

Definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker

Summary The review of IB2014_001 has been undertaken to align with the NSW Health Service Aboriginal Health.

Document type Information Bulletin

Document number IB2018_018

Publication date 24 May 2018

Author branch Workforce Planning and Development

Branch contact (02) 9424 5969

Replaces IB2014_001

Review date 24 May 2023

Policy manual Not applicable

File number H18/15768

Status Active

Functional group Clinical/Patient Services - Governance and Service Delivery, Information and Data, Medical Treatment
Corporate Administration - Governance
Personnel/Workforce - Employment Screening, Industrial and Employee Relations, Workforce planning
Population Health - Health Promotion

Applies to Board Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Cancer Institute, Chief Executive Governed Statutory Health Corporations, Community Health Centres, Dental Schools and Clinics, Government Medical Officers, Local Health Districts, Ministry of Health, NSW Ambulance Service, NSW Health Pathology, Public Health System Support Division, Public Health Units, Public Hospitals, Specialty Network Governed Statutory Health Corporations

Distributed to Divisions of General Practice, Government Medical Officers, Health Associations Unions, Ministry of Health, NSW Ambulance Service, Public Health System

Audience All staff across Ministry of Health and NSW Health organisations

DEFINITION OF AN ABORIGINAL HEALTH WORKER

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide NSW Health with a suitable term that defines NSW Health Aboriginal Health Workers within the NSW Public Health System as a sub-set of the overall NSW Health Aboriginal workforce.

NSW Health seeks to capture a definition for greater clarity of categories, work roles and responsibilities, scopes of practice and minimum requirements for position holders.

The purpose for this definition is to clarify terminology and **is not** to be used for industrial interpretations and/or argument.

The audience for this definition is:

- Individual Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal Health Practitioners
- Line managers of Aboriginal Health Workers, including Aboriginal Health Practitioners
- Clinical supervisors of Aboriginal Health Practitioners
- Clinical team members / peers of Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal Health Practitioners
- Senior Managers including Human Resources
- Local Health Districts, Agencies, Pillars and Specialty Hospital Networks
- Local Aboriginal community members across NSW.

Aboriginal Health Workers, as defined herein, are eligible to participate in the Aboriginal Health Worker Forum.

During 2016 – 2017 local Executive staff and the Aboriginal Health Worker workforce across all NSW Health organisations were consulted about the state-wide Aboriginal Health Worker Forum. The purpose of the Aboriginal Health Worker Forum is to support all NSW Health Aboriginal Health Workers to develop their professional networks within the unique contexts in which they function.

The state-wide Aboriginal Health Worker Forum will be held every two years and hosted by the Workforce Planning & Development Branch, Ministry of Health.

Note: In this document the term ‘Aboriginal’ will be used in preference to ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ or ‘Indigenous’ in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW (NSW Health; (PD2005_319).

BACKGROUND

Nationally there has been inconsistency regarding the definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker (Health Workforce Australia, 2011; NATSIHWA, 2012; NATSIHWA).

On 1 July 2012, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner Board of Australia commenced the national registration of Aboriginal Health Practitioners, who are one category of the NSW Health Aboriginal Health Worker workforce.

New national qualification standards were endorsed in 2013 by the National Skills Standards Council (NSSC) for the Aboriginal Health Worker workforce following in-depth national reviews. The NSSC has been replaced by the Australian Industry and Skills Committee (AISC, May 2015).

KEY INFORMATION

An Aboriginal Health Worker is:

- An Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander person (AustLII, 2013) which means someone who:
 - Is of Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander descent; and
 - Identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; and
 - Is accepted as such by the Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander community in which they live, or formerly lived.
- Is employed in an Aboriginal identified position in NSW Health
- Has undertaken, or is willing to undertake, a minimum Certificate III Aboriginal Primary Health Care (including undergoing recognition of prior learning processes against current qualifications)
- Provides flexible, holistic and culturally sensitive health services to Aboriginal clients and the community to achieve better health outcomes and better access to health services for Aboriginal people.

Although Aboriginal Health Worker roles are diverse, an analysis of these roles has identified that all Aboriginal Health Workers have the following characteristics that are universal across Australia (Health Workforce Australia, 2011):

- The provision of Aboriginal primary health care
- Cultural security and safety
- Disease prevention and health promotion
- Local community knowledge
- A holistic approach to health care.

