

Ensuring Progress in Aboriginal Health

A Policy for the NSW Health System

Better Health Good Health Care



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A n O u t l i n e

Overview

Aboriginal health is estimated to be three times worse than that of the rest of the community. This is typified by a life expectancy that is 20 to 25 years less than that of the rest of the population.

Ensuring Progress in Aboriginal Health: A Policy for the NSW Health System is an important step in meeting the NSW Government's commitment to restoring the health and social, emotional and cultural harmony and well-being of Aboriginal people in NSW. It reinforces the NSW Government's commitment to partnership with the Aboriginal community in addressing these issues and was developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (AHMRC).

The Policy:

- outlines NSW Health's position with respect to all aspects of improving the health and well-being of Aboriginal people and communities in NSW;
- establishes agreed principles and goals to guide decisions and actions by the NSW health system in all matters relating to Aboriginal health; and
- reinforces the commitments made in the *NSW Government's Statement of Commitment to the Aboriginal People of NSW*.

Aboriginal Health Policy Principles

- A whole-of-life view of health;
- Practical exercise of the principles of self-determination;
- Working Partnerships;
- Cultural understanding; and
- Recognition of trauma and loss.

It complements *NSW Health's Strategic Directions for Health - Better Health Good Health Care 1998-2000*.

Goals

1. Improved health of Aboriginal people taking account of the need to restore social, economic and cultural well-being

Improvement in the health and well-being of Aboriginal peoples of NSW is the primary goal of this *Policy*.

Key strategic directions:

Reduce the risk of Aboriginal ill-health, disability and premature death, key priorities being:

- maternal, infant and child health;
- diabetes;
- diseases of the circulatory system;
- emotional and social well-being including interpersonal abuse;
- substance misuse;
- injury and poisoning;
- improving the ability of Aboriginal communities to improve the health of individuals and families, and communities, including environmental health;

- improving early intervention;
- chronic disease management;
- improving access to acute care services; and
- improving environment and infrastructure that support the health and well-being of Aboriginal people and communities.

2. Improved access to culturally sensitive and appropriate services

Access to culturally and socially appropriate services is widely recognised as a major factor in the improvement of the health and well-being of Aboriginal people and communities.

Key strategic directions:

- Establish and maintain working partnerships:
 - in planning and the delivery of programs and services between the NSW Health Department, Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW, Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, the Commonwealth and other service providers, such as the Divisions of General Practice: and
 - to improve collaboration and cooperation between government agencies across government to enable a holistic approach which addresses the wide range of factors underlying Aboriginal ill health;
- Improve access to culturally sensitive mainstream health services;
- Improve access to Aboriginal community controlled health services;
- Improve primary health care and specialist health services through partnerships between mainstream health services and Aboriginal community controlled health services; and
- A skilled and motivated workforce, including the implementation of the NSW health system's Aboriginal Employment Strategy.

3. Effective evidence-based health planning

The processes of evidence based planning can:

- Improve transparency in decisions about priorities, service delivery and allocation of resources; and
- Strengthen self-determination by providing information which enables Aboriginal people and communities to make informed decisions concerning health and well-being.

It is widely accepted that service delivery will be most effective where Aboriginal community participation occurs. The NSW Partnership Agreement at the statewide and regional levels and the Agreement on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health at the State/Commonwealth level are important mechanisms to improve participation.

Key strategic directions:

- Improve access to timely, accurate and reliable information to support better planning and delivery of health programs and services for Aboriginal people;
- Improve participation of Aboriginal communities in planning, monitoring, evaluation; and
- Improve equity in resource allocation to take account of the poor health status of Aboriginal people and limitations on access due to factors such as cost, geographic isolation, continuity of services.

4. An Environment of Improvement

Effective monitoring and evaluation will establish an environment in which improvement can be sustained, current models of "Better Practice" can be identified and resources appropriately allocated to services and programs.

Aboriginal health data in NSW is currently inadequate for a "Best Practice" approach to be adopted for improving service delivery and outcomes. The use of models of "Better Practice" is an intermediate step that, with improvement of Aboriginal health information will facilitate the introduction of "Best Practice" models. "Better Practice" are services and programs that are working well and delivering outcomes.

Key strategic directions:

- Effective monitoring and evaluation to enable sustained change and to improve accountability for outcomes and the use of resources;
- Development of process for improved reporting by Area Health Services to the NSW Department of Health and Area Health Service Boards, on services and programs for Aboriginal people and progress in achieving outcomes;
- Implementation of collaborative processes for peer review and assess the progress of the implementation of Area and local Aboriginal health plans to assess progress, and inform future planning; and
- Effective use of "Better Practice" as a tool for improvement.

Implementation



The *Policy* will be implemented, monitored and evaluated through:

- The NSW Aboriginal Health Strategic Plan which aims to ensure coordinated action between the Commonwealth, the NSW Government and the Aboriginal community controlled health sector; and
- Area (Regional) Aboriginal Health Plans.

For further copies please contact:

Better Health Centre - Publications Warehouse
Locked Mail Bag 5003
Gladesville 2111
Ph: (02) 9816 0452
Fax: (02) 9816 0492

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