# Major milestone towards eliminating racism in healthcare

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| Key points* A major milestone towards a culturally safe health regulation process will see Indigenous representatives guide National Boards’ consideration of allegations of racism.
* This is a significant step to eliminate racism from healthcare and follows the Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency (Ahpra) and First Nations Peak’s successful push to enshrine cultural safety as a guiding principle in the legislation underpinning Australia’s health regulation scheme
* Ahpra acknowledges the ongoing harm to First Nations Peoples from racism in the health and justice systems. This national tragedy is reflected in the death of Ms Dhu in Western Australia in 2014 and many others who have died of preventable causes whilst in custody.
* The National Health Leadership Forum welcomes Ahpra’s work in establishing a culturally safe notification process, and the message it sends that racism and the poor care delivery that stems from racism will not be tolerated.
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24 March 2023

## Indigenous representatives to guide health regulation process

First Nations representatives will be central to regulatory decisions about medical practitioners, nurses and midwives where Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples are involved.

Details about a new culturally safe process being implemented to consider such matters is being released as part of Ahpra and the National Boards’ commitment to eliminating racism from healthcare.

A minimum of two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representatives and Chair, plus practitioners from each of the professions and community members, will together make decisions about matters concerning culturally safe health care and racism in line with the legislation governing health practitioners in Australia.

The Indigenous representatives will make decisions with other Board members about any notification involving Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. In the most serious matters, this will include the decisions about whether to refer a practitioner to an independent Tribunal.

A proud descendent of the Darumbal and Juru clans of the Birra Gubba Nation with South Sea Islander heritage, Associate Professor Carmen Parter is an Ahpra Board member and not involved in any regulatory decision making.

However, as co-Founder and Director at the Learning Centre for Systemic Change and Research and the inaugural Co-chair of the Indigenous Working Group of the World Federation of Public Health Association, A/Prof Parter said elevating Indigenous involvement in the consideration of matters concerning race was real and significant action.

‘Racism is the biggest public health issue that Australia faces today and no-one wants to talk about it or do anything about it,” A/Prof Parter said.

‘When we move forward to looking at these cases it is so critical to have Indigenous voices brought into the process because we'll bring that cultural lens on race and how it plays out.

‘We bring a different lens to the process - a lens of lived experience - to uncover things that people aren't necessarily aware of because we know that racism is a difficult subject to talk about.’

‘Ahpra has been talking about cultural safety and eliminating racism for a few years, but this is the action, this is going to be visible.’

The arrangements come after Ahpra, the National Boards and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Strategy Group advocated to enshrine cultural safety as a guiding principle and objective for the National Scheme, which was [adopted as legislative amendments](https://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Ministerial-Directives-and-Communiques/National-Law-amendments/Joint-statement.aspx) to the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law last October.

A/Prof Parter said establishing culturally safe notification processes, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, was vital in sending a message through the entire health system as well as building confidence among Indigenous communities.

‘Cultural safety being legislated is such a big move. But the solutions are held with those that experience racism, so that's why it's important that we have a voice at those tables and to bring that experience into addressing racism in healthcare practice,’ A/Prof Parter said.

‘This is where Ahpra can play a critical role in terms of how we eliminate racism in the health professions that we regulate’.

‘It's critical to get that communication out there because communities are going to feel much more confident that services are going to really do something.’

‘I want to end up one day where my grandkids and future generations will actually enjoy the same level of healthcare as others would expect.’

Chair of the National Health Leadership Forum Ms Fiona Cornforth stated that cultural safety is very much a prerequisite for health service delivery in providing an environment free of racism that ensures better health outcomes are achieved for First Nations people.

‘The vision for both the 2021-2031 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and the 2021-2031 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan is for a health care system to be free of racism; to achieve this we must address the discriminatory policies and practices that exist, instituting culturally safe care is intrinsic to this aim’.

‘The NHLF welcomes and supports Ahpra’s work in establishing a culturally safe notification process, and the message it sends that racism and the poor care delivery that stems from racism will not be tolerated.

#### Background:

The creation of a culturally safe notification process, led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, is a major milestone in the implementation of the [National Scheme’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety Strategy 2020-2025.](https://www.ahpra.gov.au/About-Ahpra/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health-Strategy/health-and-cultural-safety-strategy.aspx)

Ahpra and National Boards continue to work closely with Indigenous health leaders to implement the five-year strategy, which has seen the organisation’s Culturally Safe Notifications Working Group lead reform in the way notifications involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples will be considered.

As well as delivering mandatory cultural safety training to 1,596 Ahpra staff, Board and committee members, the strategy has seen the adoption of consistency for cultural safety in the codes of conduct across all health professions.

Ahpra is also actively working to increase the number of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples on the National Boards and committees. There are currently 13 members of National Boards who identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and a further 14 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples on delegated committees in the National Scheme.

Ahpra has also publicly committed to ensuring that cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples receiving healthcare is the norm but, as an agency, acknowledges that it still has much to learn, change and to take action on.

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| “It is so critical to have Indigenous voices brought into the process because we bring that cultural lens on race and how it plays out” – Associate Professor Carmen Parter. |

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| Contact us* For media enquiries, phone (03) 8708 9200.
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