



Australian Government
Department of Health and Aged Care



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework

2025–2035



Foreword

A message from the Hon Anika Wells MP

On behalf of the Australian Government, I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which we all have the privilege to live. I also pay my respects to Elders past and present who have nurtured and protected these lands and waters for more than 60,000 years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders are the holders of ancient wisdom who have sustained deep cultural knowledge and strengthened communities for generations. Australians stand on the shoulders of 1,600 generations of First Nations people and that is our shared history.

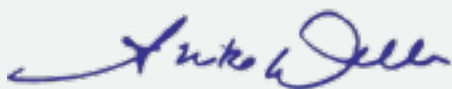
Aged care should embrace the strength that lies in the heart of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people while supporting them to lead enriched lives as they age. The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recognised that the aged care system has not adequately supported older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the past and that they remain underrepresented among aged care recipients and the aged care workforce.

Australia's aged care system is undergoing genuine, positive change for everyone receiving and giving aged care. Now is the time to make aged care work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework (the Framework) is a timely and important step towards building an aged care system that supports older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live long and healthy lives. The Framework outlines specific reforms for addressing the challenges faced by older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities in accessing and receiving care that is culturally safe, trauma aware, and healing informed—wherever they live. It aims to support more Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations into the sector and grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce. This will improve experiences with the aged care system for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

As enshrined in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, we achieve better outcomes when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a genuine say in the matters that affect them. This Framework was developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations, and I would like to thank all involved for their considerable effort in partnering with us and contributing their deep knowledge, powerful insights, and lived experiences. I look forward to continuing this partnership through implementation and biennial updates to the Framework.

Together, we will improve the future of aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.



Anika Wells
Minister for Aged Care
Minister for Sport



Acknowledgement of Country

We, the Department of Health and Aged Care, proudly acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and pay respect to those who have preserved and cared for the lands on which we live, work, and benefit from each day.

We recognise the inherent strengths and knowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people provide to the health and aged care system and thank them for their existing and ongoing contributions to the wider community. We extend this gratitude to all health and aged care workers who contribute to improving health and wellbeing outcomes with, and for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

We also recognise and respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's continuing connections and relationships to the lands, waters, culture, and community; and pay respect to all Elders past and present.

Artist interpretation of the Department of Health and Aged Care, our reconciliation journey, and our 100th anniversary. Artwork is titled '100 Years of Health' by contemporary Kalkadoon artist Chern'ee Sutton.

Passages is a custom embodied design for the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care and was produced in collaboration with Winangali through a co-design process with Iscariot Media (IM) a 100% Aboriginal owned creative and training agency (IscariotMedia.com).



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Executive Summary

As custodians of traditions and values, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people strengthen and ensure the future of communities by sustaining rich culture from generation to generation. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people are knowledge holders and the hearts of communities.

This framework establishes a 2035 vision for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to age well by having their spiritual, physical and mental health needs met through holistic, high-quality and culturally safe aged care. This care should promote wellbeing, deliver trauma aware and healing informed responses and empower connection to culture, family, community and Country or Island Home.

Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are eligible for aged care support from the age of 50. This age eligibility reflects need priorities across a number of social determinants of health. In 2021, the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety found the aged care system must transform to appropriately respond to the diverse needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is critical to restoring dignity for those who have suffered historic trauma and recognising the centrality of self-determination and the ongoing strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework (the Framework) outlines actions that aim to achieve significant improvements to the aged care experience for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Framework is importantly person-centred and underpinned by the new rights-based Aged Care Act. It affirms the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and embraces holistic concepts of health, social and emotional wellbeing and quality of life for

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which is grounded in self-determination and connections to community, culture and Country and/or Island Home.

The Framework sets out aged care reforms under 5 measurable outcomes:

- **Outcome One:** Culturally safe and responsive access to aged care
- **Outcome Two:** Culturally safe, accurate and prioritised assessment
- **Outcome Three:** Culturally safe aged care services in community
- **Outcome Four:** More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers
- **Outcome Five:** A larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.

These outcomes are underpinned by four guiding principles that closely align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

1. Genuine partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities on aged care reforms.
2. Prioritise Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and increase their participation in the aged care sector.
3. All mainstream institutions, government agencies and stakeholders in the aged care system are accountable to deliver better aged care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Evidence based on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be used to drive aged care reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Vision

Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people age well by having their spiritual, physical and mental health needs met through holistic, high-quality and culturally safe aged care that promotes wellbeing, delivers trauma aware and healing informed responses and empowers connection to culture, family, community and Country or Island Home.



Guiding principles

1. Genuine partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities on aged care reforms.
2. Prioritise Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and increase their participation in the aged care sector.
3. All mainstream institutions, government agencies and stakeholders in the aged care system are accountable to deliver better aged care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. Evidence based on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be used to drive aged care reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people (hereafter referred to as older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) are wisdom keepers and custodians of long sustained traditions and cultural values. They uphold a critical role in family and community structures, and sustain communities through passing on rich cultural knowledge and practices to younger generations (National Advisory Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care 2020). The Department of Health and Aged Care (the department) is committed to supporting older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to undertake this role and age well through quality, culturally safe (see definition at Appendix 1) and responsive aged care services.

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety

The Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety (Royal Commission) highlighted that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people generally have poorer experiences with the aged care system. Despite greater need, reflected in earlier eligibility for aged care services¹, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not access aged care services at rates commensurate with need. The reasons for this are complex, with barriers to accessing services including:

- ongoing impacts of colonisation, historic trauma and institutional racism leading to mistrust of government systems, institutions and the workforce within these settings
- social and economic disadvantage
- complexity of My Aged Care with built-in assumptions that may not apply for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (including that people reside in a fixed location, are proficient in English language and computer literate, have access to records and identification documents, will trust strangers and government with sensitive information, and have confidence engaging with bureaucratic processes)
- a lack of culturally safe assessments and services across urban, rural and remote settings, including a lack of cultural safety in mainstream aged care
- intersectionality and additional need arising from higher rates of disability, comorbidities, homelessness and dementia
- distances between services and communities, insecure or overcrowded housing and food security
- insufficient employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and people with high levels of cultural safety across all roles in aged care.

Recommendations were made to address these barriers (refer to Appendix 2), including the creation of a clear pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the appointment of a First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, increasing cultural safety throughout the aged care system, prioritisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers, the use of flexible funding arrangements, and a focus on increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce.

¹ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are eligible for aged care services from the age of 50, compared to the age of 65 for the non-Indigenous population. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are also currently eligible from the age of 45 under the Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) if on a low income and homeless or at risk of being homeless.

