Directive: compliance is mandatory

Aboriginal Health Policy

Objective file number: ASD/00917
Policy developed by: Aboriginal Health Division (April Lawrie Smith)
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Summary
Outlines SA Health commitment to improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through shared approach to policy development, planning and service across the health system and maintaining respect for cultural diversity

Keywords

Policy history
Is this a new policy? N
Does this policy amend or update an existing policy? N
Does this policy replace an existing policy? N
If so, which policies?

Applies to
All SA Health Portfolio

Staff impact
All Staff

PDS reference
D0131

Version control and change history

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SA Health
Aboriginal Health Policy - 2007

“Statement of Commitment” to Improve Aboriginal Health
Aboriginal Health

For Aboriginal people, health “...is a matter of determining all aspects of their life, including control of their physical environment, of dignity, of community self esteem, and of justice. It is not merely a matter of the provision of doctors, hospitals, medicines or the absence of disease and incapacity...”¹

Health is both a fundamental human right and an important worldwide social goal and is defined as a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing.²

The South Australian Government is committed to improving the status of Aboriginal people in South Australia through addressing all aspects of life, including health status.³

Policy Purpose

SA Health aims to deliver a comprehensive and sustainable health system that ensures healthier, longer and better lives for South Australians.⁴ Within this context improving Aboriginal health and wellbeing is a priority and this policy statement signifies the commitment of SA Health to achieving this outcome.

SA Health acknowledges the effects of past colonisation, continuing discrimination, social disadvantage and exclusion on the health of Aboriginal people. This policy therefore outlines the ways in which SA Health will work with Aboriginal South Australians in planning and delivering health services integrating regard for cultural diversity, cultural respect⁵ and reconciliation.

SA Health will work within a whole-of-government strategic approach to improve Aboriginal health outcomes. In making this commitment, SA Health will provide leadership as well as work cooperatively with other Government and non-Government organisations to ensure the social determinants of Aboriginal health are addressed. It is therefore important to ensure that Aboriginal health is a priority for all government agencies.
Aboriginal People and the Health System

Aboriginal people have continuing rights and responsibilities as custodians of their land associated with traditional ownership and as members of kinship groups and families.

Aboriginal people experience a range of health challenges attributable to the on-going impact of colonisation and to many socio-economic factors.

The historical and contemporary context and conditions, within which Aboriginal South Australians live, including the loss of country, have made it difficult to attain and sustain good health and wellbeing. Widespread social disadvantage and poor physical, spiritual and emotional health impact on many Aboriginal lives. Full or partial exclusion from employment opportunities, poor housing and education, exposure to unacceptable environmental conditions and over-representation in the justice system place Aboriginal South Australians at much higher risk of social stress and health disadvantage than non-Aboriginal South Australians. The continuing poor and unmet health needs of Aboriginal people, further compounds the stress experienced adding to the burden of disease across the community.

Given this context, SA Health will support individual, family and community health and wellbeing initiatives that address the complex interaction of social, cultural, economic, and physical environments in which Aboriginal people live.

SA Health will continue to develop and implement strategies to provide health services and models of health care that address the patterns and burden of disease experienced by Aboriginal people as a whole and by particular population groups such as men, women, the elderly, children and young people.

Statement of Commitment

SA Health is responsible for the provision of a range of health services in primary health and acute care settings. The specific needs of Aboriginal people will be met through a comprehensive primary health care approach that addresses physical, mental and social health and wellbeing. The particular needs of Aboriginal people will be addressed in all areas of SA Health’s responsibility.

SA Health is committed to improving health outcomes for all Aboriginal people in South Australia so that the differences in their health status and the rest of the South Australian population are eliminated. This requires:
1. Respect for Culture

SA Health views respect for culture as vital for full participation in society and for improving the wellbeing of Aboriginal people. Respect for culture means ensuring that the cultural diversity and security (including rights and obligations, views, values and expectations) of Aboriginal people are respected in the delivery of health services.

2. Reconciliation

SA Health recognises Reconciliation between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people is central to making our State a harmonious and just society.

Reconciliation is a joint approach to implementing practical commitments to improving the wellbeing and quality of life for Aboriginal people in South Australia. Reconciliation includes the development of ongoing relationships with Aboriginal communities, groups and individuals, based upon respect and on recognition and acknowledgement of the past injustices and the disadvantaged status of Aboriginal people.

3. A holistic approach

SA Health recognises that the improvement of Aboriginal health status must include attention to physical, spiritual, cultural, emotional and social wellbeing, community capacity and governance.

4. Promoting good health

SA Health recognises that health promotion and illness prevention are fundamental components of comprehensive primary health care and must be core activities for Aboriginal community controlled and mainstream health services. All the social determinants of health need to be addressed in order to provide equity in health status for all South Australians, and in particular, for Aboriginal people.

