

# Together, Forward

2023-25

For the community



**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are advised that this publication may contain images and names of deceased persons.**

**Cover artwork credit:**

Natalie Bateman (Walbanja-Yuin)  
*Monga Waratah 2021*

**Our commitment to diversity and inclusion**

To achieve our vision of ‘creating exceptional health care together’, we must remove barriers and provide equitable opportunities for our patients, team members and community to be included in health care. We are committed to working alongside people with different backgrounds, experiences and identities to learn what we can change so everyone can contribute and thrive.

This work is copyright. It is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 licence. Apart from any use as permitted under the Copyright Act 1968, no part may be reproduced by any process without written permission from the Territory Records Office, Canberra Health Services, ACT Government, GPO Box 158, Canberra City ACT 2601.

Enquiries about this publication should be directed to:  
[CHScomms@act.gov.au](mailto:CHScomms@act.gov.au) or [canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au](http://canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au)

**Acknowledgement of Country**



Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and contribution to the life of this region.



**Accessibility:** How to get this information in other ways.

**To get this information:**

- in large print
- to listen to
- in any other format
- call 02 5124 0000**



If you need the translating and interpreting service

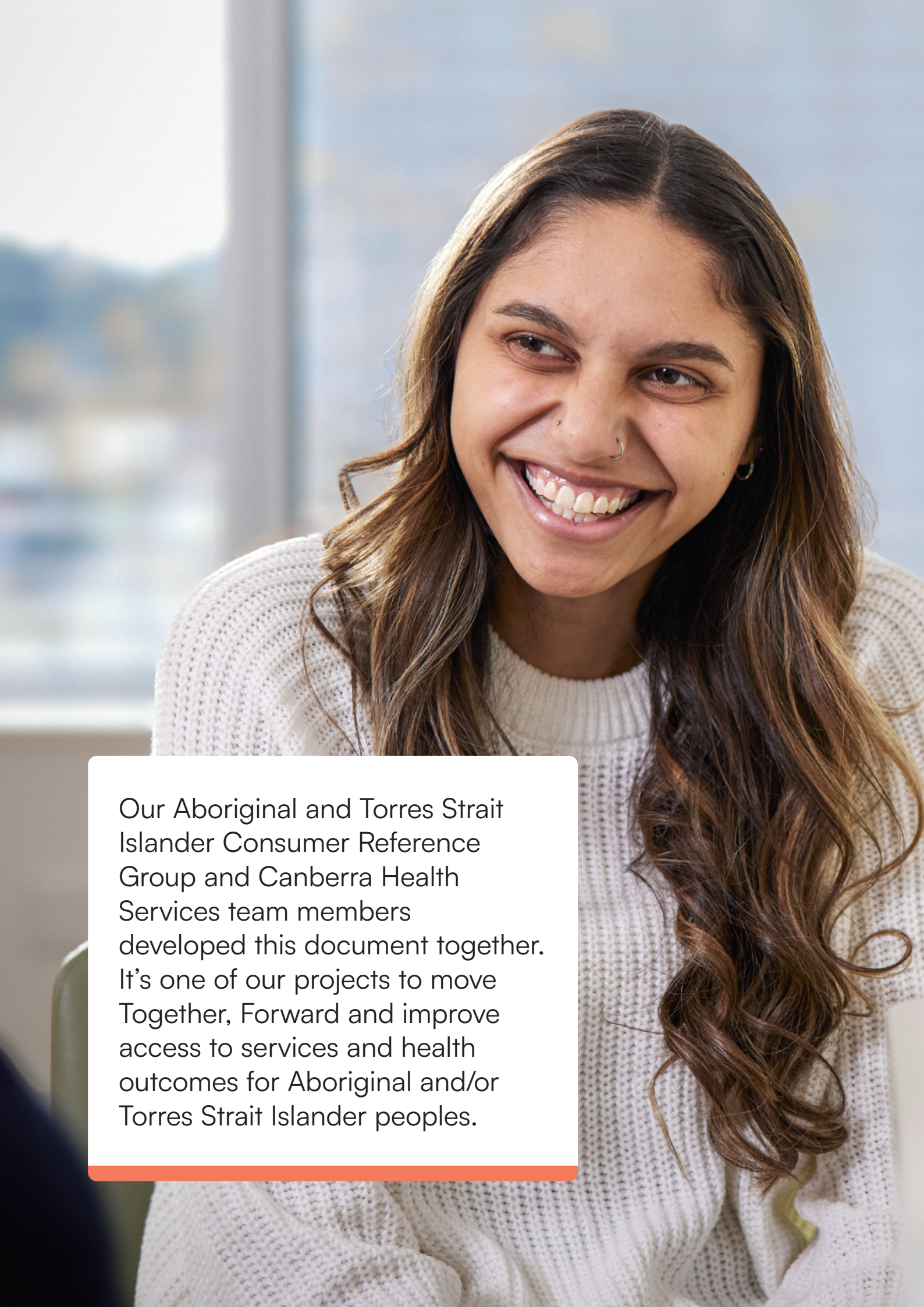
**call 131 450**

[canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au/accessibility](http://canberrahealthservices.act.gov.au/accessibility)



