

Communique

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A consistent baseline definition of cultural safety for the National Scheme

Introduction

The definition of cultural safety has been developed for the national scheme regulating health practitioners across Australia (the National Registration and Accreditation Scheme, or National Scheme).

The definition is an important step in the commitment Ahpra, National Boards and Accreditation Authorities have made to make patient safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples the norm, recognising that patient safety includes the inextricably linked elements of clinical and cultural safety, and that this link must be defined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

The definition

Principles:

The following principles inform the definition of cultural safety:

- Prioritising COAG's goal to deliver healthcare free of racism supported by the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023](#)
- Improved health service provision supported by the Safety and Quality Health Service Standards [User Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health](#)
- Provision of a rights-based approach to healthcare supported by the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#)
- Ongoing commitment to learning, education and training

Definition

Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities.

Culturally safe practise is the ongoing critical reflection of health practitioner knowledge, skills, attitudes, practising behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.

How to

To ensure culturally safe and respectful practice, health practitioners must:

- a. Acknowledge colonisation and systemic racism, social, cultural, behavioural and economic factors which impact individual and community health;
- b. Acknowledge and address individual racism, their own biases, assumptions, stereotypes and prejudices and provide care that is holistic, free of bias and racism;
- c. Recognise the importance of self-determined decision-making, partnership and collaboration in healthcare which is driven by the individual, family and community;

d. Foster a safe working environment through leadership to support the rights and dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and colleagues.

How the definition will be used

The definition will be applied across the National Scheme and by the National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF) member organisations for embedding a baseline definition of cultural safety.

The definition will be used in the standards, codes and guidelines that National Boards set for registered health practitioners and Accreditation Authorities' standards.¹ Practitioners need to meet these standards to be registered.

Having a consistent definition is important

Having a clear baseline definition for the entities in the National Scheme is important as it means Ahpra, National Boards and Accreditation Authorities can provide consistent advice to registered health practitioners across the regulated professions.

This is an important first step towards doing our part to embed cultural safety in the health system.

Partnership with National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF)

The definition was developed by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Group (Strategy Group) in partnership with the NHLF.

The NHLF is comprised of leaders from Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health peak sector. The Strategy Group is comprised of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health experts as well as representatives from Ahpra, Ahpra's management committee, National Boards, accreditation authorities and NSW health professions councils.

The draft definition that was released for consultation was developed by the Strategy Group and NHLF.

For more information

More information about the Strategy Group and the work of Ahpra and National Boards on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Program is available on the Ahpra website:

<http://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-AHPRA/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Strategy.aspx>

¹ Some Boards and Accreditation Authorities may be further progressed in their work to embed cultural safety.