Purpose

This Framework establishes a 2035 vision for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to age well by having their spiritual, physical and mental health needs met through holistic, high-quality and culturally safe aged care. Quality of life and ageing well can look different between individuals and communities, so aged care system settings should be adaptive and flexible to meet local and individual needs. These concepts should guide reforms to ensure that aged care takes a culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed, holistic and whole-of-community approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This Framework contextualises and expands on aged care reforms recommended by the Royal Commission through five measurable outcomes. Outcomes One, Two and Three aim to ensure culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at each stage of the aged care journey. Success of these outcomes is dependent on more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations becoming aged care providers (Outcome Four) and a larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce (Outcome Five).

These outcomes were identified in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders (see page 29). All parties involved in the co-design of the Framework are committed to driving the actions of each outcome. Guiding principles will underpin the implementation of all outcomes to ensure the Framework aligns with the aims of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

The Framework is person-centred and will be underpinned by a new rights-based Aged Care Act. Aligning with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Framework holds the rights of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's diversity, wellbeing, and self-determination at its core. It recognises and embraces that the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities is grounded in connections to family, community, culture, Country and/or Island Home², land, spirituality, body, mind and emotions (Gee et al. 2014).

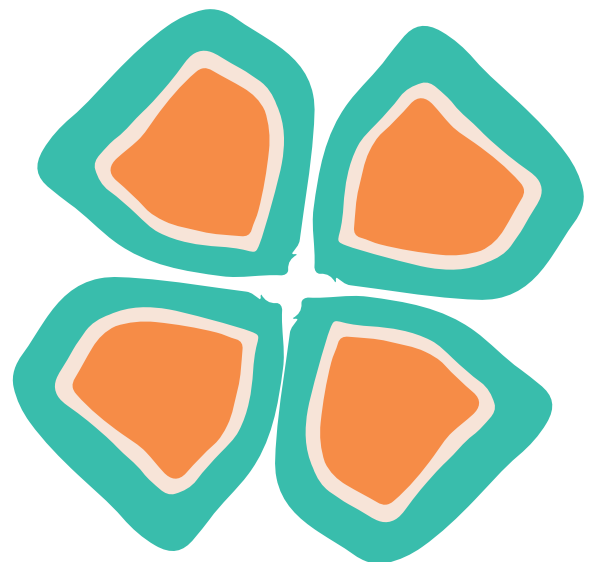
For older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, this extends to quality of life (as defined through the Good Spirit Good Life Framework) that encompasses social and emotional wellbeing together with being respected and valued as an Elder or older person and having the opportunity to fulfil cultural roles by passing on accumulated knowledge, stories and traditional values to younger generations. These factors, in addition to having access to appropriate support services and a safe and secure living environment, support ageing well through healing and strengthening the inner spirit (Smith et al. 2021).

² 'Country' refers to the physical, cultural and temporal spaces valued by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This term, however, does not resonate for some Torres Strait Islander people, who instead identify with 'Island Home'. Both 'Country' and 'Island Home' have therefore been included in the Framework to ensure adequate representation and inclusion for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

All components of the Framework build on and extend structural health reform driven by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031. It focuses on aged care system-specific reforms that seek to build the community-controlled sector and increase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to play a greater role in the delivery of aged care services. This will drive local community-based solutions that ensure aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is responsive to place-based need, holistic and person-centred. It also recognises the importance of equipping the mainstream aged care system to be culturally safe and responsive to the diverse and changing needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Together, these components aim to create an aged care system that realises the vision of the Framework in supporting older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander to age well³.

Further, an interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner was appointed in early 2024. The Interim Commissioner consulted with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, stakeholders and communities to advise Government on ways to improve aged care for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including the role, functions and authority of a permanent Commissioner. A consultation report has been released.

The Interim Commissioner will work with the department and other responsible stewards of the aged care system to enable the outcomes within the Framework and empower older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access care that meets their needs. This includes other entities including the Inspector-General of Aged Care, the Aged Care Complaints Commissioner and the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commissioner.



³ Note that aged care services are just one component of broader services and systems that are integral in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to age well. Broader reforms outside of aged care that contribute to healthy ageing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not in scope for the Framework and will be further explored in other pieces of work. Stronger integration with this broader work will, however, be considered through implementation and future iterations of the Framework, or alternative pieces of work if more appropriate.



Key Guiding Principles

Guiding principles that align with the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap underpin the Framework. This aims to ensure that aged care reforms support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to enjoy long and healthy lives and contribute to Closing the Gap.

The guiding principles for the Framework include:

1. **Genuine partnership and shared decision-making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities on aged care reforms**
(aligns with Priority Reform One – Formal Partnerships and Shared Decision Making).

The department will engage with a broad range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families, carers, communities and community-controlled organisations throughout the entire aged care reform journey. Engagement should be ethical, reflect best practice and adhere to the principles of community-led co-design, genuine formal partnership and consultation, incorporating the advice and input of stakeholders.

2. **Prioritise Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations and increase their participation in the aged care sector**
(aligns with Priority Reform Two – Building the Community-Controlled Sector).

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) provide culturally safe care, are more likely to employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. ACCOs should be prioritised as aged care providers and encouraged to play a broader role in the aged care sector through increased funding and supports.

3. All mainstream institutions, government agencies and stakeholders in the aged care system are accountable to deliver better aged care outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

(aligns with Priority Reform Three – transforming government organisations).

All levels of government, and organisations across the entire aged care system, should commit to ongoing improvements in cultural safety and trauma aware, healing informed approaches. These approaches should be meaningfully applied to inform aged care reforms and improve aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Government agencies should employ processes to assess the impact of all new aged care legislation, policies and programs on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and Closing the Gap.

Unconscious bias and institutional racism should also be consistently and widely challenged, with mechanisms in place to do so. This will ensure that regardless of how and where an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person interacts with the aged care system, their needs will be heard and appropriately met.

4. Evidence based on the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be used to drive aged care reform for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

(aligns with Priority Reform Four – shared access to data and information at a regional level).

The Framework aims to improve the collection, use and monitoring of data to inform shared decision making with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders. Data and information used to make government decisions will be available at sufficient levels of disaggregation to preserve data sovereignty and allow for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities to interpret for local decision-making. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities should also be supported to build capacity in using and interpreting data to make informed decisions on aged care reforms as they impact each respective community and organisational growth within the sector. Governments should work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations on defining the data to be collected, recognising the value of this data to communities and upholding the principles of data sovereignty.





Outcome One –

Culturally safe and responsive access to aged care

A culturally safe aged care system that is responsive to individual need and enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to obtain aged care services at rates that are at least equal to their representation in the Australian population

Current state

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience higher burden of disease and lower life expectancy and are therefore more likely to require aged care services at a younger age compared to the non-Indigenous population. This is compounded for Stolen Generations survivors who have multiple and complex needs, with health and wellbeing significantly worse than other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of similar age (Healing Foundation 2021).

