Information Bulletin

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Definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker

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Summary	Definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker has been produced as a result of the review of Aboriginal Health Workers in NSW Health and reflects the recent development of a national definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker. The definition includes the description of the four types of Aboriginal Health Worker categories according to job roles.
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Director-General

DEFINITION OF AN ABORIGINAL HEALTH WORKER

PURPOSE

The purpose of this document is to provide NSW Health with a suitable term that defines a group of Aboriginal Identified job roles within the NSW Public Health System as a sub-set of the overall NSW Health Aboriginal Workforce[1].

NSW Health seeks to capture a definition for greater clarity of work roles and responsibilities, scopes of practice and minimum requirements for position holders.

The purpose for this definition is to clarify terminology and **is not** to be used for industrial interpretations and/or argument.

The audience for this definition is:

- The individual Aboriginal Health Worker
- Their line manager
- Their clinical team members / peers
- Senior Managers including Human Resources
- Local Health Districts
- Relevant Health Networks and Pillar organisations
- The Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal Health Workers, as defined herein, are eligible to participate in the Aboriginal Health Worker Forum processes and may choose to stand for election as the Representative or Proxy members for their Health Service. Through the activities of the Aboriginal Health Worker Forum, Aboriginal Health Workers are supported to develop their professional networks within the unique contexts in which they function.

Note: In this document the term 'Aboriginal' will be used in preference to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' or 'Indigenous' in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW (NSW Health, 2005).

BACKGROUND

Nationally there has been inconsistency regarding the definition of an Aboriginal Health Worker (Health Workforce Australia, 2011; NATSIHWA, 2012; NATSIHWA).

On 1 July 2012, The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner Board of Australia commenced the national registration of Aboriginal Health Practitioners, who are a sub-set of the Aboriginal Health Worker workforce.

New national qualification standards were endorsed in 2013 by the National Skills Standards Council (National Skills Standards Council, 2013) for the Aboriginal Health Worker workforce following in-depth national reviews.

[1] "NSW Health Aboriginal Workforce" refers to the workforce by population who identify as Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander in the EEO data. The NSW Health Aboriginal Workforce extends across the breadth and depth of the NSW public health system and may or may not be working in Identified or Targeted positions.

KEY INFORMATION

An Aboriginal Health Worker is:

- An Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander person (AustLII) which means someone who:
  - Is of Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander descent; and
  - Identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander; and
  - Is accepted as such by the Aboriginal and / or Torres Strait Islander community in which they live, or formerly lived.
- Is employed in an Aboriginal identified position in NSW Health
- Has undertaken or is willing to undertake a minimum Certificate III Aboriginal Primary Health Care (including undergoing recognition of prior learning processes against current qualifications)
- Provides flexible, holistic and culturally sensitive health services to Aboriginal clients and the community to achieve better health outcomes and better access to health services for Aboriginal people.

There are four types of Aboriginal Health Worker categories, according to job roles. These are:

1. **Aboriginal Community Health Worker:** This role provides better access, liaison, health promotion and preventative health services to the Aboriginal community
2. **Aboriginal Hospital Liaison Officer:** This non-clinical role provides advocacy, support and liaison within an acute care health setting, eg. hospitals and multipurpose services.
3. **Principal Aboriginal Health Worker:** This role provides relevant graduate tertiary level clinical / professional services to the Aboriginal community.
4. **Aboriginal Health Practitioner** *(protected title)* (AustLII, 2013)**:** This is a new health professional role which commenced on 1 July 2012, and is registered with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner Board of Australia. The role provides direct clinical services to the Aboriginal community and holds a Certificate IV Aboriginal Primary Health Care (Practice) qualification.[2]

Although Aboriginal Health Worker roles are diverse, an analysis of these roles has identified that all Aboriginal Health Workers have the following characteristics that are universal across Australia[3]:

- The provision of Aboriginal primary health care
- Cultural security and safety
- Disease prevention and health promotion

[2] Guidance on how to determine whether a role constitutes or should be constituted as an Aboriginal Health Practitioner is available. Refer: NSW Health, 2013 Decision Making Framework for Aboriginal Health Workers undertaking clinical activities in NSW Health. Accessed 3/10/2013 at: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/aboriginal/Publications/decision-making-framework.pdf
[3] Health Workforce Australia 2011. *Growing Our Future: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Project Final Report*. Adelaide.

- Local community knowledge
- A holistic approach to health care.

In NSW Health, the Aboriginal Health Worker role involves building relationships and working in collaboration with a range of internal and external stakeholders.

Aboriginal Health Workers work collaboratively within multidisciplinary healthcare teams to achieve better health outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities, and play a key role in facilitating relationships between Aboriginal patients and other health professionals.

Aboriginal Health Workers also communicate with, and facilitate access to, other government and non-government organisations and support services in order to provide care that meets the physical, social, emotional and cultural needs of the patient. This communication may occur during and/or after the patient's contact with the health service.

Aboriginal Health Workers under these categories can provide either generalist or specialised services such as those outlined below, but not limited to:

- Drug and Alcohol
- Mental Health
- Family Violence
- Maternal & Infant Health
- STI & BBV
- Chronic Care
- Early Childhood
- Health Promotion
- Aboriginal Hospital Liaison
- Aged Care
- Youth Health
- Women's Health & Men's Health

SUPPORTING INFORMATION

NSW Health Aboriginal Workforce Unit can provide more information: http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/aboriginal/Pages/default.aspx

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Association (NATSIHWA) http://www.natsihwa.org.au/

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