# Contents

<b>Our Consumer Reference Group</b> .....	3
<b>Statement of Commitment</b> .....	3
<b>Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT</b> .....	4
<b>What do we know about the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT?</b> .....	6
<b>What we know at the moment</b> .....	8
<b>What we are doing</b> .....	11
Yarning with Community .....	11
Changing Our Workforce .....	12
Transforming Our Services .....	13
<b>What's next?</b> .....	15
<b>Conclusion</b> .....	17
<b>About the artist</b> .....	18
A message from Natalie Bateman .....	18
Supporting our vision .....	19
<b>References</b> .....	20



Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group and Canberra Health Services team members developed this document together. It's one of our projects to move Together, Forward and improve access to services and health outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## Our Consumer Reference Group

The Canberra Health Services (CHS) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group (CRG) was formed in 2020.

CRG works with CHS so that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people can have better access to health services, experience culturally safe care, and the needs and wishes of the community are responded to.

CRG includes representatives from the local and South Coast Aboriginal community, local community leaders and elders, health care service users and carers. Members share their experiences and provide cultural advice and direction.



“I joined CRG to improve the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout ACT’s public health system. We hope these improvements will flow across the whole system and improve things for the community in general.”

— Barry Collins, Chair, CRG

## Statement of Commitment

CHS wants to improve how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people experience healthcare. CHS partnered with CRG to develop our Statement of Commitment.

Our Statement of Commitment aims to deliver on our vision of ‘Creating exceptional health care together’.

Through our Statement of Commitment CHS commits to:

- recognising and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working and approaches to holistic health and wellbeing
- transforming the way we work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the ACT and surrounding region
- undertaking an ongoing and action oriented journey of cultural safety and responsiveness, responding to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and community in a strengths-based and culturally informed way
- strengthening relationships by working with and being open, transparent and accountable to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and
- investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, at all levels, to drive and embed transformational and positive change across our services.

# Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT

The traditional custodians of the land are the Ngunnawal people. CHS also supports many other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples from across Australia who have made the ACT their home.