The current aged care system does not adequately support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to receive aged care services. The system is difficult to navigate with multiple possible entry points and seemingly similar service options. Information about aged care services is typically from a non-Indigenous perspective, which can be alienating for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have had previous negative, culturally unsafe experiences with mainstream institutions. Trust in, and understanding of, aged care services and how to access them is generally low amongst older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This results in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers undertaking considerable levels of unfunded, informal education and awareness raising to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with the aged care system.

The complexity of My Aged Care and the skills and technology required to use it, as well as the need to share personal information before trusted relationships can be established, creates further barriers to access and deepens already existent mistrust of the system. Without culturally safe information about aged care and trusted navigation supports, older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are often deterred from engaging with the aged care system.

Multiple recommendations of the Royal Commission have been implemented since 2021 to improve aged care experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes work underway through the new Aged Care Act to help reduce the complexity of the aged care system, a newly appointed Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner and establishment of fit-for-purpose programs, like the Elder Care Support Program that builds a trusted workforce to better support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's service navigation.

Funding has also been committed to:

- support the establishment of First Nations assessment organisations as part of a new single assessment system, from July 2025
- build the capacity of ACCOs to provide aged care
- develop trauma aware and healing informed care training for aged care providers
- support investment in essential aged care infrastructure projects to increase access to quality, sustainable and culturally safe aged care services.

However, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to have negative experiences with the system. This contributes to current underrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving aged care services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50 years of age comprise approximately 3.6% of the eligible aged care population, but only represent 1.3% of residential aged care recipients, 2.9% of Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) recipients, 3.4% of Level 1 – 2 Home Care Package (HCP) recipients and 3.3% of Level 3 – 4 HCP recipients (Productivity Commission 2024). This data excludes recipients whose Indigenous status was not recorded and therefore likely underreports the numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving services. In some circumstances, this may be further reflective of a system that is not culturally safe, causing people to feel discomfort in disclosing their Indigeneity.

Targets

For older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to feel empowered to engage with the aged care system and receive aged care services commensurate with need.

This will be measured through the following targets:

- **An increase in the number of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving aged care services**, with representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over 50 years of age across aged care services being at least equal to their representation in the Australian population by 2034.
- **Achieve and maintain 100% completion rates in cultural safety training for the My Aged Care (My Aged Care Contact Centre and Aged Care Specialist Officers) and care finder workforces by 2027**. This training will be regularly revised to ensure it is relevant, high-quality and reflects best practice.
- **An increase in the number of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people supported by the Elder Care Support workforce to access aged care services**. Data on the number of people being supported will be collected in 2025, with the target of at least a 10% increase each year until 2034.
- **A majority of surveyed older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are satisfied that their experience accessing aged care services is culturally safe**. This will be measured, where possible, through data collected from:
 - the Elder Care Support workforce engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are eligible but not engaged with the aged care system)
 - engagement undertaken by the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner.

To ensure adequate coverage of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are accessing, or have attempted to access, aged care services across different provider and care types, including mainstream services, additional surveys will also be considered. Information will first be collected in 2026 with the target of at least a 5% increase in satisfaction each year until 2034.

Outcome

To meet these targets, efforts are needed to simplify the aged care system and improve navigation processes, so more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can engage and increase their positive experiences through the aged care system. This may include alternative entry provisions that allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to immediately start receiving aged care services whilst progressing their aged care needs assessment to completion. Information about aged care services needs to be developed with, and owned by, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Community-controlled organisations need to be supported and empowered to implement their own initiatives for increasing community trust in and knowledge of aged care services. Developing a culturally safe and responsive aged care system that older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will feel comfortable accessing is also dependent upon each of the other four outcomes in the Framework.



Indicative actions

The tables below highlight actions that will contribute to delivering this outcome. The first table outlines current actions that have been committed to, with both expected timeframes for tangible impact and status of implementation. The second table provides examples of future initiatives to address additional gaps in order of priority.

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
<p>Prioritise building the community-controlled sector by supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to become aged care providers that will support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to engage with the aged care system (specific actions further outlined in Outcome Four).</p>	Short	In progress
<p>The Elder Care Support Program provides intensive support throughout the aged care journey by assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and carers to understand aged care services, undergo assessment processes and advocate for care that enables ageing well. Elder Care Support workers are located in, or close to, areas of need.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>Development and implementation of a new rights-based Aged Care Act that will be better support, simplify and prioritise access to aged care services for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
<p>The new Aged Care Act embeds the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care (NATSIFAC) Program into a single national aged care system with a common entry point and culturally safe single assessment framework. This will simplify entry into the aged care system and movement between care types for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>Reforms to in-home aged care include specific design elements to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to increase access to appropriate services, including measures to increase service provision by ACCOs.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>Communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander audiences is targeted, culturally safe and responsive. Consumers, communities and organisations receive the information they need, when they need it, in language that is empowering and trauma informed. This will be achieved by both creating tailored channels for the audience (such as a sector newsletter), better using existing channels (such as the department website) and creating bespoke assets (such as brochures).</p>	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
My Aged Care is accessible, culturally safe and supportive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including acceptance of self-identification and providing access to interpreters. Third parties , including providers, where requested by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person, can act as ‘agents’ to assist in engagements with My Aged Care.	Short	In progress
Integrated Care and Commissioning place-based initiatives to strengthen the care and support sector and improve access to aged care, disability supports and veterans’ care in areas where access to comprehensive, culturally safe services can be improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Short – medium	In progress
National Aged Care Advocacy Program Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specialist advocates provide free, independent and confidential advocacy support and information to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families. This will support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand and exercise their aged care rights, seek aged care services that suit their needs and find solutions to issues they may be experiencing.	Short	Implemented
Mandatory cultural safety learning elements are developed through the Lowitja Institute and delivered to the My Aged Care workforce.	Short	Implemented

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
Recognition and funding of community-led education and awareness-raising activities , particularly those run by the community-controlled sector, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build trust, increase aged care literacy and encourage people to engage in assessment processes and access aged care services.	High
Tailored engagement with Stolen Generations survivors and organisations , such as the Healing Foundation, including increased awareness and support, recognising the additional barriers this cohort faces in accessing aged care.	High
My Aged Care includes accessible information that is co-developed and informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	High
Cultural safety training delivered to the My Aged Care workforce is locally tailored and has appropriately informed content relevant to the history and culture of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving services.	High
My Aged Care has dedicated contact points for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are specifically trained in understanding how to deliver responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and maintain connection to the aged care system, including through using the Elder Care Support Program.	Medium

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
<p>The My Aged Care, care finder and advocate workforces are supported to develop relationships and engage in cultural safety training with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and the Elder Care Support workforce. This will enable this workforce to better understand the needs of local older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families and guide people to appropriate services. Care finders have broad geographical reach where possible to deliver navigation support in more remote communities.</p>	Medium
<p>Other system navigators, for example Aboriginal Disability Liaison Officers and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce, are trained in aged care literacy to ensure there is no wrong door for entry into the aged care system for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Likewise, aged care system navigators should also have knowledge of health and disability services to guide people to the most appropriate care.</p>	Medium

