Agreement on
Northern Territory
Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing
2015–2020

Between

the Australian Government

the Northern Territory Government

and

the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT)
Foreword

A significant gap in life expectancy still exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal people. Coordination and collaboration between primary, secondary and tertiary health systems and effective community engagement and control of primary health care are vital to improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This Agreement will support key players in the health sector to have a shared vision on how to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Northern Territory, with a commitment to focus on closing the gap targets of achieving greater life expectancy and reducing child mortality.

The partners to this Agreement acknowledge that this can only be achieved through shared responsibility and genuine ongoing partnerships between all health service providers, government agencies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The partners also acknowledge that some past government policies have negatively impacted on the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

A focus on the health system alone will not close the gap. This Framework Agreement will provide a platform for work with other key stakeholders across sectors to address the social determinants that impact on the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is in keeping with the Aboriginal definition of health in a holistic context:

"Aboriginal health means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being, thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their Community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life." (National Aboriginal Health Strategy, 1989)

The Australian Government and the Northern Territory Government acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Sector’s unique level of expertise and success in the provision of primary health care services to Aboriginal people.

Senator the Honourable Fiona Nash
Assistant Minister for Health

The Honourable John Elferink MLA
Northern Territory Minister for Health

Ms Marion Scrymgour
Chairperson
Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory

* Throughout this document the term Aboriginal refers to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of Australia.
1. Introduction

1.1 The Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Partnership Framework Agreement 2015 – 2020 (the Agreement) is made between the Australian Government (represented by the Department of Health), Northern Territory Government (represented by the Northern Territory Department of Health), and the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT).

1.2 This Agreement is an instrument to support closing the gap in Aboriginal disadvantage targets identified in the National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA). The following plans underpin the Agreement and identify the priorities for the Northern Territory:

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023
- Northern Territory Health, Strategic Plan 2014–2017
- Northern Territory Health, Aboriginal Health Plan 2015–18
- NT Suicide Prevention, Strategic Action Plan 2015–2018
- Pathways to Community Control: An agenda to further promote Aboriginal community control in the provision of Primary Health Care Services
- Northern Territory Chronic Conditions Self-Management Framework 2012–2020
- AMSANT Strategic Plan
- Other relevant national and jurisdictional policy documents, including but not limited to those listed in 9.2 of this Agreement.

1.3 This Agreement continues the intent of previous Agreements – to advance the health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.

1.4 The purpose of the Agreement is to have an effective mechanism for all sectors to share information and consult on policies and programmes that aim to address the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

1.5 While this Agreement is set out over a five year period from 2015–2020, partners acknowledge that addressing the inequity between the health of Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people requires long term sustained generational efforts to effectively improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

2. Aim

2.1 The aim of the Agreement is for all partners to work effectively, collaboratively and transparently as a collective, in partnership with local communities, to improve health and wellbeing outcomes and reduce the gap for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory.
3. **Principles**

3.1 **Collaboration** – the partners will work together and with other stakeholders, including those outside the health sector, in the interest of improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people.

3.2 **Respect** – for the work and dedication of each partner and using the Agreement to its full potential to progress outcomes.

3.3 **Commitment** – to work productively with all partners through effective communication and information sharing.

3.4 **Recognition** – that Northern Territory and Australian Governments are accountable to the Australian and State/Territory Parliament and the Australian public for all health decisions and that Aboriginal community controlled primary health care service peak bodies are also accountable to their board and members.

4. **Commitments**

4.1. All partners agree to work collaboratively through joint planning and targeted, evidence based action to continue efforts, including under the *National Indigenous Reform Agreement*, to achieve the target of improved health outcomes and reduce inequity.

4.2. All partners make a commitment to focusing on the priorities common to the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023*, the *Northern Territory Health Aboriginal Health Plan 2015–18*, and the *AMSANT Strategic Plan*.

4.3. All partners commit to work collaboratively to develop, sustain and maintain:

- A health system that provides clinically appropriate care that is accessible, culturally safe, culturally competent and free of racism for all Aboriginal people.

- A health system that improves the capacity and capability of Aboriginal community controlled primary health care services, while ensuring responsiveness to the needs of Aboriginal people by mainstream programmes, and builds and maintains linkages with the community controlled health sector.

- Coordinated, culturally appropriate services across the health system, including primary health care, specialist and hospital care to improve the patient journey and health outcomes for Aboriginal people and their families.

- Reporting requirements for services that meet the needs of all partners, where possible are streamlined to reduce repetition and unnecessary burden whilst supporting service delivery, improved patient outcomes and future planning.
• Accurate, consistent and usable clinical data to support evidence-based clinical practice and quality improvement.

• Accurate, consistent and up to date data in relation to demographics, health outcomes, services and investment that is shared between partners to inform planning and decision-making.

• Financial investment information to be shared between the partners, that clearly identifies the contributions provided by state/territory governments and the Australian Government.

• Workforce strategies developed in partnership with Aboriginal communities to improve continuity of care and coordination with health and wellbeing services.

• Effective linkages with other relevant sectors (including but not limited to social and emotional and wellbeing, aged care, mental health, and alcohol and other drugs) to improve the social, economic and environmental determinants of health.

4.4. The Northern Territory and Australian governments remain committed to supporting capacity and capability for the Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector to participate in the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum as equal partners including in the design, development, provision and review of Aboriginal primary health care services.