There are

**8,949**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT, which is

**2%** of the population.



Nationally,

**3.2%**

of the population identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

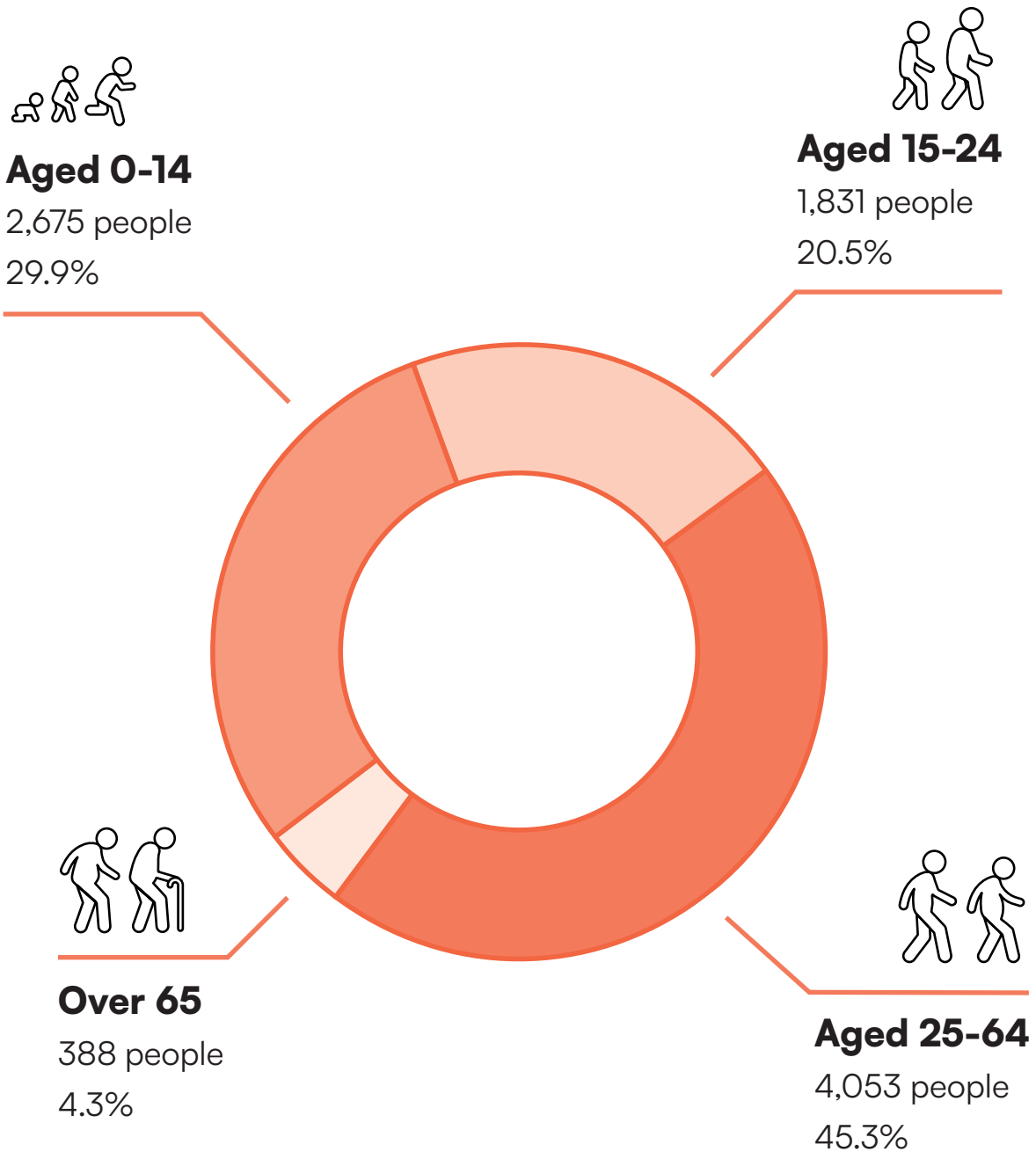


CHS also provides services to approximately

**7,000**

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the nearby NSW catchment area.

# Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT, by age group.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census of Population and Housing  
— 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats

# What do we know about the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT?



In 2018-19, around 38.4 per cent of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the ACT rated their overall health as very good or excellent. This was slightly lower than the figure nationally at 44.6 per cent. Of those who rated their overall health as fair or poor, the ACT reported similar figures to those reported nationally.



We know that approximately **one-third of the health gap** between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people nationally is due to social determinants (for example, employment, level of schooling, housing adequacy).



The 2021 census of population and housing included a question on long-term health conditions. Among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, **mental health conditions (including depression) were the most common condition reported** among males and females, followed by asthma and arthritis.



During the period 2017-18 to 2021-22 the leading reasons for public hospital admissions for ACT and Southern NSW Local Health District Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples were **kidney treatment (haemodialysis), chest pain and abdominal pain.**



For the period 2009 to 2020, **breast cancer was the most common cancer diagnosed** among ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Canberrans, followed by prostate cancer, lung cancer and bowel cancer.



Recent data has shown that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT are **similar** to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population nationally for:

- mental health outcomes
- disability
- tobacco use during pregnancy
- antenatal care visits
- childhood immunisations.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT have **better** rates compared to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population nationally for:

- physical activity
- alcohol and other drug use
- smoking.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in the ACT have **worse** rates compared to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander population nationally for:

- attendance of health checks.

# What we know at the moment



CHS is committed to providing a more culturally safe environment for our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients and their families.

We can see that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients have better results in some areas:



**breast cancer screening participation rates are higher** for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women in the 70+ age range



**lower hospital acquired complications for birth** compared to non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people



**lower avoidable hospital readmissions** for surgical complications.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients receiving care at CHS have similar results for:



**'seen on time' status** for the Canberra Hospital Emergency Department for triage categories one, three, four and five



wait times **for elective surgeries, across all three triage categories**



wait time **for treatment at Walk in Centres.**



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people continue to have a higher rate compared to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receiving care at CHS for:



avoidable hospital readmissions for **medication complications**



outpatient **appointment cancellation rates**



avoidable hospital readmissions **for infections**



outpatient **'did not attend appointment' rates.**



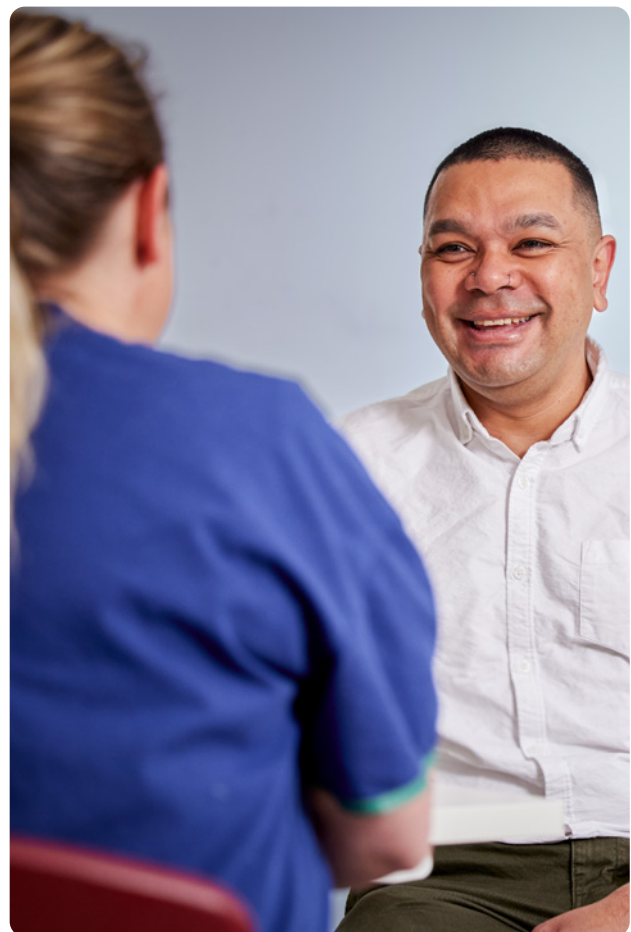
# What we are doing

## Yarning with Community

We make decisions with the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, with patients and families, and with other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander led organisations. Here's how:



- our CRG is made up of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community members who have experience with our services. CRG members bring stories to CHS, work closely with CHS on creating new programs, and provide advice on all aspects of CHS' work
- we work closely with others (such as Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services and ACT Corrective Services) to ensure that health services reach everyone in the community
- we listen to lived experience through Yarning Circles, surveys and feedback, and by having meaningful conversations with people in the community
- in partnership with CRG, CHS developed and introduced the Menu for Mob which offers culturally familiar meals. After the Menu for Mob was introduced, 100% of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander consumers surveyed reported the food contributed to meeting their cultural needs.



## Changing Our Workforce

We know that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and community groups are the best advocates for their own health and wellbeing. Engaging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health workers across CHS helps us to improve services for the community.

Our workforce is growing as we welcome more Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff members to the CHS team:

- as of 30 June 2024, there were 114 CHS team members who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- these team members are in diverse roles, including nurses, doctors, administrative officers, health professional officers and general service officers
- CHS has 24 identified positions in a range of roles across the organisation and CHS continues to employ both male and female Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs) who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- we engage with the Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) Academy program.

We are focussing on training and creating culturally safe workplaces:

- all CHS team members must complete training on cultural responsiveness and understanding the health challenges facing Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples



- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander team members are supported to engage with opportunities to upskill and advance their careers, such as through training and further education
- we are committed to implementing the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Staff Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy, and the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Workforce Action Plan.

## Transforming Our Services

We are changing the way we provide culturally safe services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients and their families and wherever possible, consider social determinants of health. This is what we're doing:

- we work in collaboration with other ACT Government Directorates wherever possible to improve processes and systems ACT-wide with a focus on social determinants of health
- our ALO Service has undergone a review of its model that will inform a consumer-centred future direction for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing across CHS facilities
- we have been implementing the “Pathways to Wellbeing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with Cancer” program to increase the number of people attending cancer screening and support programs
- we have been undertaking a dedicated project for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children on outpatient waiting lists. By targeting children on this list and creating more opportunities for families to visit the clinics, the number of children waiting for ear, nose and throat services has dropped significantly
- we continue to incorporate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander artwork within health facilities, including artworks featured in the new Canberra Hospital Building 5 Main Reception, courtyards, and in clinical areas.





# What's next?

Our CRG will continue to work in genuine partnership with CHS to make meaningful change.