Outcome Two – Culturally safe, accurate and prioritised assessment

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive accurate, holistic, prioritised, culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed aged care assessments

Current state

Assessments for home and community care supports using Regional Assessment Services (RAS), or for complex needs and residential care using Aged Care Assessment Teams (ACAT), are often not culturally safe or sensitive to the traumas experienced by many older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including Stolen Generations survivors. These processes and tools are frequently developed and conducted through a non-Indigenous lens that is often unable to accurately consider and understand the needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their families. Further, these processes require deeply personal information to be shared with strangers, and generally fail to take the time and effort needed to develop the trusted relationships for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to see the benefit in sharing this information. This, along with a lack of consideration to other cultural sensitivities and the trauma these processes may trigger, inhibits information from being freely shared, leading to poor assessment outcomes that do not accurately reflect the level of care a person may need. Poor assessment experiences coupled with long wait times, particularly in rural and remote areas where assessment services are not as readily available, may strengthen distrust and cause people to disengage with the aged care system. It may also deter other older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the community from applying for aged care services.



Targets

For older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to receive holistic, accurate, culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed assessments and be prioritised for these processes. This will be measured through the following targets:

- **Aged care assessments for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are categorised as high priority and commence within 10 calendar days** (unless this is not appropriate, for instance if individual and/or community priorities arise). This will be reviewed 3 years after Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations and workforce have been established.
- **An increase in the proportion of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving assessments from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessors and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations.** Achieving this target will be dependent on an associated increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations delivering assessments and an increase in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment workforce. Data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving assessments and re-assessments from the First Nations assessment workforce will be collected from 2026, with the target of at least a 10% increase each year until 2034.
- **An increase in the proportion of the Elder Care Support workforce involved in assessment processes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.** Data on the proportion of the Elder Care Support workforce involved in assessment processes will be collected in 2026, with the target of at least a 10% increase each year until 2034.
- **An increase in the proportion of the aged care assessment workforce engaging in cultural safety training.** Data on training rates will be collected in 2025 with the target of having all assessment organisations, including the workforce and leadership (at both the board and executive level), engaging in training by 2027.
- **An increase in the number of mainstream assessment organisations with a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).** Data on the number of organisations with RAPs will be collected in 2025 with the target of having all assessment organisations commit to a Reflect RAP, at minimum, by 2028.
- **A majority of surveyed older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are satisfied that their experiences with assessment processes were comprehensive, accurate and culturally safe.** This will first be measured, where possible, through data collected from:
 - the Elder Care Support workforce engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities
 - engagement undertaken by the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner.

To ensure adequate coverage of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have undergone an aged care assessment, additional surveys will also be considered. Information will first be collected in 2026, with the target of at least a 5% increase in satisfaction each year until 2034.

Outcome

To meet this target, aged care assessments for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need to be prioritised so people do not disconnect from the aged care system due to long wait times. Processes need to be simplified through the replacement of RAS and ACAT with a new, culturally safe single assessment system. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations also need to be established to deliver culturally safe assessments to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who do not want to engage with mainstream assessment processes, which can feel culturally unsafe.

An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment workforce is required, along with support from the Elder Care Support workforce. All assessors need to complete training on culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed approaches to assessment. The assessment tool also needs to be culturally valid and safe and enable assessors to respond to situations with cultural sensitivity.

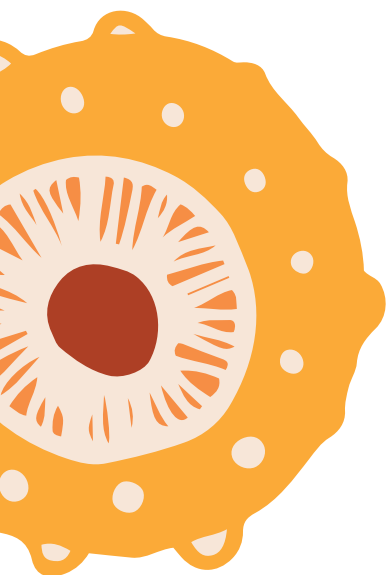
Indicative actions

The tables below highlight actions that will contribute to delivering this outcome. The first table outlines current actions that have been committed to, with both expected timeframes for tangible impact and status of implementation. The second table provides examples of future initiatives to address additional gaps in order of priority.

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations (preferably ACCOs) that are equipped with culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed approaches to deliver aged care assessments as part of the Single Assessment System .	Short	In progress
Build the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment workforce to provide culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed assessment processes to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
<p>Nationally consistent definition of cultural safety in aged care settings developed by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) in consultation with the sector. This definition will be deployed across all elements of the aged care system, including oversight bodies, and will align with definitions used in other sectors, including health and disability.</p>	Short	Implemented
<p>Policies and processes for aged care assessments ensure older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can be supported by an Elder Care Support worker, trusted person or organisation, where an older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person wants to have this support.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>Development of an Integrated Assessment Tool with culturally -specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander validated tools (which may include the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (KICA) Tool, KICA Urban and Regional, KICA Carer and the Good Spirit Good Life Quality of Life tool) to improve assessment outcomes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.</p>	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Training for all assessors on culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed practice, including training content on the social determinants of health, the role of aged care in promoting and maintaining wellbeing, and the role of different types of services in keeping older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people well.	Short	Implemented
Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low	
Prioritisation of assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as high priority (commence within 10 calendar days from referral).	High	



Outcome Three – Culturally safe aged care services in community

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed comprehensive care in or close to community, Country or Island Home

Current state

Aged care services for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed, and promote holistic health and wellbeing. They should also facilitate the provision of place-based care on, or close to, Country or Island Home (or have options to return to Country or Island Home if this is not possible, particularly for end of life and palliative care). The need for these services is becoming even greater as, in 2022, the total Stolen Generations population (estimated at 33,600, with the majority residing in non-remote locations) aged into eligibility for aged care services (AIHW 2021).

Regardless of where older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people reside in Australia, there is often limited or no choice in service providers that are culturally safe and offer trauma aware and healing informed care. In urban areas, mainstream services may be more readily available, but they are not always culturally safe. This leads to poor ageing outcomes and reduced wellbeing in older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through either forcing people to access culturally unsafe services or leave community to receive culturally safe care. Some may also choose to go without much needed aged care services rather than receive care from a culturally unsafe provider.





