



Australian Government

STUDENT RESOURCE

# Primary health care roles and pathways

**Make a difference for your Mob,  
start your career in primary  
health care today.**



**Working in primary health care offers a range of fulfilling career opportunities that help make a direct impact on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.**

**If you're interested in nursing or midwifery, becoming a general practitioner or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker or exploring roles within allied health, this booklet will guide you through the many possibilities, understand the support available when pursuing these careers, and the study pathways and training incentives designed to help you succeed.**

**Embrace the chance to shape a healthier future for all – your rewarding career in primary health care is waiting. Make a difference for your community and start your career in primary health care today.**

## **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Health Practitioners play a vital role in supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities by offering health care, access to appropriate services, and guidance on healthy living and preventive care. By addressing both physical health and mental wellbeing, they ensure care is delivered in a culturally respectful and effective manner, which contributes to better health outcomes for the community. This career is vital for ensuring health services are respectful and tailored to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### **Here's what an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker and Health Practitioner typically does:**

- Health Practitioners in some areas issue medication and provide vaccinations.
- Undertake primary health care assessments and making referrals to doctors or other health practitioners.
- Support patients through their health journey.
- Support visiting specialists and provide post-treatment follow up and support.
- Work in multidisciplinary teams such as ear and eye health, maternity and birthing areas, with child and youth health, men's and women's primary health, mental health, with older people in aged care or with people with disability.

### **Study pathway**

To become a Health Worker or Health Practitioner, you can start by completing a Certificate II, Certificate III or Certificate IV in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care. You will gain skills in areas like community engagement, health promotion, and cultural liaison.



**Proud Gomeri man Jacob started his career as an Aboriginal Health Worker inspired by generations of health workers who came before him.**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can access training through the First Nations Health Worker Traineeship (FNHWT) Program delivered by National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) or the Indigenous Health Workforce Traineeship (IHWT) program through the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) in their state or territory (except ACT). These programs provide support, training, mentorship and work placements.

If you want to study further and obtain a Diploma or other related qualifications, scholarships like the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship are available to support.

## Nurse

Nurses are health care professionals who provide care, support and education to people across all stages of life. From babies and kids to Elders, a nurse's role goes beyond clinical care – they are advocates, educators and trusted community members.



**Proud Kamilori and Gomeri Nurse**

**Katie is driven by a desire to help  
her community heal.**

### Every day is different, however, here's what a nurse might do daily:

- Provide broad care such as monitor someone's health, give medications and dress wounds.
- Educate families about health issues and build strong relationships within community – this builds trust and encourages people to seek help when they need it.
- Work closely with doctors, other health care workers and midwives to provide holistic care, tailored to the unique needs of the community.

### Being a nurse can help your community by:

- Ensuring culturally safe health care and advice is available. This helps educate and empower communities, and strengthens community bonds to help improve health outcomes.
- Reducing preventable diseases by promoting healthy lifestyles, providing timely care and encouraging preventive health care. In remote areas nurses are often the main contact for health care, helping make health care services more accessible to more communities.
- Becoming a role model for future generations. Nursing is a career that offers opportunities to make a real difference in people's lives. Many health care professionals have chosen this career because they are following in their family's footsteps. It is a respected profession with pathways for growth and you can specialise in a specific area of nursing such as paediatrics, mental health, aged care, or even a leadership role.

### Study pathway

To become a nurse in Australia, you need to complete a Bachelor of Nursing (3 years for Registered Nurses) or a Diploma of Nursing (18-24 months for Enrolled Nurses), and complete the clinical placement. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can access Fee-Free Tafe and apply for scholarships such as the Lowitja O'Donoghue Foundation Nursing Scholarship, the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme and the Indigenous Health Scholarship program.







## Midwife

A midwife specialises in caring for women during pregnancy, childbirth and the postpartum period, ensuring the health and wellbeing of both mum and bub.

In community, midwives provide significant benefits, such as providing culturally safe care by incorporating cultural traditions and practices into their care of mum and bub, this can include traditional practices like birthing on country programs. This type of care ensures women feel respected and supported during, before and after pregnancy.

### Here's what a midwife typically does:

- Provide health support, care and advice to women before conception, and during pregnancy, labour, birth and the postnatal period either at home, in an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, in community or birth centres including clinic, health units and private or public hospitals.

**Gudjal Midwife Kyleigh began her health career, driven to support mums and bubs through impactful prenatal and postnatal care.**

- Promote natural childbirth and identify complications for the woman and her bub.
- Consult with other health professionals and refer to medical care or other health professions when required.