5. Health sector responsibility

SA Health recognises that improving the health of Aboriginal individuals, families and communities is a core responsibility and a high priority for the whole of the health system. Making all services responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people will provide greater choice in and access to the services they are able to use.
6. **Support for the Aboriginal community controlled health care sector**

SA Health supports community decision-making, participation and control as a fundamental component of the health system that ensures that health services for Aboriginal people are provided in a holistic and culturally sensitive way.

The Aboriginal community controlled health sector’s demonstrated effectiveness is recognised in providing appropriate and accessible health services to a range of Aboriginal communities and its role as a major provider within the comprehensive primary health care context.

7. **Working together**

SA Health acknowledges that combining the efforts of government, non-government and private organisations within and outside the health sector, and in partnership with the Aboriginal health sector, communities and people, provides the best opportunity to address and influence the broader determinants of health.

8. **Localised decision making**

SA Health acknowledges the importance of health authorities sharing decision making with local Aboriginal communities so that they can define their health needs and priorities in culturally appropriate ways and work together to develop responses to those needs both within mainstream and Aboriginal Community Controlled health services.

9. **Developing the capacity and resources of health services and communities**

SA Health recognises the importance of strengthening all health services, developing appropriate models of health care and developing community expertise to respond to health needs and take shared responsibility for health outcomes. This includes effectively equipping staff with appropriate cultural knowledge and clinical expertise, building physical, human and intellectual infrastructure, fostering leadership, governance and financial management.
10. Accessible and equitable health services

SA Health recognises that it is essential to provide effective and sustainable health services, responsive to the population needs which are culturally appropriate and accessible. Particular consideration also needs to be given to the complex needs of Aboriginal people living in rural and remote settings. Improvement in Aboriginal health requires improved environmental health conditions and infrastructure and the local availability of culturally respectful preventative health services.

11. Accountability for effective services provision and improved health outcomes

SA Health recognises the importance of accountability for services provided and the effective use of funds and other resources by both Aboriginal Community Controlled and mainstream health services in order to optimise health outcomes. Governments are accountable for effective resource application through long-term funding and meaningful planning and sustainable service development in genuine partnership with communities.

These principles must form the basis of all policy and service delivery throughout SA Health, including the policies and activities of government funded services.

Shared Responsibility

SA Health will work closely with Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, Aboriginal community groups, other government, local government and non-government agencies, health professionals, including Aboriginal Health Workers\(^6\), to improve Aboriginal health.

Strategic Context, Performance Monitoring and Reporting

The key policy and strategic documents which guide SA Health’s efforts to address Aboriginal health inequities are:

> South Australia’s Strategic Plan
> SA Health Strategic Plan
> National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
> National Cultural Respect Framework

SA Health will monitor Aboriginal health outcomes by reporting on an annual basis to State and Commonwealth Governments on progress towards achievement of targets in these key policy and strategic documents.
South Australia’s Strategic Plan includes specific targets on:

- Aboriginal healthy life expectancy: to lower the morbidity and mortality rates of Aboriginal South Australians;
- Aboriginal wellbeing: to improve the overall wellbeing of Aboriginal South Australians;
- Aboriginal employment: to increase the participation of Aboriginal people in the South Australian public sector; and
- Aboriginal leadership: to increase the number of Aboriginal South Australians participating in community leadership and in programs which develop and enhance such leadership.

South Australia’s Strategic Plan will be supplemented by the Aboriginal Strategic Plan for South Australia in which the South Australian and Governments will jointly address the key priorities affecting the individual and community wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

A key priority of the SA Health Strategic Plan is to address the health inequities faced by Aboriginal people by reducing the gap in health outcomes between South Australia’s Aboriginal people and the rest of South Australia’s population.

South Australia’s Strategic Plan targets are incorporated in the strategic directions of the SA Health Strategic Plan. The SA Health Strategic Plan also includes the specific strategic direction to: Improve the health of Aboriginal People by:

- Reducing Aboriginal ill-health.
- Developing a culturally responsive health system.
- Promoting Aboriginal community health and wellbeing.

Regional level Aboriginal targeted community Health Improvement Plans will be developed to progress these strategies to improve Aboriginal health.

The goal of the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (NSFATSIH) is to ensure that Aboriginal people enjoy a healthy life equal to that of the general population that is enriched by a strong living culture, dignity and justice. It requires all government agencies to work together on a range of initiatives that address specific health issues. SA Health contributes by reporting annually on these initiatives.

The National Cultural Respect Framework guides the development and delivery of culturally responsive policy and services and the strengthening of relationships between the health care system and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
1 “Aboriginal Peoples’ Concept and Perception of Health” on pages ix to xiii of *The National Aboriginal Health Strategy*, 1989, AGPS  
Accessed 1/6/2007

http://www.who.int/en/  
Accessed 1/6/2007

3 *South Australia’s Strategic Plan 2007*  
Accessed 1/6/2007

4 South Australia’s Health Plan.  


6 A broad indication of how the South Australian health system is integrated can gained through consideration of *South Australia's Health Plan*.  

7 National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health: Framework for action by Governments, NATSIHC, Canberra.  
Accessed 1/6/2007

8 See previous citation.