



Government Response to the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner's Report: *Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*

Overview

The Australian Government welcomes the Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner's report *Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*. The Report is grounded in extensive engagement with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and carers, and the organisations that support them, on their experiences and their aspirations for aged care that is culturally safe, accessible and responsive.

We acknowledge the leadership and advocacy of the Interim Commissioner, Ms Andrea Kelly. Her deep consultation with communities in every part of the country, and the trust she built along the way, has laid the foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander aged care reform in Australia. Her report will guide the Government's work in the years ahead, and stands as a lasting contribution to the lives of older First Nations peoples.

The Government is delivering the most significant aged care reform in a generation. The *Aged Care Act 2024* puts the needs of older people at the centre of our aged care system, including a clear focus on ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander older people can access care that is high quality, culturally safe, trauma-aware, respectful, and responsive.

Much of the work the Interim Commissioner's report calls for is already underway. The Government is investing in Aboriginal community-controlled aged care services, improving access pathways, strengthening a workforce that includes and champions the skills and care of First Nations people, and funding capital works so more people can get the care they deserve on Country.

However, there is much more work to do to make our aged care system one every First Nations Australian can trust, and one that ensures every First Nations person can be cared for in a way that is culturally responsive and suits their choices. This includes work to grow the capability of First Nations organisations and workers to deliver assessments and care, to deepen the culturally safe care people can access, and to ensure the broader system is more responsive to the choices and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The centrepiece of this work will be a permanent, independent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner, established in law. This responds to a key recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aged Care Quality and Safety, and is built on the foundations the Interim Commissioner has laid.

Communities told us they want a voice with real standing and real independence – and we will deliver a statutory office, independent in voice and judgement, placed within our independent national regulator so that voice is connected to the powers that best drive change across the system, with the backing of the Commissioner’s independent powers and resources.

In every part of our aged care system, the Government will continue to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with their care sector and with advocates to ensure every First Nations Australian is supported to age with dignity, connection and choice.

Sam Rae MP

Minister for Aged Care and Seniors

Recommendation	Government Response
Recommendation 1: Publish the Transforming Aged Care for Aboriginal and Torres Islander people report.	The Government accepts this recommendation. The Report was published on the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing website on 6 February 2025.
Recommendation 2: Commit to develop a 10-year transformation plan.	The Government accepts in principle this recommendation. In February 2025, the Department of Health, Disability and Ageing (the department) released the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework 2025-35 (the Framework), developed in partnership with its First Nations Aged Care Governance Group. The Framework sets out a 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. Principles and actions in the Framework are aimed at driving significant improvements to the aged care experience of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the decade. The Department will continue to work in partnership with the First Nations Aged Care Governance Group, the Council of Elders, National Aged Care Advisory Council and other key First Nations stakeholders in progressing actions under the Framework and other priorities identified in the Interim Commissioner's report. A progress report against the Framework will be released later in 2026.
Recommendation 3: Agree in-principle to the proposed model for an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commissioner.	The Government accepts this recommendation. Legislation to establish a permanent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner will be introduced in July 2026. The legislation will establish a permanent Commissioner that is independent of Government and the Department, established within the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission, the

Recommendation	Government Response
	independent national aged care regulator. The person appointed to this role will be a respected Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. The Commissioner will set their own annual work plan, report publicly each year, and will complement other regulatory and complaints office-holders and take an aged care systems-wide approach to support transformative change. Funding for the role of Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner has been extended until June 2027 to ensure continuity while the permanent Commissioner role is being established.
Recommendation 4: Urgent and time sensitive recommendations	The Government notes recommendations 4.1 to 4.26 and is taking a broad range of actions to progress each matter they raise in an urgent and time-sensitive manner, as per the recommendation. These include reinforcing positive examples of culturally safe aged care, training and workforce development, community awareness, information and resources, better assessment pathways, greater capital investment, and data and research. Further information on this work is set out below.

Recommendation 4: Additional Information

Since 2022 the Government has invested over \$2 billion in initiatives to directly support older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their families and carers to access culturally safe aged care. These initiatives are building services and a workforce that improve access, choice and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ageing and Aged Care Council (NATSIAACC) was formed in July 2023, and the Government continues to work closely with NATSIAACC to inform aged care policy, and hear First Nations voices as the reforms continue.

The role of Interim First Nations Aged Care Commissioner was established in December 2023, with Ms Andrea Kelly commencing in the role in January 2024. As the report demonstrates, this enabled deep engagement with older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and service providers to understand their priorities and perspectives.

The Commissioner has given voice to the barriers and challenges experienced by older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and to the changes needed to improve access and outcomes. The Interim Commissioner also contributed to the design of the permanent statutory Commissioner role. Funding for the role has been extended to 30 June 2027 while the permanent Commissioner is established.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Framework 2025-35 was published in February 2025, with a vision for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to age well by ensuring Government supports their spiritual, physical and mental health needs by providing holistic, high quality and culturally safe aged care.