Targets

For older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to receive culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed care in or close to community, Country or Island Home. Community can be defined at the local level or at the regional level where more appropriate. This will be measured through the following targets:

- **An increase in the proportion of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving care from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers.**
Achieving this target will be dependent on an associated increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations becoming aged care providers (**Outcome Four**). Data on the proportion of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people currently accessing aged care services through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers will be collected in 2025 with a target of at least a 5% increase each year until 2034.
- **An increase in the number of mainstream organisations engaging in training on culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed care.** Data on training rates will be collected in 2025 with the target of having all mainstream aged care organisations, including the workforce and leadership (at both the board and executive level), completing training by 2028.
- **An increase in the number of mainstream organisations with a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).** Data on the number of organisations with RAPs will be collected in 2025 with the target of having all organisations commit to at least a Reflect RAP by 2028.
- **A majority of surveyed older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are satisfied that aged care services are holistic, culturally safe, enable them to live in or close to community and are responsive to their needs.** This will be measured, where possible, through data collected from:
 - the Residents' Experience Survey
 - the Elder Care Support workforce engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (including older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are eligible but not engaged with the aged care system)
 - engagement undertaken by the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner.

To ensure coverage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged care recipients across different provider and care types, including mainstream services, additional surveys will also be considered. Information will first be collected in 2026, with the target of at least a 5% increase in satisfaction each year until 2034.

Outcome

To meet this target, more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations need to enter and remain in aged care service delivery (supported through **Outcome Four**), increasing the distribution and coverage of culturally safe services and workforce. Providers of culturally safe and responsive care need to also be supported to remain in the aged care sector, with additional support for sector growth. The new Aged Care Act embeds the requirement for culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed care across all aged care services. This will be supported through a common definition of culturally safe care for use in the aged care sector (adapted to individual and local community need where necessary).

The cultural safety of the mainstream aged care sector also needs to increase, and all entities in the system - including oversight bodies - need to improve their cultural safety. This will allow these entities to properly assess the quality of services and ensure only those providers who can demonstrate culturally safe care are able to claim specialisation in service provision to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. To sustain services close to community, Country or Island Home, program and policy settings need to support the provision of flexible, adaptive and place-based responses to local and regional needs. Appropriate funding is needed to support these flexible models of care. The new Aged Care Act also needs to permit the broad and flexible range of services needed for culturally safe and responsive care.

Indicative actions

The tables below highlight actions that will contribute to delivering this outcome. The first table outlines current actions that have been committed to, with both expected timeframes for tangible impact and status of implementation. The second table provides examples of future initiatives to address additional gaps in order of priority.

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact	Status
	Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Imminent In progress Implemented
Nationally consistent definition of cultural safety in aged care settings developed by NATSIAACC in consultation with the sector and community. This definition will be deployed across all elements of the aged care system, including oversight bodies, and will align with definitions used in other sectors, including health and disability.	Short	Implemented

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Development of cultural safety guidance materials , including advice on specific actions to support culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed practice in aged care settings, and training materials for standardised use across the aged care sector.	Short	Implemented
Prioritise building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to provide culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed aged care services in or close to Country or Island Home (specific actions further outlined in Outcome Five).	Short	In progress
Prioritise building the community-controlled sector by supporting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to become aged care providers and deliver culturally safe aged care services in or close to Country or Island Home (specific actions further outlined in Outcome Four).	Short	In progress
Cultural safety is prioritised at all levels of the aged care sector , including the department, the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC) and the Inspector-General of Aged Care, supported through cultural safety training and the work of the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner.	Short – medium	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
<p>Additional funding for NATSIFAC providers to meet the higher costs of delivering services in remote and very remote locations and deliver the Fair Work Commission’s decision on the Aged Care Work Value case. This will ensure that NATSIFAC providers have the right level of funding to continue to deliver culturally safe care, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in these areas have continued access to culturally safe aged care within their communities.</p>	Short	Implemented - Stage 1
<p>The strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards, under the new aged care regulatory model, requires mainstream providers registered in categories 4, 5 and 6 to implement strategies to deliver care to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>The new Aged Care Act enables connection to culture for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving mainstream in-home care services, including reasonable supports for return to Country or Island Home. It also retains this for people receiving both in-home and residential care under the NATSIFAC program.</p>	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Improved cultural safety of the ACQSC in audit methodology, registration processes and regulatory functions through implementation of recommendations from the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission capability review .	Short	In progress
Design of the new Support at Home program provides for the diverse and changing needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	In progress
Strengthen models of volunteering (including the Aged Care Volunteer Visitors Scheme) that support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving aged care.	Short	In progress
Provision of free Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interpreting services for use by aged care providers on at least the same basis that interpreters are provided for culturally and linguistically diverse communities.	Short	In progress
The department's Local Network supports the development of place-based partnerships between mainstream and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care services and providers, as well as other key partners such as ACCHOs and Aboriginal Medical Services to create supportive and integrated care systems.	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
The department and ACQSC assist in connecting aged care services with local ACCHOs to facilitate older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in residential care to receive primary and allied health care through a local ACCHO, where they wish.	Short	In progress
To support adoption of the National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines , develop specific guidance material on culturally appropriate design in residential aged care homes for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	In progress
To continue the NATSIFAC program to provide flexible residential and home care services in rural and remote Australia and areas where access to culturally safe care is limited.	Short	Implemented
Integrated Care and Commissioning place-based initiatives to strengthen the care and support sector and bring together aged care, disability supports and veterans' care in areas where comprehensive, culturally safe services can be improved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Short – Medium	In progress
Specialisation Verification allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify aged care services that can provide culturally safe care.	Short	Implemented

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
Mobility between NATSIFAC and other aged care programs is streamlined to ensure people who temporarily or permanently move away from NATSIFAC service sites can immediately transition to an aged care program in their new location. They will also have the option to return to the NATSIFAC program, on return to the service site. This will ensure older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in more areas can access flexible and culturally safe aged care service delivery.	High
The full costs of delivering services to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are accounted for in Independent Health and Aged Care Pricing Authority reviews into pricing considerations , including specialisation rates outside MM 6 and MM 7 (remote and very remote communities) to cover increased costs in delivery of care in all culturally thin markets.	High
Recognition and funding for community-led education and awareness-raising activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to build trust, increase aged care literacy and encourage people to access culturally safe aged care services on Country or Island Home.	High
Support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who have relevant training capabilities to deliver appropriate training across the aged care sector and develop a more culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed workforce.	High
Expansion of the NATSIFAC program in areas where needed with associated support for mobility between this program and other service types. ACCOs are prioritised to deliver the program.	High

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
Mainstream residential care services facilitate return to Country or Island Home and connection to culture for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, where possible, and/or explore opportunities for relevant partnerships that could assist this outcome.	High
Mainstream programs for residential care are designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities so that they work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people. This will result in an increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers and greater cultural safety for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, without compromising quality and safety.	High
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-focused pre-aged care resources providing information for people diagnosed with dementia or experiencing cognitive decline about what to expect with the condition and the range of support services available, particularly under the National Dementia Support Program, are designed by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Medium
Greater awareness of and engagement with the National Aged Care Advocacy Program amongst older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and communities. This will support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to understand and exercise their aged care rights, seek aged care services that suit their needs and find solutions to issues they may be experiencing.	Medium

Outcome Four –

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations become aged care providers

Current state

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be able to exercise choice in aged care providers. While we know many prefer to receive services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations who are trusted by the community, their limited numbers make it difficult to exercise choice. Indicative data shows the number of aged care services delivered by ACCOs is likely around 2% of total services (AIHW 2024b)⁴. These Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers have consistently and successfully provided culturally safe and responsive aged care to older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in their respective communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations already delivering culturally appropriate health care, disability services and/or social and emotional wellbeing services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are also best positioned to lead the expansion of safe, integrated aged care services for their community.

