

# Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW

Skills IQ Program Review of the Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package  
Products

*The AH&MRC Acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands on which the AH&MRC stands, the lands of the Bidjigal and Gadigal people of the Eora Nation. The AH&MRC pays respect to Elders past, present and emerging.*



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## Background

The HLT Health Training Package is the national framework for skills development in the health industries. The Australian Industry and Skills Council (AISC) has approved SkillsIQ, at the direction of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Industry Reference Committee (IRC), to undertake a thorough review of all nationally recognised Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products included in the HLT Health Training Package. IRC members have been working to guide this review and to provide:

- Guidance at the national level to ensure Training Package Products are flexible and responsive to changing workplace practices, industry, and client needs
- Specialist advice and strategic direction in relation to stakeholder feedback and issues relevant to the sector
- Views and feedback on behalf of the sector and organisations they represent

## The Skills IQ Review Scope

The Training Package Products included in this review were last endorsed on 01 July 2013. The IRC identified the need to review the qualifications packaged in the HLT Health Training and submitted a Case for Change to ASIC to conduct a review, undertake consultation, and propose updates to the training package. These amendments to the training package aim to ensure the products are better aligned with industry needs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker IRC have responsibility for 7 qualifications packaged in the HLT Health Training Package.

These include:

- HLT20113 Certificate II in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- HLT30113 Certificate III in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- HLT40113 Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- HLT40213 Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice
- HLT50113 Diploma of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health
- HLT50213 Diploma of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice

A consultation guide was circulated during November and December 2020, requesting feedback to the IRC on issues within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker sector.

## Summary

For this response, the AH&MRC refers to both the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) and AH&MRC Registered Training Organisation (RTO no. 91020). The AH&MRC RTO delivers courses from the HLT Health Worker Training Package to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce in New South Wales (NSW). This response has been informed by consultation of the AH&MRC Member Service Chief Executive Officers and AH&MRC RTO staff. Overwhelmingly, there is a consensus of feedback that the current training products do not meet the practical needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce. There are three overarching issues discussed in this response:

- There is misalignment between the teaching material in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioners qualifications and the practical skills needed within the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation setting in NSW.
- The qualification has several skill gaps that need to be addressed in the training package. These gaps identified by our member services include telehealth technology, continuous quality improvement and clinical governance, remote and rural health practice, pharmacology and pathophysiology, justice health, palliative care, public health and infection control and trauma-informed practice.
- The timing required to complete qualifications under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package has not been considered against the practical requirements of the position within the workforce.

The AH&MRC and its RTO arm recognise the important updates to Trainer and Assessor requirements within the draft. The AH&MRC considers supporting Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners to become Trainers and Assessors incredibly important. The knowledge and experience that Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners can bring of the practical application of the qualifications into the teaching space increases the strength of the teaching and the learning experience. The AH&MRC would like to propose that SkillsIQ consider including the assessor's skill set (TAESS00011 Assessor Skill Set) in the training package.

## About the AH&MRC

The AH&MRC, formerly the Aboriginal Health Resource Co-op (AHRC) was established in 1985 following a recommendation of the Brereton Report by the NSW Aboriginal Task Force on Aboriginal Health in 1982-83.

The AH&MRC assists the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) Sector across NSW to ensure they have access to an adequately resourced and skilled workforce to provide high-quality health care services for Aboriginal communities.

As the Peak Body for Aboriginal Health in NSW the AH&MRC represents the rights and interests of 47 Member Services. The AH&MRC is committed to the delivery of four key priorities. These are:

1. Aboriginal Community Control and Innovation
2. Education and Workforce
3. Research and Data
4. Governance and Finance

## About the AH&MRC Registered Training Organisation

The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council's (AH&MRC's) Registered Training Organisation (RTO) is registered with the Australian Skills and Quality Authority under registration number 91020. AH&MRC's RTO was created to provide educational courses in Aboriginal health and associated disciplines that are grounded in cultural competency. Nationally recognised courses offered by AH&MRC's RTO are subsidised by the NSW Government under Smart and Skilled.

The AH&MRC of NSW RTO is approved to deliver the following qualifications:

- HLT30113- Certificate III in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- HLT40113- Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care
- HLT40213- Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice
- CHC43215- Certificate IV in Alcohol and Other Drugs
- CHC43315- Certificate IV in Mental Health
- CHC53315- Diploma of Mental Health
- CHC51015- Diploma of Counselling

The AH&MRC RTO facilities include a variety of education and training spaces including lecture rooms, clinical demonstration, and simulation training labs. State-of-the-art simulation equipment facilitates learning in a practical setting by imitating real-life medical emergencies. The RTO's biggest learning space is an immaculately designed 140 seat auditorium with modern facilities including a projector and audio-visual equipment.

## Opportunity to review SKILLSIQ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products Draft 1 Consultation Guide

The AH&MRC would like to thank SkillsIQ and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Industry Reference Committee (IRC), for the opportunity to provide comment of the Draft 1 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products Consultation Guide. As the Peak Body for Aboriginal Health in NSW the AH&MRC recognises the importance of ensuring the Aboriginal health workforce is well trained and equipped with the skills to deliver services that improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. NSW has the second highest proportion of program enrolments into the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker qualifications nationally, with 25% of enrolments in Australia from students within NSW.

As a provider of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker education in New South Wales, AH&MRC considers the review an opportunity to improve the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products in aligning with the workforce needs and the vocational placements requirements to support students to develop their skills. The following response to Draft 1-Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products Consultation Guide focusses on the high-level issues associated with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Products. The AH&MRC RTO staff have attended the virtual consultation held Monday, 14 December 2020 by SkillsIQ and provided more detailed information through those channels.

