



Delivering on the Declaration

Making self-determination real in aged care

The anniversary of UNDRIP is a timely reminder of the promise of the new Aged Care Act. It also shows why aged care reform must support safe, respectful and culturally strong care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders.

On 13 September, we mark the anniversary of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).

UNDRIP recognises an important truth. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to help shape decisions that affect their lives. This is called self-determination. UNDRIP also supports equal treatment, strong culture and respect for identity. These rights should guide how governments make decisions and deliver services.

The Closing the Gap Priority Reforms aim for the same kind of change. They call for governments to share decisions, support community-controlled services, improve how government organisations work, and share better data. Together, these ideas recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as people with rights, not just people who receive services.

Nowhere is that more important than in aged care.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people hold culture, memory, language and law. They deserve care that protects their dignity and respects their cultural role.

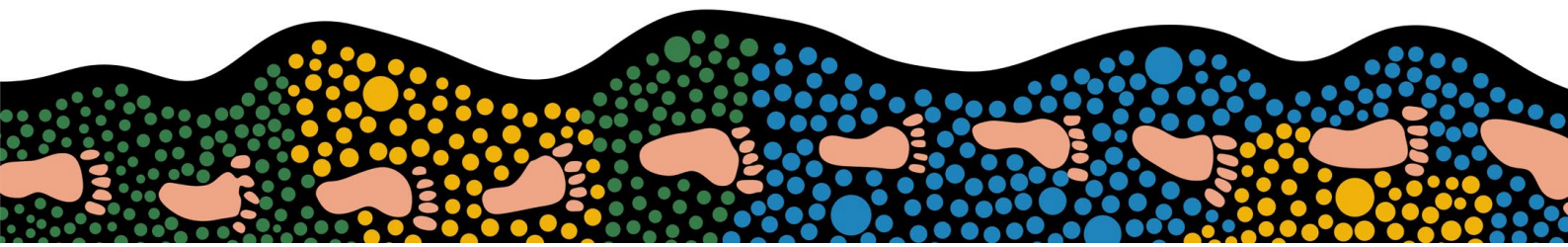
Good aged care must also respect culture. It should help Elders stay connected to Country, family, community and identity. It must recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are diverse. It must also listen to what Elders say they need.

Australia's aged care reforms are a chance to make these rights real. Reform must do more than change rules and systems. It must share power, respect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge, and give Elders, families and communities a real say in care.

That is where UNDRIP, the Closing the Gap Priority Reforms, aged care reform and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner come together.

UNDRIP sets out the rights. These include self-determination, having a say in decisions, equal treatment, culture and identity. The Closing the Gap Priority Reforms show how to put those rights into action. They call for shared decisions, stronger community control, better government systems and better use of data. Aged care reform gives us a chance to apply these changes in a very personal part of people's lives. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Aged Care Commissioner can help make sure these commitments shape policy, regulation and services.

The Commissioner must be more than a person asked for advice after decisions are made. The role must help shape decisions from the start. It must bring the voices of Elders and communities into reform. It must also challenge systems when they fall short and help hold governments and providers to account.





This is how self-determination moves from declaration to delivery.

The success of aged care reform will not be measured only by new laws, new structures or project milestones. It will be measured by the daily experiences of older people. Can they get care when and where they need it? Do they feel culturally safe? Can they stay connected to Country and community? Are families and communities treated as partners? Do Elders have a real say in decisions that affect them?

We have a chance to turn the promise of UNDRIP into practical change.

With the right support, the Commissioner can help build an aged care system that respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people. This system should value their authority, knowledge and hopes for the future. Governments can help by giving the role the independence, authority and resources it needs to make change.

Aged care providers can also lead change. They can make cultural safety part of everyday work. They can support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and share decisions with Elders, families and communities. The sector can build trust by listening, acting on what it hears and being open about progress. Communities can continue to shape the design, appointment and future direction of the Commissioner's role.

Rights are meaningful only when people can feel them in their daily lives.

This is our chance to build an aged care system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and older people are not just consulted. They must be respected as decision-makers, leaders and people with rights. The system should be judged by whether it protects those rights in everyday life.

We must not let it pass.

