

## **POSITION STATEMENT**

# **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People's Health**

### **BACKGROUND**

The poor health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people is primarily due to social, historical, economic and environmental disadvantage that increases the risk of mental health, physical problems and lower educational achievement in adult life<sup>1</sup>. In order to address the disparity in health between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and non-indigenous children and young people the Australian College of Children & Young People's Nurses (ACCYPN) has developed a position statement to guide the practice of nurses working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

### **THE AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF CHILDREN & YOUNG PEOPLE'S NURSES**

#### **BELIEVES THAT:**

1. Disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous Australian maternal, child, young people and family morbidity is largely preventable<sup>2</sup>.
2. This disparity needs to be recognised in resource allocation and funding.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child, young people and family health requires a primary health care approach<sup>3</sup>.
4. Nurses who care for children and young people work at an advanced practice level and there needs to be and educational support and recognition for this role.
5. Child and young people's health status are important predictors of adult physical and psycho-social health, and educational and socio-economic status.
6. Improving access to quality child care and educational facilities in the pre-school years would benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait children in their growth and development<sup>4</sup>. The provision of quality child care and educational facilities is the responsibility of all levels of government.
7. There needs to be community wide commitment to supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander families with children and young people<sup>5</sup>.
8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are of diverse cultural backgrounds and this needs to be considered in health service planning and delivery.

#### **RECOMMENDS THAT NURSES:**

1. Support, develop and actively participate in regional community development, including the provision of quality primary health care and child care services with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people and their families.
2. Encourage good nutrition and antenatal care during pregnancy and exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months (unless medically contraindicated) and healthy nutrition throughout the lifespan.
3. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in lobbying governments and organisations for adequate resources to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander maternal, child, young people and family health.
4. Participate in the on-going education and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and nurses.
5. Promote, advocate and provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in nursing courses and in the nursing workforce.
6. Promote and practice cultural safety within their practice environment.

## RESOLVES TO:

1. Continue to seek opportunities to promote and maintain positive health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and children and young people, their families and their communities.
2. Advocate for accessibility to culturally appropriate health and related services that would improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.
3. Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health information and cultural studies in undergraduate and postgraduate nursing courses.
4. Promote and support strategies to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the paediatric and child health nursing workforce.
5. Participate in ethical research aimed at making a difference to the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, improve systems and access to knowledge for this population and ensure knowledge is returned to the community where the research is conducted.

## References

<sup>1</sup>AIHW (2007) *Young Australians: Their health and wellbeing 2007*. Canberra: Australian Clearinghouse for Youth Studies

<sup>2</sup>Harvey PW (2006). *Social determinates of health - why we continue to ignore them in the search for improved population outcomes*. Australian Health Review. 30:4, 419 - 423.

<sup>3</sup>Wilson T, Condon JR, Barnes T (2007). *Northern Territory Indigenous life expectancy improvements 1967 - 2004*. Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health. 31:2, 184 - 188.

<sup>4</sup>Centre on the Developing Child at Harvard University (2007). *A Science-based Framework for Early Childhood Policy: Using evidence to Improve Outcomes in Learning, Behaviour and Health for Vulnerable Children*. [cited; Available from: <http://developingchild.harvard.edu>]

<sup>5</sup>Walker, R. (2010). An evaluation of Ynana Ngurra-ngu Walalja: Halls Creek community families program. Perth, Western Australia: Telethon Institute for Child Health Research