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NHMRC

Attn:

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## CATSINaM Response to Targeted Call for Research - Priorities in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

The Congress of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINaM) wishes to nominate the following as research priorities in response to the Targeted Call for Research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

### Background

#### CATSINaM

CATSINaM was founded in 1997 and is the national peak body that represents, advocates for, and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives at a national level. We are a membership-based organisation and are governed by a nationally elected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Board. We believe that nurses and midwives are the backbone of the Australian health system and play a pivotal role in providing culturally safe health services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As nurses and midwives often work in frontline positions, their capacity to do this effectively is critical.

A strategic direction for CATSINaM is to strengthen our effectiveness in supporting the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in nursing and midwifery. This contributes to the well-recognised and broader need for Australia to improve recruitment and retention of nursing and midwifery students and employees in order to meet the health care needs of the future.

### Targeted Research

To assist the assessment of research topics, below is our response to the following questions:

1. **What is the research priority (a significant research knowledge gap or unmet need) you are nominating? How would a TCR in this area greatly advance our understanding of this issue?**

The research priorities areas we wish to nominate are:

*Unity and Strength through Caring*

- ω Research into racism as a determinant of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and how it manifests into institutional racism.
  - ω Impact of institutional racism on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health.
  - ω Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery as a unique professional knowledge system.
2. [What are the relevant Australian Government Priorities, and/or Ministerially-agreed State and Territory health research priorities linked to your nominated priority?](#)
- Under Closing the Gap all governments made a commitment to address the health inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
  - The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, vision is for 'the Australian health system free of racism by 2031'. This is achieved by making the health system accessible, culturally safe, effective and responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is underpinned by an evidence based approach.
  - Racism affects the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Individual experiences of racism results in poor mental health, poor physical health and increased substance use. Racism manifested in a systemic manner, compound ill effects, by inequity of resources required for good health. Lack of understanding and acknowledgement of racism continue to exist within the broader community. Through research new knowledge will emerge to inform the impact of racism on health.
  - The current chronic disease management models of care are driven by fee for service funding models (e.g. Medicare) which has a hierarchy of significance for health professionals, with doctors at the top, less significance on the role of nurses, and the input of allied health professionals as key contributors to care.
  - Under Closing the Gap Australian Governments committed to health and employment parity targets, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment targets for government health systems. Nurses and midwives make up the largest proportion of the health workforce with critical shortfalls of up to 83,000 in the next three years, with predicted rises up to 100,000 by 2030. Increasing recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives is key to addressing both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes and broader workforce shortages.
3. [How would a TCR in this area contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and improve health outcomes for the individual and/or community?](#)
- A TCR in allied health is would extend our understanding by defining and analysing the impact of allied health interventions on chronic disease management within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context. Identifying how allied health professionals contribute to better Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing outcomes

can provide guidance to the development of flexible and responsive health workforce and service delivery models. A targeted analysis of current and emerging evidence would provide the impetus to ascertain areas for further research.

- A TCR in the area of racism would extend our understanding of the benefits of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce and their pivotal role in achieving health equity, across Australia's health systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians are more inclined to access healthcare, where services are culturally competent. Through this, we can achieve the best health outcomes.
- The lack of cultural safety and the presence of institutional racism serve as barriers to recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives. The creation of a culturally safe health care system, requires wide scale changes in the way we educate, recruit, accredit and develop health professionals.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health professionals, including nurses and midwives, are critical to creating cultural safety and increasing access to health system resources. Understanding the unique manner in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses incorporate culture into their professional knowledge and practice allows us to build education and employment frameworks that capitalise on this knowledge, encouraging greater attraction and retention into the profession by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

#### 4. How will the TCR reduce the burden of disease on the health system and Australian economy?

- CATSINaM believes that institutional racism and lack of cultural safety lead to the consequence of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Peoples accessing health care later, become less proactive in health and increase disease burden. Poor outcomes, overall, result in higher costs to the present health system.
- There has been very little specific research into the contribution of allied health more broadly to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Targeted research is required to ascertain the skill mix, health disciplines and service delivery models that will best meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with chronic and complex conditions.
- The Aboriginal community controlled health sector is based on a comprehensive primary health care model, which allows for a focus on the whole person – their health issues and their health needs. Our current health and funding system is doctor centric without the evidence to justify this focus or its benefits.

5. Are there any reports or findings that support your nomination for the suggested topic?

We offer the following reports and papers for your information:

- National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, 2013-2023 and the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan, 2013-2023.
- CATSINaM Economic Analysis Report - A cost effective approach to closing the gap in health, education and employment: Investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing education, training and employment. Authored by Dr Katrina Alford.
- CATSINaM Position Statement Cultural Safety and Indigenous Allied Health Australia Cultural Responsive Framework.
- CATSINaM Position Statement Recruitment and Retention.
- Ferdinand, A., Paradies, Y. & Kelaher, M. 2012, Mental Health Impacts of Racial Discrimination in Victorian Aboriginal Communities: The Localities Embracing and Accepting Diversity (LEAD) Experiences of Racism Survey, The Lowitja Institute, Melbourne.
- Beyondblue 'Educate yourself about racism'<https://www.beyondblue.org.au/who-does-it-affect/the-invisible-discriminator/educate-yourself-about-racism>
- <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/what-impact-racism>