- We will improve the information available to community about what services we provide, how we can help people, and how they can provide feedback.
- We are working hard to reach our recruitment targets and employ more people who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander in a range of roles.
- We are working to further develop our career pathways for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. This includes investing in creating professional development plans that reflect opportunities for different parts or roles within CHS.
- We will be rolling out new training programs on cultural responsiveness in practice, and how to “Ask the Question” on whether someone wishes to identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.
- We are always looking for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander suppliers to support our work and to uplift Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.
- We will be opening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Welcome Lounge in 2024, which was chosen to support the “heart of the campus” concept with indoor-outdoor areas facilitating community’s connections to Country.
- We will be working across the service and with the ACT Health Directorate to adopt healing aware and trauma informed care and practice.
- We are collaborating with the ACT Health Directorate to support the development of the ACT Disability Health Strategy and the alignment of the CHS Disability Action and Inclusion Plan.



# Conclusion



We are committed to working across all areas of CHS to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients and the community.

We understand that there are unique healthcare challenges facing our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander consumers. This is reflected in the data we collect, and in the conversations we have with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients and their families.

Together, Forward 2023-2025 sets out our priorities for the next few years and provides a way for the community to engage with the progress we are making. We welcome all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people within the ACT and surrounding areas to work with us, engage with our leadership, and provide feedback on our services.

We want to hear from you. If you have any feedback for us on Together, Forward or receiving care at CHS, please consider reaching out.

You can submit anonymous feedback through our [feedback form](#) available on our website.

Or you can share your stories with us by email:

[CHS.AboriginalandTorresStraitIslander-CRG@act.gov.au](mailto:CHS.AboriginalandTorresStraitIslander-CRG@act.gov.au)

The CHS Together, Forward 2023-2025 focus areas are also informed by other ACT and National documents that share our commitment to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples. CHS continues to work with other government and non-government organisations on a range of frameworks for meaningful change. Some of these are listed here:

- National Agreement on Closing the Gap 2020
- ACT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2019-2028 (2019 Agreement)
- National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (second edition) (National Standards)
- Indigenous Allied Health Australia Cultural Responsiveness in Action Framework
- ACT Government Cultural Integrity Framework & Addressing Systemic Racism: Framework for Change (Pending release)
- National Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021-2031
- ACT Disability Health Strategy.

# About the artist

Natalie Bateman is a proud Walbanja-Yuin artist on the NSW South Coast. Her cultural heritage, kinship and connection to the land and sea are at the heart of her very successful practice as an artist.



## A message from Natalie Bateman



Natalie Bateman (Walbanja-Yuin)



“We walk together in partnership, with shared values towards reconciliation.

This design features the pathways that bring us to Canberra Health Services. The colours of the region’s vibrant native flowers welcome and enhance positivity, leading the way to healing and rehabilitation.

We hope this work will be a marker on the journey to build trust with the community and help realise the Canberra Health Services’ vision to create exceptional health care together.

In the centre are the four kidney shapes representing the staff and the diverse communities of Canberra and the surrounding region. The centre circle is Canberra Health Services (and a sun which represents fire). Here we all gather, as if around a campfire, bringing respect, as we have been taught by our ancestors.

I chose the Monga Waratah because it comes from around the Braidwood/Mongarlowe area. The four Monga Waratahs are a reminder of how we share the core values of Canberra Health Services; to be kind, respectful, progressive, and reliable.”



## Supporting our vision

Natalie Bateman's painting is part of a larger project called 'Together, Forward'. It marks our commitment to undertaking an ongoing journey of recognising and respecting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of working and approaches to holistic health and wellbeing. It will support us in our role to be a health service that is trusted by our community and help us live up to our shared values. We hope that it will welcome and support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples as both consumers and team members of Canberra Health Services.

## About the Monga Waratah

Natalie Bateman (Walbanja-Yuin)  
*Monga Waratah 2021*  
Acrylic on canvas

Photograph: RLDI

Artwork creation supported by community generosity through Canberra Hospital Foundation

Collection: Canberra Health Services 2021

# References

ACT Health Directorate (2024) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and demographic profile. Canberra: ACT Health Directorate

Australian Bureau of Statistics. Census of Population and Housing — 2021 Census Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people QuickStats. Canberra: ABS. Viewed 18 July 2024 <https://www.abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/IQS8>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework - Summary report July 2023. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 18 July 2024: <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/report-overview/overview/summary-report?ext=>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Australia's mothers and babies Web report 2023. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 18 July 2024: <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mothersbabies/australias-mothers-babies/contents/baby-outcomes/birthweight>

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework, 3.01 Antenatal Care. Canberra: AIHW. Viewed 18 July 2024: <https://www.indigenoushpf.gov.au/measures/3-01-antenatal-care#:~:text=In%202019%2C%20about%209%20in,01.1>

Canberra Health Services (2024) Together, Forward. Canberra: Canberra Health Services

