



Our Communities, Our Strategy: Six Priorities for Lasting Change

Badu Island

Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service





Masig (Yorke Island)

Priority Area

Actively eliminating racial discrimination and institutional racism

Understanding the importance of eliminating racism in health care

Racial and institutional racism are persistent and deeply rooted structural drivers of health inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Racism refers to the attitudes, behaviours, and beliefs whether conscious or unconscious that reinforce unfair differences and maintain power imbalances across individuals, systems, and communities.

Institutional racism occurs when these inequities are embedded within the policies, practices, and structures of organisations and systems.

It results in the unequal access to resources, opportunities, and outcomes, often excluding or disadvantaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Actively eliminating racial discrimination and institutional racism means recognising and confronting these injustices, transforming systems and behaviours, and committing to structural change that ensures culturally safe, equitable, and just outcomes.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“We must commit to identifying and calling out racism, ensuring it is consistently reported and acted upon.”

“Increase patient understanding about racism complaints process, who to contact.”

“Cultural awareness training tailored to specific communities for staff and clinicians, to ensure we have the right clinical skill and cultural knowledge.”

We heard that

- Community members spoke about how the impacts of racism can make it harder for people to feel safe and confident when seeking care. They shared the importance of building trust, respect, and understanding between staff and community.
- People said it’s hard to make a complaint. The rules are unclear, and there is little follow-up or feedback given to community.
- Community want more chances to tell the truth about their experiences and to begin healing.
- Community also want all TCHHS staff to learn about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, practices, and protocols.

What we are going to do

- Make it easier to report racism by providing clear information about how to make a complaint and what happens next.
- Create local community profiles so our staff understand the cultural practices and protocols in each community we serve.

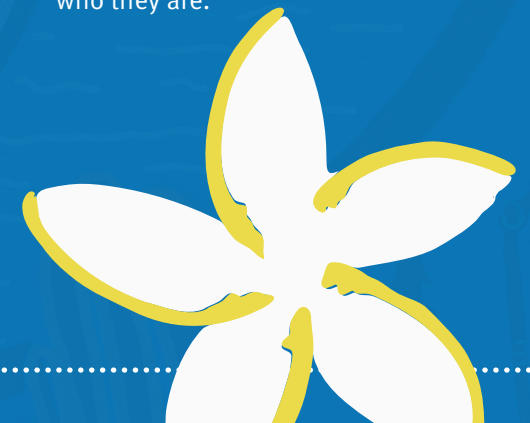
What success looks like

Reporting Racial Discrimination:

- Increase proportion of resolutions for racial discrimination complaints made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Deliver anti-racism education and information to address the nuanced and multilateral considerations for the Torres and Cape region.

Community Profiles:

- Community profiles are created, shared, and improved over time.
- Staff use profiles to deliver more respectful and culturally safe care.
- Profiles inform local staff induction and service delivery.
- Communities say the profiles reflect who they are.



At TCHHS, we know that real change begins by listening and continues through action.

These case studies showcase how we are working alongside communities to build a culturally and clinically safe health system that responds to the voices, values, and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

From tackling racism to strengthening cultural capability and workforce inclusion, these stories reflect our shared commitment to health equity, every step of the way.



Walking Together

Our Journey Towards Health Equity and Cultural Safety

We are committed to ensuring that instances of racism are never ignored. TCHHS has strengthened our systems to ensure that racism is reported, addressed, and met with real accountability. Our goal is to build a health service that is equitable, inclusive, and culturally grounded, one that genuinely responds to the health and wellbeing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

One of the ways we are supporting this vision is through our Cultural Practice Program. Designed to strengthen staff understanding of working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare contexts, this training builds cultural capability, promotes culturally safe care, and strengthens relationships with patients and community.

We are proud to share that over **92.6%** TCHHS staff members have completed Cultural Competency Training, helping embed respect, safety, and understanding into everyday healthcare delivery.