The actions outlined in the Framework are driving significant improvements to the aged care experience of older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over the decade, and work continues to deliver upon – and beyond – the Framework.

Aboriginal Community Controlled care

Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) are crucial to the delivery of culturally safe aged care. Consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Government is supporting more ACCOs to become aged care providers, and exploring ways to keep reducing barriers to entry under the reforms. (*Recommendation 4.17*)

Currently, 97 ACCOs are supporting older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access aged care through the Elder Care Support program, which has invested \$140 million and already supported around 9,000 Elders. To further increase the availability of culturally safe services, a further ongoing annual investment of \$15 million will support 16 new ACCOs to enter the Commonwealth Home Support Programme and expand their service delivery. (*Recommendation 4.1; 4.17*)

Access and assessment

The Government is undertaking a two-year pilot to identify ways to improve the assessment experience for older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, so that it is culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed. The pilot is being delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander assessment organisations themselves, and will help inform future arrangements and expansions to First Nations assessment arrangements. (*Recommendation 4.19*)

Nearly 11,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 50 and over are accessing the new Support at Home program, which considers whether a person is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander when determining their priority category, and – on top of a person's care budget – allocates approximately \$15.5 million each year in care management supplements to support culturally safe and responsive in-home care.

In 2026–27, the Thin Market Grants program delivered an additional \$2.5 million to Support at Home providers that specialise in services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and a new Thin Market grants stream with higher loadings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services will further support service provision by ACCOs. (*Recommendation 4.1; 4.15; 4.17; 4.24*)

Culturally safe services and capital

More than \$500 million is being invested over four years from 1 July 2026 in the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flexible Aged Care Program (NATSIFACP), which already supports almost 2,000 aged care places across 49 services, which work with their local communities to meet both cultural and service needs. (*Recommendation 4.1*)

A review of NATSIFACP is currently underway, due to report before the end of 2026, the outcomes of which will inform how best the program can support more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and people into the future. (*Recommendation 4.1; 4.16; 4.26*)

In addition, \$139 million has been allocated through the Aged Care Capital Assistance Program (ACCAP) for rebuilds of four NATSIFACP residential services. The facilities in Port Augusta, Docker River and Wynnum are expected to be completed later in 2026, and the rebuild in Wadeye is expected in 2028. A further \$201 million is delivering infrastructure to improve access to quality aged care for First Nations communities, mostly in remote settings, with almost half supporting ACCOs. (*Recommendation 4.5; 4.17; 4.26*)

In April 2026, the Government launched *Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People*, a co-designed resource that considers the needs of Stolen Generations Survivors and their communities in infrastructure projects, helping to keep Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices central to the design and delivery of the reforms. (*Recommendation 4.1; 4.4*)

Workforce

Developing a culturally safe aged care workforce is critical, and an investment of \$232 million is working to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in aged care through the Indigenous Employment Initiative (IEI). More than 1,000 people are currently employed and accredited through the program, and IEI organisations are delivering services to almost 7,000 older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. (*Recommendation 4.18*)

Educational resources on the specific care needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and Stolen Generations survivors, are also being made available to support the capability of the aged care workforce and ensure care is sensitive, thoughtful and respectful. (*Recommendation 4.4; 4.6; 4.7*)

Stolen Generations and means testing

The Government is working to improve the aged care experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who faced the trauma of removal from their families as children.

Stolen Generations Redress payments are now exempt from the residential aged care asset means test; building on the existing income test exemption. This exemption applies to payments made under all state and territory Stolen Generations redress schemes, such as the Territories Stolen Generations Redress Scheme. (*Recommendation 4.14*)

Standards, resources and partnership

The Government has also supported the development of a range of resources for the care sector, including community information materials, supports to transition to the new *Aged Care Act*, and targeted cultural safety training aimed specifically at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, including assessment organisations and health services. (*Recommendation 4.3; 4.4; 4.7; 4.8; 4.9; 4.10; 4.11*)

Work is also underway by the Aged Care Quality and Safety Commission to implement the strengthened Aged Care Quality Standards, improving outcomes through better engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and people. (*Recommendation 4.2*)

The Government acknowledges there is more to do, and will continue to consider the remaining matters raised in the report as the reforms are implemented. This includes as worker screening arrangements are designed, as entry and access requirements are reviewed so that eligible older people are not excluded, including those with limited connectivity or without standard forms of identification, and as the assistive technology and home modifications arrangements under Support at Home are put in place.

The Government will also keep working with the Aboriginal Community Controlled sector on greater flexibility in how funding can be used, stronger partnerships between mainstream and Aboriginal Community Controlled providers, and the data and research needed to inform decisions about older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's access to aged care.

This work will continue in partnership through the key councils and governance forums, to deliver the aged care outcomes that every older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person deserves.