5. Roles and Responsibilities

5.1 Responsibility to realise the commitments in this Agreement will be shared, as appropriate, between all partners working in a spirit of cooperation and collaboration.

5.2 This Agreement recognises and respects the existing individual roles and responsibilities of the partners to this Agreement.

5.3 Under the terms of this Agreement, the Australian Government, the Northern Territory Government and AMSANT maintain autonomy with respect to their individual legislative requirements and responsibilities whilst fulfilling their agreed commitment to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum.

5.4 Collaboratively, the partners to this Agreement commit to maintaining an effective Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum by:

• Meeting quarterly to progress the business of the partnership.

• Inviting other key stakeholders to participate in meetings where required (for example, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet and Primary Health Networks).
• Supporting the establishment of specific sub committees to focus collaborative activity in key areas agreed by the forum partners.

• Taking responsibility to be both transparent and accountable in information sharing and planning efforts to support improved service delivery for Aboriginal peoples.

• Ensuring issues of concern raised by partners are carried forward to relevant key stakeholders for information, action or response.

• Coordinating and/or supporting the implementation of new programmes, taking into consideration systems effectiveness, the acute care system and primary health care system.

• Analysis and provision of input into key policy issues and policy development.

• Exchanging information on issues relevant to Aboriginal health.

6. Implementation, Reporting and Monitoring Arrangements

6.1 The partners to this Agreement commit to developing a work plan to be revised annually that identifies the strategic focus and agreed priority areas for action.

6.2 Amendments to the work plan can be agreed by all partners at any time to accommodate a changing environment and emerging priorities.

6.3 The partners to this Agreement agree to report annually to the Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum on their individual contributions to achieving the agreed priorities.

6.4 The Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum will report annually to the relevant Australian Government and Northern Territory Ministers and the Chairperson of AMSANT.

7. Data Collection and Evaluation

7.1 The partners acknowledge the importance of sensitive, reliable and timely data, including financial, to effective planning and service delivery for Aboriginal health and wellbeing services and will facilitate access to available data.

7.2 The partners agree to:

• Support the development and improve the quality and availability, of data for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework.
• Improve the quality of relevant data available on the provision of mainstream and Aboriginal specific services, including data on estimated primary health care expenditure and ratios of population to staffing at a service level.

• Support the development of appropriate datasets that capture the performance against agreed jurisdictional objectives of mainstream and Aboriginal specific services.

8. **Duration of this Agreement**

8.1 This Agreement is for the period 2015–2020 and will come into effect from the date of signing and shall continue to the 30 June 2020 and/or until partners execute a further Agreement (in substitution of this Agreement).

8.2 Any variation to this Agreement, prior to 30 June 2020 requires written notification to all partners of this Agreement and consensus of all partners to the Agreement.

8.3 In the event that the signing of a new Agreement is delayed, this Agreement may be extended with the written agreement of all partners to the Agreement.

8.4 Where there is a conflict between the partners over matters covered by this Agreement, the partners will first use their best endeavours to seek to resolve the issue through a formal meeting at the operational level. Should a resolution not be reached, the matter will be referred in writing to the signatories of this Agreement to determine an agreed process to resolve the dispute.

9. **Appendices**

9.1 Definitions

9.2 Other Key Documents
9.1. Definitions

In this Agreement, unless a contrary intention is indicated:

Aboriginal community controlled primary health care services means those health and wellbeing services operated by organisations that are incorporated and controlled by Aboriginal people.

AMSANT means the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory peak body representing Aboriginal community controlled primary health care services in the Northern Territory.

Australian Government refers to the Department of Health on behalf of the Australian Government.

Health is defined in the National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party Report (1989) as including not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.

Health and wellbeing services are those services covered by the holistic definition of health and include such services as substance use, health promotion and disease prevention services, early childhood and children, adolescent, women’s and men’s health, aged care, services for people with a disability, mental health services as well as clinical and hospital services.

Northern Territory Aboriginal Health Forum refers to a meeting of the Australian Government Department of Health, the Northern Territory Department of Health and AMSANT.

Northern Territory Department of Health refers to the Northern Territory Government.

Partners refers to the three key stakeholders, the Australian Government Department of Health, the Northern Territory Department of Health and AMSANT, which agree to work collaboratively as stated in this Agreement.

Signatories refers to the Honourable Fiona Nash, Australian Government Assistant Minister for Health, the Honourable John Elferink, Northern Territory Minister for Health, and AMSANT Chairperson Marion Scrymgour, who have signed the Framework Agreement on behalf of the partners.
9.2. Other Key Documents

In addition to the National Indigenous Reform Agreement, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023, the AMSANT Strategic Plan and Northern Territory Health Plan, the Framework Agreement is underpinned by the policy and programme documents listed below.

Partners acknowledge this list may evolve over the life of the Framework Agreement to reflect current national and jurisdictional strategic, programme and policy documents.

National:

- The Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (1991)
- National Framework for Health Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Families
- National Continuous Quality Improvement Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal, and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Drug Strategy
- National Anti-Racism Strategy
- National Indigenous Law and Justice Framework
- Fourth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood Borne Virus and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2014–17
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan Implementation Plan 2013–2023
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework 2011–2015
- Indigenous Australian Health Programme Guidelines
- Indigenous Advancement Strategy
- NACCCHO 10 Point Plan 2013–2030.

Territory:

- Little Children are Sacred Report 2006
- Pathways to Community Control 2007
- NTAHF Core Primary Health Care Services Framework 2011.