Moreover, many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are not part of the care and support sector, such as art centres, are increasingly playing a role in coordinating care, providing respite and improving wellbeing for older people in their community but are not formally recognised or funded to provide aged care services. These organisations are currently faced with substantial barriers, particularly in regulatory and approval processes, to become approved aged care providers and remain in aged care delivery.

The current application process to become an approved aged care provider is long, complex and requires a fee that inhibits Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that cannot cover the cost of entering the aged care market. The application process also requires unnecessary duplication of information and does not recognise existing regulatory requirements met through the delivery of comparable services (for example, primary health and disability services). Services also face duplicative reporting and audit requirements. Together, this creates unnecessary administrative burden, posing barriers for smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with already stretched services and staff from entering and remaining in aged care delivery.

⁴ The AIHW Aged care service list was filtered for organisations that fit the definition of an ACCO under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap:

- a. incorporated under relevant legislation and not-for-profit
- b. controlled and operated by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- c. connected to the community, or communities, in which they deliver the services
- d. governed by a majority Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander governing body.



Target

An increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are aged care providers. Improved data on the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations that are currently aged care providers will be collected in 2025, with a target of at least a 10% increase each year until 4% of all aged care providers are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Outcome

To meet this target there will need to be effort, including partnering, in assisting more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to enter into and remain in aged care delivery. Increased financial assistance, training and capability building will be required along with innovative models that look to maximise economies of scale at a regional level. The Aged Care Rules that sit under the new Aged Care Act need to continue to exempt ACCOs from the requirement to have a majority independent board and enable mutual recognition of similar accreditations across the care and support sector. The Act should ensure regulatory processes are culturally safe and accept how ACCOs operate to meet community need and expectations. A range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are needed to address the supply deficit including ACCOs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses and cooperatives.



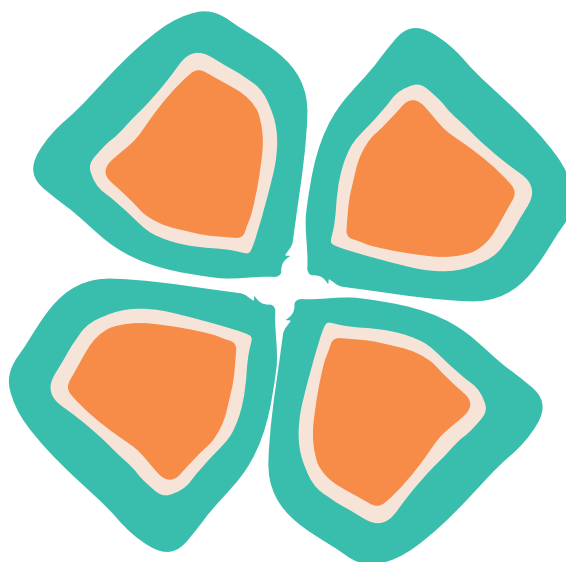
Indicative actions

The tables below highlight actions that will contribute to delivering this outcome. The first table outlines current actions that have been committed to, with both expected timeframes for tangible impact and status of implementation. The second table provides examples of future initiatives to address additional gaps in order of priority.

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Capacity and capability building projects in the community-controlled sector to encourage and support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to enter and remain in the aged care market.	Short – medium	In progress
Infrastructure grants, such as the Aged Care Capital Assistance Program (ACCAP) , for existing providers to undertake significant capital builds.	Short	In progress
Integrated Care and Commissioning place-based initiatives that strengthen the care and support sector by assisting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations already delivering primary health care, disability, veterans and/or mental health services to integrate or expand into aged care delivery.	Short – medium	In progress
Remote and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Service Development Assistance Panel (SDAP) to assist with capacity building of existing providers including care delivery, governance and infrastructure projects.	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Additional funding to support NATSIFAC providers to transition to increased transparency and accountability requirements under the new Aged Care Act, deliver the Fair Work Commission's decision on the Aged Care Work Value case, and to meet the higher costs of delivering services in remote and very remote locations. This will ensure culturally safe NATSIFAC providers continue to deliver services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	In progress
Co-operative and Mutual Enterprise Support Program (Care Together Program) to support the establishment of new co-operative and mutual business models and innovative place-based solutions to address issues in delivering care services in thin markets, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.	Short	In progress

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
The ACQSC applies flexible approaches to registration and regulation , including recognition of existing obligations and regulatory mechanisms such as existing primary/allied health and/or disability accreditations, flexibility to waive approval fees, and dedicated supports for more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to become aged care providers.	High
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations are supported through transparent, long-term, sustainable and flexible funding and intensive, community-led business support and education initiatives to enter the aged care sector and improve aged care service delivery. This includes assistance with navigating being an aged care provider and understanding the implications of reforms and new reporting requirements.	High
Mainstream programs support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to deliver culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed services which are fit for purpose and focus on community need.	High
Data dashboards are built on to enable easy access to accurate data that makes it clear where there is unmet need and ACCO service opportunities.	Medium



Outcome Five –

A larger Aboriginal and Torres Strait workforce

More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enter and remain in roles across the aged care workforce

Current state

In the same way that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prefer to receive services from trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, there is often a strong preference for care to be provided by other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are best placed to develop trust with and meet the cultural and language needs of local older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. However, this cohort is underrepresented in the aged care workforce.

As reported through the 2023 Aged Care Provider Workforce Survey, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise only 1.2% of directly employed workers in nursing, personal care and clinical care management roles across the aged care sector, despite comprising approximately 3.8% of the overall Australian population. This includes approximately 0.77% of this workforce employed by residential aged care facilities, 0.85% in the HCP Program, 3.09% in CHSP, 1.75% in the Multi-Purpose Services (MPS) Program and 19.21% in the NATSIFAC Program (AIHW, 2024a) .

Target

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people comprise at least 3.4% of the paid workforce across all aged care services, with the stretch goal of 5% by 2031. This matches the target outlined in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031. This target and recommendations will be updated following development of the First Nations Aged Care Workforce Action Plan.