Aboriginal Health Workers build relationships and work in collaboration with a range of internal and external stakeholders. Aboriginal Health Workers work within multidisciplinary healthcare teams to achieve better health outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities, and play a key role in facilitating relationships between Aboriginal patients and other health professionals. They communicate with, and facilitate access to, other government and non-government organisations and support services in order to provide care that meets the physical, social, emotional and cultural needs of the patient. This communication may occur during and/or after the patient's contact with the health service.

The Aboriginal Health Worker can provide either generalist or specialised services such as those outlined below, but not limited to:

- Aged Care
- Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections (BBV & STI)
- Chronic Care
- Drug and Alcohol
- Early Childhood
- Family Violence
- Health Promotion
- Maternal & Infant Health
- Mental Health
- Women's Health & Men's Health
- Youth Health

ABORIGINAL HEALTH WORKER CATEGORIES

There are four types of Aboriginal Health Worker categories and all of these are paid under the NSW Health Service Aboriginal Health Workers' (State) Award (NSW Health; IB2015_051).

1. **Aboriginal Health Worker:** The Aboriginal Health Worker category includes the roles of Aboriginal Community Health Workers, Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer and Aboriginal Liaison Officer. These roles are non-clinical and provide a variety of services in a community and/or hospital setting. These services include advocacy, support, liaison and health promotion.
2. **Aboriginal Health Practitioner (*protected title*):** This position provides direct clinical services to local Aboriginal communities. Aboriginal Health Practitioners are required to hold a Certificate IV Aboriginal Primary Health Care Practice and be registered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practice Board of Australia (ATSHPBA) supported by the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (AHPRA). Aboriginal Health Practitioners perform a range of clinical practice and primary healthcare duties. Aboriginal Health Practitioners have a different pay scale to Aboriginal Health Workers.
3. **Principal Aboriginal Health Worker:** This position provides a career pathway for Aboriginal Health Workers with a degree qualification. Principal Aboriginal Health Workers will develop, implement and review Aboriginal primary health care strategy and policies and may be responsible for the supervision and training of Aboriginal Health Workers. Under the NSW Health Service Aboriginal Health Workers' (State) Award, the Principal Aboriginal Health Worker role is a new classification.
4. **Senior Aboriginal Health Worker:** In the 1970s Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) were selected from local community members. They were often chosen on the basis of their cultural knowledge, understanding, skills and roles in the

community. Their extensive experience working in NSW Health is as a cultural navigator. This position manages resources for the delivery of individual health services or health programs and may be responsible for the supervision and training of Aboriginal Health Workers. The Senior Aboriginal Health Worker has applied for an advertised Senior Aboriginal Health Worker role and has been selected on merit.

REFERENCES:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner Board of Australia. (n.d.). Registration. Retrieved March 1, 2018, from <http://www.atsihealthpracticeboard.gov.au/Registration.aspx>

NSW Aboriginal Health Workers (State) Award_IB2015-051. Retrieved March 7, 2018 http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/IB2015_051.pdf

AustLII. (2013, July 5). Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 no 42 Sect 4. Retrieved March 1, 2018, from: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/nsw/consol_act/alra1983201/training.gov.au

Australian Industry and Skills Committee, May 2015. Retrieved March 7, 2018 at: <https://www.aisc.net.au/>

Health Workforce Australia. (2011, June). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project Interim Report. Retrieved March 1, 2018, from <https://www.natsihwa.org.au/sites/default/files/atsihw-project-interim-report-20111017.pdf>

NATSIHWA (2012). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Professional Practice Framework. Retrieved March 1, 2018, from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association: https://www.natsihwa.org.au/sites/default/files/natsihwa-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-hw-prof-practice-framework_final_draft_july_2011.pdf

NATSIHWA. (n.d.). Become a member. Retrieved March 1, 2018, from National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association: <http://www.natsihwa.org.au/content/membership>

NSW Health Aboriginal Health Workers (State) Award_IB2015-051. Retrieved March 7, 2018 http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/IB2015_051.pdf

NSW Health. (2005, January 27). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Preferred Terminology to be used (PD2005_319). Retrieved March 1, 2018, from

NSW Health: http://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2005_319.pdf

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

NSW Health Aboriginal Workforce Unit can provide more information:
<http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/aboriginal/Pages/default.aspx>

[Good Health – Great Jobs Decision Making Framework for Aboriginal Health Practitioners](#)