

# **POSITION STATEMENT**

## ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young Peoples' Health***

### **BACKGROUND**

Indigenous inequality is a global health problem. Compared with non-Indigenous Australian people, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experience disproportionate and poorer health outcomes, with a greater burden of disease, unacceptably high mortality rates, and a shorter life expectancy<sup>1-3</sup>. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples have higher rates of injury and hospitalisation, than their non-Indigenous peers, and are over-represented in child protection and youth justice systems<sup>2,4,5</sup>. Historical, political, and socioeconomic disadvantages are major contributors to the increased negative health and social outcomes in adulthood<sup>6</sup>. Chronic disease, substance use, as well as inadequate diet, education, employment, income, housing and access to health and social supports contribute to this present situation<sup>2,6,7</sup>. To address the unacceptable health disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young peoples, the Australian College of Children & Young People's Nurses (ACCYPN) have developed a position statement to guide the education and practice of nurses working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young peoples, families, and communities.

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

#### **BELIEVES THAT:**

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are a diverse cultural group and this needs to be considered in health service planning and delivery at a local, regional, and system-wide level<sup>8</sup>.
2. Children and young people's health and wellbeing are important predictive indicators of physical, psychological, and social outcomes in adulthood<sup>9,10</sup>.
3. Investment and promotion in culturally appropriate health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people will positively influence future generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families and communities.
4. The disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous children and young people's health and wellbeing is largely preventable and treatable<sup>2</sup>. This requires consideration and recognition in the allocation of resources and funding<sup>7</sup>.
5. A primary healthcare approach is required for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people<sup>11</sup>. Consultation, and collaboration with, and active participation by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities is imperative in the planning, delivery and evaluation of health services.
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>12</sup>. The provision of quality child-care and educational facilities is the responsibility of all levels of government.
7. There needs to be a collaborative community-wide commitment to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families, and communities<sup>10</sup>.
8. Nurses caring for children and young people practice at an advanced level that requires ongoing clinical and educational support and recognition.

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

1. Promote and practise high quality culturally safe and sensitive care that is free from racism and inequality and readily accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

This includes respecting and celebrating the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in its own right, respecting the autonomy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and acknowledging the

historical and political context of healthcare provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and families.

2. Promote, support, and actively participate in regional community development; including the provision of quality primary health care and child care services in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families and communities<sup>12</sup>.
3. Promote adequate antenatal care and nutrition during pregnancy<sup>13</sup>.
4. Encourage exclusive breastfeeding for the first six months of life (unless medically contraindicated) and a nutritious diet throughout the lifespan.
5. Encourage and promote physical, social, and emotional health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families, and communities during pregnancy and throughout the lifespan.
6. Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to lobby governments and organisations for adequate resources to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people's health and health related services.
7. Participate in the ongoing education and support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and other healthcare workers.
8. Promote, advocate, and provide support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in nursing courses and in the nursing workforce.
9. Provide cultural awareness training to enhance cultural humility for all staff working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families, and communities. This includes acknowledging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples holistic approach to health, illness and wellbeing<sup>3</sup>.

#### **RESOLVES TO:**

1. Continue to seek opportunities to promote and work in partnership to maintain positive health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families, and communities.
2. Advocate for accessibility to culturally appropriate health and related services to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people, their families, and communities.
3. Promote and support 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 Islander people in the nursing workforce caring for children, young people, and their families.
5. Participate in ethical research aimed at improving and supporting the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, to promote systems and access to expertise and to ensure knowledge is translated to the community<sup>14</sup>.
6. Work with other organisations, such as the Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives and Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care to promote the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses, children, young people and their communities through policy and advocacy.

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