Outcome

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must be recruited and retained in all levels and roles across the aged care system. Providers must make their workplaces culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and volunteers, with retention strategies that include mentoring and supports and suitably tailored training options.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RTOs require investment to build their capacity to deliver adapted training, which the sector has found culturally safe and more effective in achieving outcomes. This includes opportunities to build in micro-credentialing and recognition of prior learning and life-skills. Partnering across Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce peak organisations, federal government departments and state and territory governments to coordinate workforce initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be explored.



Indicative actions

The tables below highlight actions that will contribute to delivering this outcome. The first table outlines current actions that have been committed to, with both expected timeframes for tangible impact and status of implementation. The second table provides examples of future initiatives to address additional gaps in order of priority.

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
<p>The First Nations Aged Care Workforce Action Plan (to sit under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031) will identify and anticipate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training and workforce needs in the aged care sector for the immediate and long-term future. It will include targets for training and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and avenues to promote aged care employment pathways.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>The Community Development Program and its replacement Remote Jobs and Economic Development Program (or similar), to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote areas to receive meaningful training to build skills that reduce barriers to employment in areas of demonstrated need, including aged care.</p>	Short	In progress
<p>Continuation of the Aged Care Transition to Practice Program to provide additional support for early career Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurse participants to develop clinical care skills in aged care settings.</p>	Short	In progress

Committed actions	Timeframe for impact Short (within 4 years) Medium (within 6 years) or long term (within 10+ years)	Status Imminent In progress Implemented
Strengthen models of volunteering that engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers as part of the workforce, including the exploration of volunteering as a pathway to employment.	Short	In progress
Indigenous Employment Initiative (IEI) to subsidise employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in entry-level, non-clinical roles in both residential and home care settings.	Short	Implemented
Aged Care Nursing and Allied Health Scholarships for personal care workers, enrolled and registered nurses, and allied health professionals working in aged care, with a guaranteed number of scholarships available for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	Implemented
Rollout of the Aged Care Nursing Clinical Placements Program , which will support Bachelor/Master of Nursing students to undertake high-quality professional clinical placements in the care and support sector, with priority for students in the second and third years of their degrees. A target of 2.86% has been set for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.	Short	Implemented
Rollout of the Home Care Workforce Support Program , which includes specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander targets as an entry pathway into the home care sector for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.	Short	In progress

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
Flexible and on-the-job training and career pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in, or interested in entering, the care and support sector workforce, including recognition of prior learning and experience, informal caregiving and volunteer experience and life-acquired skills. This could include development of a kinship care program that recognises the importance of kinship care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through funding kin to provide care on Country or Island Home.	High
Micro-credentialling and upskilling opportunities , particularly to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health expertise into the aged care workforce.	High
Support for aged care providers to build cultural safety in order to recruit, train and maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staffing, particularly local staff. This may include funding for recruitment and retention strategies, training for mainstream employers on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and removal of barriers impacting recruitment and retention.	High
Utilise mainstream job and volunteer training programs and influence other government departments and state and territory governments to allocate a portion of these resources specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander jobs and skills development in the care and support sector.	High

Gaps and future aspirations outside of committed measures	Priority High Medium Low
<p>Coordination across government departments and state and territory government to deliver more funding and support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RTOs for tailored, culturally safe training to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce.</p>	High
<p>Acknowledgement of the role formal and informal volunteers hold in the aged care system, including both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteers and volunteers who support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes the need to remove barriers impacting recruitment and retention, and provide training, recognition and support for volunteers.</p>	Medium

Next Steps

The Framework outlines indicative actions (either already committed to or for further consideration) that will support the implementation of each outcome. All parties involved in the co-design of this Framework are committed to implementing these actions and monitoring progress against targets under each outcome.

The Framework is a living document and will be reviewed and updated biennially. Progress against targets will inform updates to the Framework to ensure its relevance, including newly identified barriers and further opportunities for action. This involves reconsidering targets once achieved and adding additional aspirational goals. Where relevant, linkages with other related strategies will also be further outlined and developed. The review process will be particularly important for the ability of the Framework to be responsive to a changing environment and evolving issues.

Further detail on governance and reporting through Framework implementation is outlined in Appendix 3.

Developing the Framework

The Framework was developed through the rich knowledge and experiences of members of the First Nations Aged Care Governance Group and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework Working Group. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, peak bodies, community-controlled organisations and other Australian Government agencies, with representation from:

- The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC)
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)
- Healing Foundation
- Institute for Urban Indigenous Health (IUIH)
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA)
- Australian Association of Gerontology (AAG) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing Advisory Group (ATSIAAG)
- Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (VACCHO)
- National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF)
- Services for Australian Rural and Remote Allied Health (SARRAH)
- National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)
- Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission (ACQSC)
- Department of Veterans' Affairs (DVA)
- Department of Social Services (DSS).



Related Strategies

The Framework aligns with other relevant strategies and standards that affect older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their carers, families and communities, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care workforce and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. These include:

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap (and associated strategies and plans)
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031
- Our Care, Our Way, Our Future: 5-Year Plan for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care (2021–2026)
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Plan
- National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People’s Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–23
- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (once finalised)
- Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia Declaration (and associated plans)
- The New Aged Care Act and Aged Care Quality Standards
- National Indigenous Languages Report
- National Dementia Action Plan
- Aged Care Diversity Framework
 - Australian Government Diversity Action Plan
 - Actions to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a guide for consumers
 - Actions to support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: a guide for aged care providers
- Framework for Governance of Indigenous Data.



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Appendix 1 – Definition of cultural safety in aged care

Cultural safety in aged care for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is understanding one's own culture and the impact that your culture, thinking, and actions may have on the culture of others through ongoing critical self-reflection. Gaining such truthful insight about oneself is critical for ensuring access to a culturally safe, respectful, responsive and racism free aged care system providing for the optimal safety, autonomy, dignity, and absolute wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people, and their families. Only the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person who is the recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.

Aged care service providers and workers must take responsibility for building trust and relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users, and their families, and for creating a new aged care system which centres on their living experience, cultural, and ageing needs, as determined by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users themselves. The implementation of a trauma aware, healing informed approach to professional practice, and facilitating a greater understanding and respect for individual and collective cultures, histories, knowledges, traditions, stories, and values of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander service users, their families and communities, will greatly support the delivery of a quality and culturally safe aged care system. Aged care service providers must also firmly commit to continuously measure and improve structures and behaviours necessary for cultural safety and quality support to remain embedded in the Australian aged care system.



