

# Together, Forward

Better health and access to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Canberra region



**ACT**  
Government

**Canberra Health  
Services**

## Acknowledgement of Country

Canberra Health Services acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land, the Ngunnawal people. Canberra Health Services respects their continuing culture and connections to the land and the unique contributions they make to the life of this area. Canberra Health Services also acknowledges and welcomes Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples who are part of the community we serve.

## Accessibility



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**Produced by** Canberra Health Services in collaboration with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group and CHS 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.



Natalie Bateman (Yuin)  
*Acknowledgement of Country* 2013  
acrylic on canvas  
CHS Collection

Details reproduced throughout this brochure with the artist's permission.

**To find out more about the symbolism underpinning the work go to page 10.**

# — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in the ACT

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



**6476** Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in ACT

= **1.7%** of ACT population

aged 0-14 years



**31%** (2032)

aged 15-24 years



**21%** (1364)

aged 65 and over



**3%** (206)



**NSW catchment** adds approx.

**7000** Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Data on this page is from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census, 2016

# How healthy is our ACT Community?



**25%** were in a healthy weight range in 2017-2019.



There's been a **reduction in smoking rates: 64.3%** non-smokers in 2014-2015 and now **77%** non-smokers in 2017-2019.



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in ACT are more likely than those who don't identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander to have: **Congestive heart failure | Diabetes complications | Iron deficiency anaemia.**



In the ACT more babies born to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander mothers were born at a healthy weight (**13.5%**) compared to nationally (**10.7%**).



In the ACT, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people reported experiencing **psychological distress. 9.4%** of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people access ACT public health mental health services.

At Canberra Health Services, **5%** of **adult acute mental health service clients** identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.



Between January and May 2020, **2.4%** of **young people up to 18 years of age** who asked for help from Adolescent Mental Health Service identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. **Half of these** young people returned to the service **within 28 days.**



Some of the other conditions Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are admitted to ACT hospitals for are: **Cellulitis (skin infection) | Convulsions and epilepsy | Dental Services | Congestive Heart Failure | Ear nose and throat infections | Diabetes.**

# 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.

Breastscreen has high participation rates for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women aged 40-49 and 60-69. Breastscreen are developing a culturally appropriate breast screening information brochure to help increase the rate of other age groups.

From July 2018 to May 2020 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples had low numbers of hospital acquired complications (for example: falls, pressure injuries or complications from treatment).

More Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients chose to leave against medical advice or did not wait for treatment than people who don't identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander.

In 2019 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people surveyed after discharge from the Canberra Hospital said they felt more involved in the decision to start a new medicine and receiving information about the medicine.



# — What CHS has done so far?

## We now have:



A yearly Month of Yarning to help understand more about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's experiences with CHS. We want to hear your story!



An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Staff Network where CHS staff can build relationships, support each other, share issues and concerns. This helps promote CHS as a culturally safe environment and employment preference for our community.



An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Consumer Reference Group with people from ACT and NSW to share their experiences, provide cultural advice and direction, and build a strong partnership.



An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elected Body representative at our top-level governance committee.



An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Impact Statement that must be considered when anyone at CHS develops a strategy, plan or policy document.



An action plan to track our progress to meet the Closing the Gap and ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement actions and targets.

All these initiatives have been recently introduced. There is still more to learn and change!

# — What's next?



Look at ways of getting more information about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples experience of care and health outcomes so we know what we need to work on.



Improve information available to community about what services we provide and how we can help get people the care they need.



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples getting an outpatient appointment sooner.



Make community members feel welcome on committees and working groups so Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples have a voice at CHS.



Train staff to be better at talking with and caring for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples by learning about experiences and culture.







Make our spaces more welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Reduce harm to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples from alcohol and drugs and improve mental health support.



Provide health care with cultural support for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in detention.



Work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander mothers to improve care while they are pregnant and increase the number of babies born with a healthy birth weight.



Improve access to care and treatment for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with ear, nose, and throat problems. If surgery is needed, we will work on making that happen quicker than in 2020.

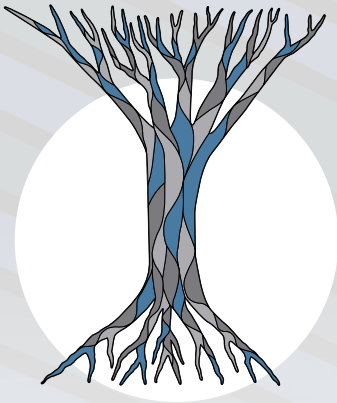


Improve care and cultural support to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples with cancer.



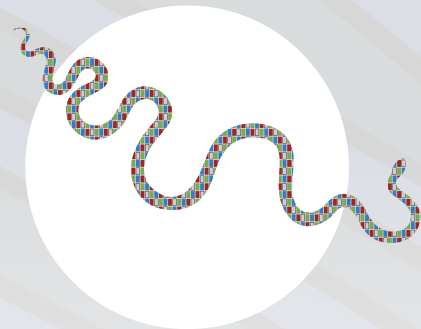
# Natalie Bateman speaks about the work

Natalie Bateman, a proud Yuin woman from the NSW South Coast, depicts Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples from the ACT and surrounding region being brought to the Canberra Region Cancer Centre (CRCC) with comfort, reassurance, guidance and spiritual strength. In 2013 she described the meanings underpinning this work.



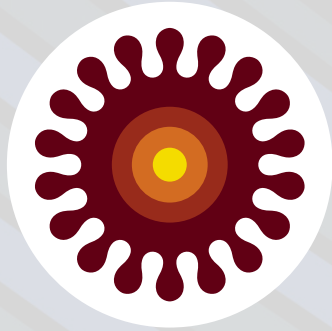
## Tree of life

The tree gives us our shelter, clothing, ceremonial gear, hunting and gathering tools, canoes, shelter, food, medicine, fire and water. It tells us about the weather and the earth. We hear our stories under the tree. Trees are our landmarks for travelling. They talk to us, they pose in the shapes of our ancestors. The roots bury deep into mother earth and the limbs stretch out to the sky. Trees nourish the land and have nourished our people for many thousands of years. We connect to the energy of the tree.



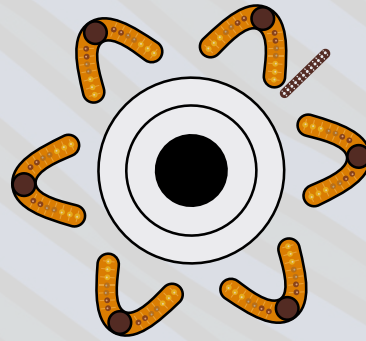
## Serpent

The rectangular shapes within the Serpent represent the patients' different stages of cancer treatment, the different treatment levels in the building, and also the diversity of the community and staff.



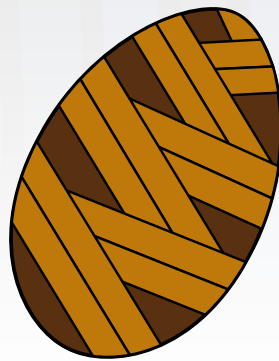
### Circles

We are joined together in a circle with others who have come to the CRCC as a place of excellence and supported learning. The circles within each other are the knowledge gained through coming to the CRCC so that through being at the Centre people will come away with some light. The lines represent the waves of people coming through the Centre and their own personal journey.



### Meeting Place (Healing Centre)

People travel to the CRCC to get the best possible treatment, information and resources for themselves, their family, friends and carers. The Healer has placed the 'Healing Stick' by their side.



### Eggs

The eggs represent people who have been wrapped up by the illness and are brought to the CRCC with care.



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