## AH&MRC response

The AH&MRC has identified that the major concerns with Draft 1 of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products relate to ensuring the skillsets are

practically applicable to the role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioners within the workplace setting and considering the timeframe commitment for potential students considering undertaking a career as an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioners

Issue 1: There is misalignment between the teaching material in the Aboriginal Health Worker qualifications and the practical skills needed within the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation setting.

The AH&MRC considers that the SkillsIQ review has taken steps to better align the subjects encapsulated within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package with the practical workforce needs but acknowledges that shortfalls within the content still exist. For example, Aboriginal people experience the damaging effects of ongoing intergenerational trauma and the symptoms of this trauma can manifest differently in different people<sup>1</sup>. Aboriginal people who are seeking health care often make first point of contact with an Aboriginal Health Worker. It is essential that Aboriginal Health Workers understand trauma-based models of health service delivery and can adapt the principles of trauma informed care to the needs of the patient. In the Consultation Guide trauma-informed care is mentioned as a skillset alongside mental health, self-harm, and suicide. The intergeneration trauma experienced by Aboriginal people can be exhibited as participating in high-risk activities and physical illness. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioners have the skills to deliver a trauma-informed model of care while working with Aboriginal people to address their health needs.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker qualifications should also include subject matter to assist the students to understand the Medicare Benefits Schedule (MBS) environment. The ACCHO Sector is the largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the country<sup>2</sup> with a service delivery model that is centred around the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner role. The ACCHO Sector relies heavily on Medicare-generated funds to ensure the services are sustainable in the long term. The role of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner in these settings so commonly depends on the generation of Medicare income, making this an important area of knowledge for this role.

The AH&MRC proposes that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker qualifications could be strengthened by increased requirements for assessing workplace application of the skills encompassed within the training package. This would require increased communication between the RTO providing the training and the workplace setting. The delegation of mentors within the workplace should be considered within this approach.

Issue 2: The timing required to complete qualifications under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package has not been considered against the practical requirements of the position within the workforce.

AH&MRC propose a clear training pathway from AQF Level 2 to 5 within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioner training package, which reflects the changes to

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<sup>1</sup> [Intergenerational trauma | Australians Together](#)

<sup>2</sup> [NACCHO | National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation](#)

the Aboriginal Health Award<sup>3</sup> and Health Practitioner Registration. Draft 1 of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Training Package Products Consultation Guide section “*Deleted Qualification and benchmark Qualification for practitioners*”, suggests *HLT40213 Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice* has been deleted in favour of the *Diploma of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice*, for Health Practitioner Registration.

The AH&MRC holds concerns with the proposed entry requirement of the *Certificate IV in Primary Health Care* qualification becoming a pre-requisite for the *Diploma of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice*, will discourage students from becoming a registered health practitioner. The AH&MRC consider that proposed changes may negatively impact the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health workforce in NSW, specifically those training to become registered Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner. The time commitment required to complete the Certificate IV pre-requisite, and subsequent Diploma will potentially decrease students’ motivation to enrol in a diploma level qualification. A reduction in students would lead to reduction in qualified practitioners, ultimately impacting the ACCHO workforce. The AH&MRC suggest the following needs to occur as part of the next stage of redeveloping the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander training packages:

- Mapping across the continuum of AQF levels 2 to 5 to reduce duplication of knowledge and performance evidence;
- Unit coding need to reflect a chronological progression across AQF levels.
- Training packages should include best practice models of curriculum design for offline and face-to-face teaching and learning that support Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing & authentic examples that meet industry skills needs.

It is also important to standardise the training of Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners to ensure that those entering the workforce with this qualification have the appropriate skills and knowledge to undertake the practical requirements of the role. The timeframe under which the *Certificate IV in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care Practice* is delivered varies across Registered Training Organisations. Given the important role that Aboriginal Health Workers/Practitioners play in addressing the health needs of Aboriginal people and communities, it is the position of the AH&MRC that the required skills and knowledge could not be acquired in under a 12-month period.

Issue 3: The qualification has several skill gaps that need to be addressed in the training package. These gaps identified by our member services include telehealth technology, continuous quality improvement and clinical governance, remote and rural health practice, pharmacology and pathophysiology, justice health, palliative care, public health and infection control and trauma-informed practice.

AH&MRC proposes inclusion of new emerging skill sets in the training package, which the reflect our members services innovative model of service delivery.

New South Wales is characterised by disperse and diverse populations who live in regional, rural and remote locations. As the health needs of these geographical locations have grown, the role and expectations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker/Practitioners has steadily increased. Health workers who operate in these health care settings deal with complex clinical loads which require them to have further clinical skills and knowledge, particularly in

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/news-and-media-releases/website-news/changes-to-the-aboriginal-health-award>

rural and remote communities. AH&MRC and our member services have identified several skill gaps that need to be included in the training package: telehealth technology, continuous quality improvement and clinical governance, remote and rural health practice, pharmacology and pathophysiology, justice health, palliative care, public health and infection control and trauma-informed practice.

## Recommendations

### The AH&MRC proposes the following recommendations

- (1) The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Industry Reference Committee consider further consultation of employers of Aboriginal Health Workers to understand the practical skills needed in the workplace setting.
- (2) The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker Industry Reference Committee undertake mapping across the continuum of Australian Qualifications Framework levels 2 to 5 to outline career progression through the various qualifications.



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