Appendix 2 –

Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety recommendations for aged care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

Recommendation 47: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway within the new aged care system

The Australian Government should ensure that the new aged care system makes specific and adequate provision for the diverse and changing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and that:

- a. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive culturally respectful and safe, high quality, trauma-informed, needs-based and flexible aged care services regardless of where they live
- b. priority is given to existing and new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, including health, disability and social service providers, to cooperate and become providers of integrated aged care services
- c. regional service delivery models that promote integrated care are deployed wherever possible
- d. there is a focus on providing services within, or close to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations while maximising opportunities for people to remain on, and maintain connection with, their Country and communities
- e. aged care is available and providers are engaged at the local aged care planning region level on the basis of objectively established need that is determined in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and communities, and recognising that aged care needs and service delivery preferences may vary between locations and population centres
- f. older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are given access to interpreters on at least the same basis as members of culturally and linguistically diverse communities when seeking or obtaining aged care, including health care services.



Recommendation 48: Cultural safety

1. By 1 July 2022, the Australian Government and the System Governor should:
 - a. require all of its employees who are involved in the aged care system, and any care finders who are not its employees, to undertake regular training about cultural safety and trauma-informed service delivery
 - b. require all aged care providers which promote their services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to:
 - i. train their staff in culturally safe and trauma-informed care, and
 - ii. demonstrate to the System Governor that they have reached an advanced stage of implementation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Action Plan under the Diversity Framework.
2. From 1 July 2023, the System Governor should:
 - a. ensure care finders serving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are culturally trained and familiar with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers who are trusted by the local population
 - b. ensure, wherever possible, that aged care assessments of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are conducted by assessors who are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, or others who have undertaken training in cultural safety and trauma-informed approaches
 - c. work with State and Territory Governments to establish culturally appropriate advance care directive processes, guidance material and training for aged care providers that account for the diversity of cultural practices and traditions within each State and Territory.
3. From 1 July 2023, the System Governor should require its employees, and any care finders who are not its employees, to undertake regular training about cultural safety and trauma-informed service delivery.

Recommendation 49: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner

1. By 1 July 2023, there should be within the System Governor a statutory role that involves the ongoing fostering, promotion and development of culturally safe, tailored and flexible aged care services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country. The person appointed to this role shall be an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person.
2. A person should be appointed by 31 December 2021 under interim administrative arrangements to perform relevant functions and exercise relevant powers.

Recommendation 50: Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations as aged care providers

1. The Australian Government should assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to expand into aged care service delivery, whether on their own or in partnership with other organisations, including with Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander providers.
2. The Australian Government and the System Governor should encourage and support additional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care providers by flexible approval and regulation of them to ensure:
 - a. existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait providers are not disadvantaged and should continue to provide high quality and safe aged care while being assisted to meet the new provider requirements
 - b. other organisations that wish to move into aged care to enhance services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across Australia are given special consideration.
3. Flexibility in approval and regulation should extend to such matters as: additional time to meet new requirements; alternative means of demonstrating the necessary capability or requirement; and, in some very limited cases, exemptions. Assistance should include financial assistance for capacity-building.

Recommendation 51: Employment and training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care

1. By 1 December 2022, the Australian Government should:
 - a. develop a comprehensive national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Workforce Plan in consultation with the National Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care, including:
 - i. the refinement of existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander training and employment programs
 - ii. targets for the training and employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the full range of aged care roles.
 - b. provide the funds necessary to implement the Plan and meet the training and employment targets
 - c. work with the State and Territory Governments to implement the Plan, which should include making available vocational educational training facilities, teachers and courses available in urban, rural, regional and remote Australia.
2. In the interim, the Australian Government should ensure, in consultation with the National Advisory Group for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care, that the existing employment programs and initiatives for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are aligned to the needs of the aged care sector.

Recommendation 52: Funding cycle

1. The Australian Government should block fund providers under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway (see Recommendation 47) on a three-to seven-year rolling assessment basis.
2. The Pricing Authority should:
 - a. set the funding of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway following advice from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner,
 - b. annually assess and adjust the block funding on the basis of the actual costs incurred while providing culturally safe and high quality aged care services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the preceding year.

Recommendation 53: Program streams

1. Under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway, the Australian Government and the System Governor should:
 - a. provide flexible grant funding streams that are able to be pooled for:
 - i. home and community care
 - ii. residential and respite care, including transition.
 - b. establish funding streams under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway that allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care pathway providers to apply for funding for:
 - i. capital development and expenditure
 - ii. provider development.
 - c. make funds available, on application, for any residential aged care provider that has Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents who require assistance to retain connection to their Country, including meeting the costs of:
 - i. travel to and from Country, as well as the costs of any people needed to provide clinical or other assistance to the resident to make the trip
 - ii. a family member travelling to and from the older person at a distant residential facility
 - iii. establishing, maintaining and using infrastructure that facilitates connection between the residential facility and communities on Country, such as videoconferencing technology.

Appendix 3 –

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework Governance and Reporting

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework (the Framework) provides a unique opportunity to drive genuine change to the aged care system for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. It is a vehicle to both drive government actions, and to identify and commit to further actions needed to improve aged care services. It will enshrine healthy ageing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the heart of aged care reforms and foster stronger linkages with broader care and support systems. The Framework will be implemented and regularly reviewed in partnership between the Australian Government and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, with governance arrangements that embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and experience throughout. The Framework will hold government to account through regular reporting against measurable targets that are outcomes focused.

Governance

Implementation of the Framework will be overseen by the First Nations Aged Care Governance Group (FNACGG). The FNACGG is co-chaired by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council and the Australian Government, with membership consisting of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care and health stakeholders and government representatives. This will ensure a partnered approach to implementation.

The FNACGG will monitor implementation and provide input to the Framework. FNACGG will report to the First Nations Health Governance Group to ensure linkages with broader systems to support healthy ageing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Progress against targets will be reported regularly to the First Nations Aged Care Commissioner, Council of Elders and the National Aged Care Advisory Council.

Activities

The Department of Health and Aged Care will work with FNACGG on biennial updates to the Framework. Reporting mechanisms will be established to measure progress against outcomes.

Other activities will include:

- monitoring of committed actions.
- increasing program evaluations to build an evidence-base and inform future actions.
- progressing aspirational actions identified in the Framework.
- transparent data sharing to support data sovereignty, identify and address gaps in data collection and track progress against targets.
- revision to targets, if appropriate, as data capture under the Framework becomes more sophisticated and further gaps are identified.

Outputs

Updates to the Framework will be published biennially to ensure it remains current and responsive to emerging issues. This will include updates to committed actions, additional aspirational actions and updates to targets where appropriate.

Progress against targets in the Framework will also be reported annually through the FNACGG.

The Framework will contribute to reporting mechanisms under the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021 – 2031 and initiatives under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to track and ensure aged care supports healthy ageing for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Outcomes

The Framework aims to drive genuine and tangible improvements to the aged care system that support the diverse and changing needs of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. More older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will achieve healthy ageing through an enhanced aged care system that is culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed.

Outcomes will be measured against the Framework's targets, which may evolve over time. Where progress is not on track, further actions or a change in focus may be required.

Data and evidence will be both qualitative and quantitative and paint a comprehensive picture of the aged care experience for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to measure real progress.