### Study pathway

To become a midwife in Australia, you can complete a Bachelor of Midwifery (3 years) or a combined Bachelor of Nursing/Bachelor of Midwifery (4 years), which includes clinical placements. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can apply for scholarships such as the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme and Indigenous Health Scholarship program.

## General Practitioner

A General Practitioner (GP) is a doctor who provides comprehensive and ongoing health care to individuals and families. They're usually the first point of contact when someone needs medical advice or treatment. In an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, a GP plays an essential role in addressing the unique health needs of the community as they can provide medical expertise with cultural understanding.

### Here's what a GP typically does:

- Address symptoms, diagnose illnesses and provide treatments, including prescribing medications.
- Provide preventive care to their patients and help them stay healthy by conducting regular check-ups, giving vaccinations and offering lifestyle advice.
- Management of chronic conditions by providing coordinated care with other health care professionals such as specialists.

### Benefits to the local community

**Holistic health support:** GPs provide care that addresses both physical and mental health needs that is culturally safe to ensure the person is supported holistically.

**Health prevention:** educate people about health issues, provide continuity of care and cultural understanding combined with medical care.

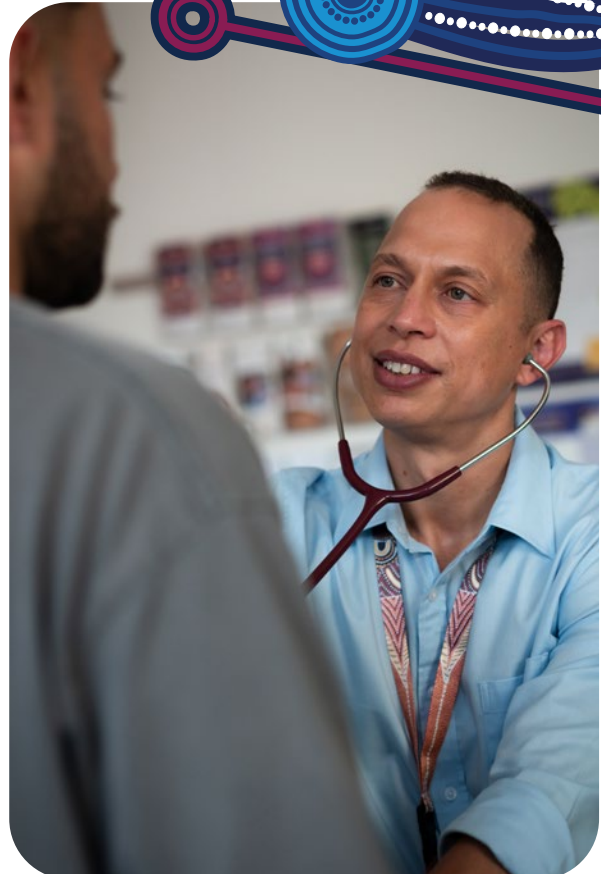
### Why consider becoming a GP?

As a GP, no 2 days are the same and you will treat a broad range of health issues. You will diagnose and treat illnesses, help prevent health issues and use new technologies to ensure your community stays well.

Becoming a GP offers a meaningful and rewarding career where you can make a real difference in your community. It is a respected profession that allows you to help individuals and families stay strong, healthy and improve their quality of life. You can help your community stay strong by providing culturally safe care. You have options in working in a mix of settings from clinics to health centres and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.

### Study pathway

To become a GP in Australia, you need to complete a medical degree (5–6 years undergraduate or 4 years postgraduate), followed by a 1-year hospital



**Proud Kalkadoon, Waanyi, Gangalidda  
GP Dr. Marjad began his health career,  
dedicated to improving the health  
journey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait  
Islander people.**

internship and 3–4 years of GP training through either the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners or the Australian College of Rural and Remote Medicine, including exams for fellowship. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can access support from the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association to help navigate this pathway.



## Allied Health

The role of the allied health workforce is to help people achieve positive health outcomes to live long, strong and healthy lives. Allied health professionals provide a broad range of diagnostic, technical, therapeutic and direct health services to improve the health and wellbeing. Some examples of allied health roles are allied health assistants, physiotherapists, pharmacists and psychologists.

### Here's what an allied health worker typically does:

- Work in a health team to provide specialised support for different patient needs.
- Provide specialised expertise in preventing, diagnosing and treating a range of conditions and illnesses.

### Study pathway

To become an allied health worker, you can start by completing a Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance, or you can complete a Bachelor degree.

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) works with high school students from years 7 to 12, starting with health literacy, leadership and career planning. IAHA also offer a fully supported School-Based Traineeship to year 11 and 12 students that involves on the job training and wrap-around supports for an individual learning program.

