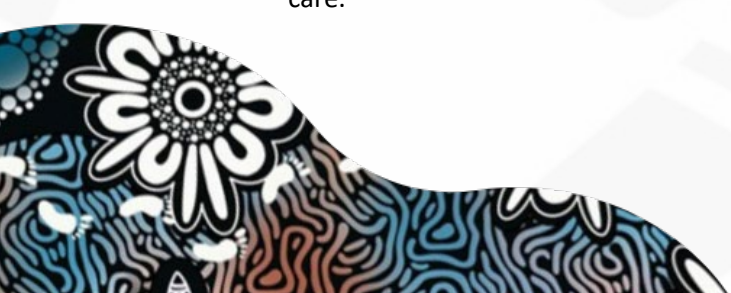
This reform moment is particularly significant as both the Interim Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner role and the current Inspector-General of Aged Care tenure transition during a period where many key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care reform recommendations remain unresolved.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies acknowledge the important work undertaken by both offices in elevating the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People within national Aged Care reform discussions.

However, leadership transition cannot become a point of reform stagnation while key Royal Commission recommendations remain unresolved.

The Government must urgently progress the outstanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific recommendations from the Royal Commission, including:

- Establishing a permanent, independent statutory Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner.
- Establishing a co-designed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care pathway that embeds cultural safety, connection to Country/Island Home and community-led models of care.





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National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Ageing and Aged Care Council

- Embedding measurable cultural safety requirements and accountability mechanisms across Aged Care delivery, assessment and workforce.
- Supporting the growth and sustainability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations delivering Aged Care services.
- Developing and implementing a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care workforce action plan aligned with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031.

RECOMMENDATION 47: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AGED CARE PATHWAY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People do not enter the Aged Care system from the same starting point as non-Indigenous Australians.

Many Elders and Older People engage with Aged Care systems later, with greater complexity, poorer health and socioeconomic outcomes, and reduced trust in mainstream institutions due to generations of systemic exclusion and discriminatory government policies.

Without a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific pathway embedded within the Aged Care system architecture, mainstream approaches risk continuing to overlook the cultural context, lived experience and holistic support needs of Elders and Older People.

The Aged Care “front door”, including My Aged Care and assessment processes, remains inaccessible and culturally unsafe for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People.

Where systems are difficult to navigate, culturally disconnected or not grounded in trust and relationship, Elders and Older People are more likely to delay engagement until crisis points emerge.

This contributes to delayed access to care, avoidable hospitalisation, reduced choice and continuity of care, and poorer ageing outcomes.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care pathway must be genuinely co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and communities to ensure cultural safety, flexibility and connection to Country or Island Home are structurally embedded across Aged Care access, assessment and service delivery systems.

RECOMMENDATION 48: CULTURAL SAFETY

Cultural safety must be embedded as a quality and safety requirement across the Aged Care system, not as an optional inclusion or workforce add-on.

Without regular, mandated and measurable cultural safety and trauma-informed training, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People remain less likely to engage with services and providers that do not reflect or respect their lived experience.



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Ageing and Aged Care Council

Embedding cultural safety must extend beyond frontline service delivery and be structurally embedded across assessment, navigation, commissioning, workforce, organisational governance and broader system accountability mechanisms.

Standardised assessment systems that do not adequately account for cultural context risk reinforcing inequitable outcomes.

To ensure culturally safe engagement, assessments must incorporate community-connected approaches and trusted assessors who understand the lived realities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

RECOMMENDATION 49: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER AGED CARE COMMISSIONER

The Royal Commission recommended the establishment of an independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner to foster, promote and oversee culturally safe, flexible and tailored Aged Care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

While important work has progressed under the Interim Commissioner arrangement, the recommendation for a permanent independent statutory role remains unresolved.

Long-term reform accountability cannot remain indefinitely interim. Without sustained accountability and structural oversight, there is significant risk that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific reform priorities continue to lag behind broader mainstream reform implementation.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies acknowledge the significant contributions of Interim Commissioner Andrea Kelly in progressing visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care reform issues and engaging directly with communities, organisations and Elders and Older people across Australia.

However, lasting reform accountability requires the full implementation of Recommendation 49, including the establishment of a permanent independent statutory Commissioner separate from the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

IMPLEMENTATION, ACCESS AND WORKFORCE

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must be supported to lead the design and delivery of Aged Care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Current reform settings continue placing pressure on ACCHOs/ACCOs to adapt to mainstream operating models that do not always align with community-controlled approaches, self-determination, culturally safe service delivery or the relational models of care required within many communities.

Sustainable reform requires long-term investment into Aboriginal Community Controlled Aged Care delivery, particularly in rural, remote and thin market settings.



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Ageing and Aged Care Council



Access and navigation barriers also remain significant.

Co-payments, inconsistent redress exemptions, digital barriers, workforce shortages and culturally unsafe navigation processes continue limiting equitable access to care.

We acknowledge the recent decision to exempt Stolen Generations Redress Scheme payments from Residential Aged Care means and asset testing and call for this exemption to also extend to at-home Aged Care programs.

A sustainable, appropriately supported and culturally valued Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce remains essential to continuity of culturally safe care.

This includes nurses, Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners, the allied health workforce, carers and community-based support roles.

Across communities, Elders and Older People are more likely to engage with services where they see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reflected across the workforce and where care is grounded in relationship, trust, lived understanding and cultural connection.

CONCLUSION

Across Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People continue to experience the consequences of an Aged Care system that remains insufficiently designed around their realities, needs and aspirations.

The recommendations of the Royal Commission were intended to drive structural reform, not remain unresolved years after their acceptance.

The longer implementation delays continue, the greater the risk that mainstream Aged Care reform settings become embedded before culturally safe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific reforms are fully implemented, limiting the ability of reform to deliver equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership is collectively calling for urgent action, stronger accountability and direct engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to ensure Aged Care reform delivers measurable, culturally safe and equitable outcomes in practice, not only recognition in principle.

Our Elders and Older People deserve to age with dignity, cultural safety, connection, respect and the right to remain connected to family, community and Country or Island Home.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People cannot wait another five years for reform commitments to translate into lived reality.





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Ageing and Aged Care Council

This statement was developed with the input of the following peak organisations and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and Older People within their jurisdictions. Endorsement of this statement is voluntary.

