



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



NACCHO

National Aboriginal
Community Controlled
Health Organisation

Rheumatic Fever Strategy (RFS) Joint Advisory Committee (JAC)

Meeting 26 June 2025

Communiqué

The seventh meeting of the Rheumatic Fever Strategy (RFS) Joint Advisory Committee (JAC) was held in Canberra on 26 June 2025. The meeting was chaired by Dr. Dawn Casey, Deputy CEO of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and Ms. Melinda Turner, First Assistant Secretary, First Nations Health Division, from the Australian Government Department of Health, Disability and Ageing.

The meeting covered several topics, including recent developments regarding acute rheumatic fever (ARF) and rheumatic heart disease (RHD), and the utility and limitations of current data captured through the RFS.

Participants provided updates from their respective jurisdictions. Several jurisdictions are progressing or finalising RHD strategies and action plans. Environmental health initiatives are underway, though resourcing remains a challenge. There is also work happening across the country to increase awareness of ARF and RHD, and of the link between housing and health. While some jurisdictions noted improvements in ARF recurrence and secondary prophylaxis adherence, others noted ARF and RHD numbers continues to rise.

The Committee discussed data and indicators needed to measure meaningful progress toward the national commitment to end new cases of RHD by 2030. Several key issues were identified across data, governance, referral pathways, chronic disease management, and primordial prevention. Further work is required by all levels of government to embody the principles outlined in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*, particularly priority reform one and priority reform four. Participants workshopped what success would look like, developed outcomes statements and identified actions required to address each issue.

Co-chairs confirmed the JAC will continue to meet up to 30 June 2028, noting the RFS has been extended to support the ongoing efforts to end new cases of ARF and RHD. The strategic issues workshopped during this meeting will inform a revised workplan for the JAC. Revisions to the current Terms of Reference and Committee membership were also discussed.

The ongoing shortage of long-acting benzathine benzylpenicillin (Bicillin L-A) was raised as a key risk, and NACCHO provided an update on current efforts to mitigate this risk. Other related issues discussed included access to echocardiograms and cardiology review in remote areas, and RHD in pregnancy.

Next steps

The Committee will meet again in 2025 to discuss the outcome of the Terms of Reference review and next steps for the strategic issues identified. For further information, please contact the RFS JAC Secretariat via: RFS@health.gov.au or the NACCHO RHD Team rh@naccho.org.au