If you want to study further and obtain a Degree or Diploma level or other related qualifications, scholarships like the Puggy Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme are available to support.



## Here are some supports available to you!

There are many pathways and funding to help you in your study and primary health care journey. Here are some organisations and scholarships that can support your study and career, either with guidance and mentorship or financially.

### Organisations

#### Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association

Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical professionals and students. Membership offers networking, mentoring, professional development and cultural safety workshops. It also provides financial support and resources. To find out more, visit [www.aida.org.au](http://www.aida.org.au)

#### Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives

Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) represents, advocates and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses, midwives and students. CATSINaM helps connect health professionals with their peers, communicates updates about changes to the profession, enables discounts for further professional development opportunities and access to scholarships. To find out more, visit [www.catsinam.org.au](http://www.catsinam.org.au)

#### Indigenous Allied Health Australia

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) is a national, member-based organisation supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander allied health students, graduates and the wider workforce. IAHA promotes professional development and cultural support, working across sectors like health, mental health, disability and education to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Find out more about IAHA at [www.iaha.com.au](http://www.iaha.com.au)

#### National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) is the peak body representing Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and supports the enhancement of capacity and capability of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Registered Training Organisations (ACCHRTOs). These organisations supporting the delivery of culturally safe health care, including training across Australia. NACCHO receives funding from the Australian Government to implement initiatives such as the First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program – a program that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to undertake accredited training in the health sector. To find out more, visit [www.naccho.org.au](http://www.naccho.org.au)

#### National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners.

National Association of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers and Practitioners (NAATSIHWP) is a national association for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers and health practitioners. It provides training and educational opportunities and activities both accredited and non-accredited to its members. It provides mentorship and programs that support career progression. To find out more, visit [www.naatsihwp.org.au](http://www.naatsihwp.org.au)

### Scholarships

There are many scholarships available to support you, in a range of health sector training courses:

#### Health Indigenous Scholarship Program

The Indigenous Health Scholarship Program help students with day-to-day expenses and provide mentoring support whilst undertaking a course in health-related professions. [australianrotaryhealth.org.au/programs](http://australianrotaryhealth.org.au/programs)

#### Health Workforce Scholarship Program

The Health Workforce Scholarship Program supports the cost of completing primary health care postgraduate and short courses for professionals working in specific settings. More information is available at [www.hwsp.com.au](http://www.hwsp.com.au)

#### Lowitja O'Donoghue Foundation Nursing Scholarships

The Lowitja O'Donoghue Foundation Nursing Scholarship Program provides opportunities to inspire and transform nursing careers in health. Three streams of scholarships are available for enrolled, registered and postgraduate/higher degree nursing students. More information is available at [www.lowitja.org.au/lowitja-foundation/scholarships](http://www.lowitja.org.au/lowitja-foundation/scholarships)

#### Pugby Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme

The Pugby Hunter Memorial Scholarship Scheme provides financial assistance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander undergraduate students studying health-related disciplines at a university or TAFE or with a registered training organisation. More information is available at [www.health.gov.au/our-work/pugby-hunter-memorial-scholarship-scheme](http://www.health.gov.au/our-work/pugby-hunter-memorial-scholarship-scheme)

#### Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program

The Rural and Regional Enterprise Scholarships Program assists rural and regional students with the cost of studying in any discipline. More information is available at [www.education.gov.au/rres](http://www.education.gov.au/rres)

## Our shared path for a stronger future

This artwork draws from a central element from Gilimbaa and Tarni O'Shea's artwork, **'We All Share The Night Sky'**, created for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan. The 'Workforce' element is central to this piece and represents the shared commitment and priority to increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation across the health workforce, and ensuring that culturally relevant and safe services are provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have used stars for navigating over thousands of years. For First Nations people, stars provide clarity and direction to our geographic, spiritual and cultural places. Over time, pathways have been created from this process of being guided by the stars. It is these pathways that guide us from where we are to where we are going. When we journey on these pathways we are all going in the same direction towards the same place.

To build a stronger future together, we all need to be on the same journey. We are here on the journey together and here to commit to a long and rewarding future for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by ensuring we have a seat at the table and are actively involved in the co-design and decision-making process. We must also walk together on this journey to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are involved in meaningful work across the health sector, and that the services we provide are culturally safe, culturally relevant, and culturally strong.

The artwork concept and narrative was developed by David Williams. David is a proud Wakka Wakka artist at Gilimbaa.



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health care today.

For more information visit  
[health.gov.au/primaryhealthcarecareers](https://health.gov.au/primaryhealthcarecareers)



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