

# **A FRAMEWORK FOR IMPROVING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER MALE HEALTH**

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## **Introduction**

I want to give you an idea of what is happening Nationally in relation to establishing a framework to improve the health of Indigenous Male Health.

There have been a number of national, state and regional Indigenous male health meetings which have been held across the country, these meetings have brought together males from a whole range of different areas, occupation and backgrounds.

For many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Males it has been a long journey and yet there is still a long way to go to achieve the position of Indigenous males. It has been a journey, which has been led and driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Males across the country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health is about recognising diversity of circumstances and lifestyles which makes up who we are.

These meetings have all highlighted the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing being addressed in a holistic way that deals with the whole person and context in which they live.

Diversity defines us as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males – it recognises Masculinity, Sexuality, Spirituality, and Political Beliefs.

We also live in different locations and circumstances which also effects and impacts on our health status and access to appropriate health services.

## **The Indigenous Male Health Forum**

As a result of these meetings particularly the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health Convention held in Ross River in the Northern Territory – a National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Reference Committee was formed, we have been working with the Commonwealth Government through the Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health (OATSIH) in Canberra to develop a Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health.

In August 1999 OATSIH brought together a number of key stakeholder agencies such as ATSIC, State/Territory Government Representatives, National Health Council and NACCHO together with members of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Health Reference Committee to facilitate the development of the National Framework.

## **Framework Development**

When we started to develop the framework we confirmed that the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males is essential to the health and wellbeing of our families and communities. This approach acknowledges the richness and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and the different needs, spiritualities, political beliefs, sexualities and lifestyles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health is a life journey that exists within cultural, political, economic, historical, social, and community contexts.

We also recognised that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males their identity and self-esteem has been significantly diminished in the last 200 years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males in turn also recognised the need to rebuild their cultural and spiritual strengths, which define their identity and pride. This rebuilding is critical for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male empowerment and self-determination in strengthening their self-esteem, quality of life, health status and spiritual wellbeing for themselves, their families and their communities.

## **Statement of Purpose**

The National Framework for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Male Health and Wellbeing aims to facilitate improvements in the commitment, knowledge, interventions and practises of stakeholders at all levels for better and longer life for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males.

The framework is not a policy it is a continuing working document. The guiding principles are a gauge for which we can formulate our own framework. The guiding principles for the framework has been endorsed by the National Health Council for the inclusion of the Revised National Aboriginal Health Strategy, which has now changed to the National Strategy for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

## **(Overhead Display)**

The Framework is designed to support and promote traditional and cultural strength and is guided by the following core principles:

- Indigenous male health and social wellbeing must be determined by Indigenous males and their families/communities in line with local cultural traditions.
- Improve Indigenous male health through effective and sustainable strategies across the continuum of care emphasised by preventative and comprehensive primary health care.
- Indigenous male access to mainstream and Indigenous specific health services must be improved across all settings and take into account the particular needs of those influenced by physical and/or psychological impairment or sexual orientation for example.

- Indigenous specific and mainstream health and related organisations must be encouraged to deliver culturally and gender appropriate services for Indigenous males in a range of settings including correctional facilities and schools.
- Encourage effective collaborative outcomes that improve Indigenous male health through sustainable partnerships among Indigenous males, their families/communities, government, non-government, community and private sector organisations in health and related fields.
- Facilitate Indigenous male involvement and consultation in planning, implementation and management of their health initiatives at the local, state and national levels.
- Indigenous male health initiatives are evidence based where possible, or designed to produce evidence, and should contribute to the body of knowledge around Indigenous male health by evaluating performance and disseminating results subject to appropriate consent.

### **Specific Topics**

**A Gender Specific Approach** – A gender specific approach is fundamental to improving the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health. This approach is based on the recognised need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males to determine and control their health needs and priorities.

**Empowerment and Self-determination** – The principles of empowerment and self-determination underpin the Framework and are critical to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health. This is based on the recognised need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males’ participation in the development, implementation, and ownership of initiatives and interventions for improving their health and well-being.

**A Holistic Approach** - A holistic health approach to improving the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health across the life span and which reflects diversity and difference in spiritualities, political beliefs, economic status, sexualities, and lifestyles.

**The Continuum of Care** – A balanced approach to improving the status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health which recognises the need for health care and interventions across the continuum of care and life span – from prevention, health promotion and early intervention to clinical care, treatment, and follow-up.

**An integrated Approach** – A coordinated and integrated approach to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health, which is based on partnerships and collaborations across the health and health related sectors including correctional services and education sectors.

**A Partnership Approach** – A partnership and collaborative approach between the Commonwealth, State and Territory, and local governments, the community controlled health and mainstream health sector, the private sector, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health. It is recognised that the key vehicle for coordinating and integrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policy and strategies are the Framework Agreements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health is incorporated within health planning, policy, resource allocation, and partnerships. However, mainstream planning and coordination mechanisms also have responsibility for improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health.

**Strategy and Policy Development** – To ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health is prioritised and incorporated within new and existing government and community based strategies, policies, and programs. There are a range of Indigenous specific and mainstream strategies and policies in place which cover the range of health and social health issues which impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health. Strategy and policy development recognises the need for capacity building (at the organisational and community level) to provide gender appropriate services based on local needs and circumstances.

**Access and Support** – Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males access to gender and culturally appropriate, to mainstream health services, community controlled health care services, and health related services in urban, rural and remote settings. This approach recognises the need for local and regional support structures and networks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males to advocate for and support the development of male health strategies.

**The Health Workforce** - Improving strategies to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male participation within the health workforce, incorporation of male health specific issues within the health workforce across service provision, research, management, and government sectors, and capacity building with health and substance use services to address male health issues.

**The Evidence Base** - Increasing gender specific research and evaluation of interventions and models of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander male health. Research and evaluation should be designed, conducted and disseminated in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males and communities and be consistent with the NHMRC guidelines for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. A part of this approach also recognises the need for information exchange and skills transfer between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities concerning models of care and good practice in addressing male health.