

Indigenous Allied Health Australia: statement on cultural safety and the rights of our young people
20 November 2025

Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisation working to improve the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. IAHA makes the following statement in light of recent media reports in Canberra involving the negative experiences of a young Aboriginal person, and in the broader context of policing behaviours nationally.

IAHA stands with our communities, in Canberra and across the nation, to protect our young people and call out institutional racism, racial profiling and freedom from systemic harm. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and people have the right to have their human rights respected. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child provide protections and affirmations for these rights. No child should live in fear that they do not have appropriate legal protection or that their human rights will be violated.

Too many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children experience racism and bias in their daily lives. Racism in all its forms must not be tolerated. Racism impacts the social and emotional wellbeing of our people¹. Negative experiences can impact young people's self-esteem and confidence, as well as their future educational, training and career outcomes.

It is critical to social and emotional wellbeing that culturally safe, trauma-aware and healing-informed services and support are provided to our communities, and particularly our young people. Such services must be culturally safe and responsive to the individual needs of young people and their families.

In this context, it is imperative that this young person receives the required care and support to heal from this experience. Health and social outcomes improve when young people have access to strong cultural support, community connections and safe pathways, and this is especially important for those who have had contact with the justice system. We stand with the family of the young person in their request for access to trauma counselling and healing.

Priority Reform 3 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, commits all governments to systemic and structural transformation to improve accountability and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Despite this progress is slow, with data showing that experiences of racial prejudice in Australia remains unacceptably high.²

¹ Gee G, Dudgeon P, Schultz C, et al (2014) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, ch 4. In: Dudgeon P, Milroy H, Walker R; editors. Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice. Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia.

² [Socio-economic outcome area 14 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing - Dashboard - Closing the Gap | Productivity Commission.](#)

Donna Murray, IAHA Chief Executive Officer and proud Wiradyuri and Wonnarua woman, states: “Our communities need to be safe. We need to know that our institutions are working hard to eliminate racism, address bias and to increase cultural safety. Our children and families need to be able to trust our systems and structures to protect and uphold their rights, including through a commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing.”

Investment across and within institutional structures and systems is urgently needed to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of racism, discrimination and prejudice.³ This includes significant and genuine commitment to develop and embed policies and procedures to specifically address racism, prejudice and bias. This can no longer be an afterthought.

To be effective, these processes must be developed in collaboration with our communities and reflect the self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Support must be provided to the workforce to amend their practice and deliver on these commitments in a culturally safe way, including through quality cultural safety training.

IAHA welcomes further engagement on these important issues under a collective commitment for transformational change.

³ See also the Partnership for Justice in Health (P4JH), established to realise a vision that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People enjoy health and wellbeing that is free of racism in the health and justice systems.