

# Children's Health Queensland Position Statement

## Eliminating institutional racism to achieve health equity

At Children's Health Queensland, we believe:

- all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people should have access to culturally safe and respectful healthcare and services to improve health and wellbeing outcomes.
- we have a collective responsibility, as part of the health system, to address all forms of interpersonal and institutional racism and racial health inequity within our hospital and health service.
- health equity can only be achieved by understanding, identifying, acknowledging and eliminating interpersonal and institutional racism in the healthcare system, led by both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff.

### The problem

Racism is a core barrier shown to impact the health and wellbeing, and access to healthcare, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people. It can lead to poorer self-reported health status, lower perceived quality of care, underutilisation of health services, delays in seeking care, failure to follow recommendations, societal distrust, interruptions in care, mistrust of providers and avoidance of health care systems.

*Making Tracks Together – Queensland's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equity Framework* defines institutional racism as 'the ways in which racist beliefs, attitudes or values have arisen within, or are built into the operations and/or policies of an institution in such a way that discriminates against, controls or oppresses, directly or indirectly, a certain group to limit their rights; causing and/or contributing to inherited disadvantage'.

In public health, institutional racism is evident in a 'one size fits all' approach to service delivery that does not meet the requirements, requests or unique needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients and communities. It can also be reflected in funding decisions, governance structures, healthcare models and clinical practices and policies that restrict or fail to acknowledge the cultural needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Children's Health Queensland pays respect to the Traditional Custodians of the lands on which we walk, work, talk and live. We also acknowledge and pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders past, present and future.



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In 2017, a report commissioned by the (then) Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council, found significant levels of institutional racism are experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Queensland's healthcare system.

In 2021, Children's Health Queensland initiated an internal review to assess the levels of institutional racism within the organisation, compared to previous performance, and to identify further opportunities for healthcare improvement.

While this review acknowledged the significant progress Children's Health Queensland has made over the past five years, it identified that a high degree of institutional racism remains. It also highlighted the need for culturally informed, continuous improvements to processes, care delivery and workplace culture to reduce, and ultimately prevent, institutional racism within our organisation.

Only through the continual critical and transparent evaluation of our performance can we use these learnings to grow as an organisation on our journey towards creating health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

## The solution

Children's Health Queensland has a zero-tolerance approach to racism and we are deeply committed to eliminating racism in all its forms. This commitment was re-affirmed in our first *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Equity Strategy (2022-2025)*, in which we pledged to address and prevent racial discrimination and institutional racism in our organisation.

Every person has the right to access health services without discrimination. Providing culturally safe healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and their families is a priority for Children's Health Queensland. As defined by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA), cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. Culturally safe practice 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.

To achieve health equity and reduce health disparities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, we must first understand and confront institutionalised racism to improve cultural safety for our families and our workforce.

We will achieve this by:

- Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health a priority across all layers of our organisation.
- Dismantling structures, policies and processes that disadvantage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Providing a culturally safe environment for our current and future Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.
- Listening and learning from the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and using this to inform, co-design and re-build health care services and policies.
- Educating and empowering our workforce to understand, identify and call out racism, bias, stigma and its impact on clinical and social and emotional wellbeing outcomes.
- Developing more robust mechanisms to resolve systemic and interpersonal racism experienced by consumers and staff.

Systemic and sustainable health equity reform can only be achieved through self-determination and the genuine inclusion of, and partnership with, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Children's Health Queensland will partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to design and deliver effective models of care. We will also strengthen our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers and community groups through genuine, impactful, and outcome-focused engagement.

## Our role

While everyone has a collective responsibility to help eliminate institutional racism and create a health system that delivers equitable and culturally safe care, Children's Health Queensland has a unique and pivotal role to play in improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in Queensland.

By prioritising and investing in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in their early years, we can shift life course health trajectories and cease contributing to inter-generational trauma and disadvantage.

We take on responsibility to help preserve the oldest culture in the world through the care we provide to its children, young people and families.

We commit to partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and empowering them to lead the design of their care at Children's Health Queensland, now and into the future.