Culture at the Core

Celebrating Identity, Belonging and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership

Across our hospitals and health centres, TCHHS continues to honour and promote awareness of the significant cultural dates that matter deeply to the communities we serve.

Throughout the year, many TCHHS facilities host gatherings that bring together staff, patients, Elders, and community partners to mark important milestones such as NAIDOC Week, Coming of the Light, Mabo Day, National Sorry Day and National Reconciliation Week.

These celebrations are more than symbolic — they are a powerful reminder that health is about more than treatment. It is about identity, belonging, and cultural safety, and ensuring every person feels seen, heard, and respected in their health journey.





Cairns, NAIDOC

A Diverse Workforce

Culturally Safe Recruitment and Workforce Inclusion

In 2023, we also undertook a comprehensive review of our recruitment practices to ensure they are aligned with best-practice standards and contribute to improving employment outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The findings emphasised the need for cultural awareness, respect, and inclusion and provided practical recommendations to support the growth and retention of a diverse workforce.

TCHHS is committed to embedding these recommendations into everyday practice.

This includes culturally safe recruitment panels, support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and sustained leadership focus on building safe and respectful workplaces. Our journey is ongoing. Yet with clear measures, community voices at the centre, and a strong commitment to health equity, TCHHS is taking real steps toward dismantling racism and building a health service that is fair, inclusive, and grounded in respect for culture.



Cairns, Torres Strait Flag Day.

“Connection to family, community and culture is central to one’s sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing.”

Community yarn participant

Our journey toward equity is far from over. However with community voices at the centre, and a clear focus on listening, learning, and acting, TCHHS is taking real steps to dismantle racism and rebuild trust. Together, we are working to create a health service that is fair, inclusive, and truly grounded in respect for culture.



Resilient Communities in Disaster (RCD)

LOCAL LEADERS

KOWANYAMA STATE SCHOOL NAIDOC 2025

KOWANYAMA STATE SCHOOL NAIDOC 2025



Wujal Wujal







Poruma (Coconut Island)



Warraber Island



Weipa



Waibene (Thursday Island)



Ugar (Stephen Island)



Kowanyama

Priority Area



Increase access to healthcare services

Understanding the importance of increasing access to healthcare services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to face significant barriers in accessing health care compared to other Australians. In Northern Queensland, these barriers are amplified by the geographic spread of communities and include the cost for services, limited transport and suitable accommodation options, distance to health services, experiences of racism and discrimination, lack of culturally safe, respectful, and responsive care, language barriers, and culturally insensitive policies. Cultural barriers also limit access to innovative models of care that bring services closer to home or that could be delivered in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations. These systemic and cultural barriers contribute to disengagement from the health system, reduced use of preventative and early intervention services, and ultimately, poorer health outcomes. Increasing access means removing these barriers by delivering culturally safe care, investing in community-led models, and ensuring services are flexible, affordable, respectful, and responsive to the needs and strengths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“Delivering more health checks within community spaces in popular gathering areas will improve accessibility. Health Services should not be limited to health facilities alone”

“Health promotion and screenings should be more engaging and fun to attract all age groups.”

“The system is driven by policies and procedures, but real progress can only happen when our people are part of the decisions and have a say in these changes.”

We heard that

- It can be hard to know when and how to get health care. Specialist services are not always available locally, and people often need to travel.
- People want more say in how health services are run and want to take care of their own health and wellbeing.
- Community want more local, culturally appropriate health promotion activities.
- Transport and accommodation services are limited, hard to use, and do not always meet people’s needs.

What we are going to do

- Support more local health promotion activities and make health education easier to access.
- Advocate for funding to grow health services on-country or closer to home.
- Improve patient travel by making systems and processes easier to use.

What success looks like

Community Engagement

- Regular consultations, with community feedback used to shape services.
- More local events that support health equity.
- Better access to health education resources.
- Positive feedback from community and resource users.

Funding and Service Expansion

- Increase number of funding proposals submitted for local, on country health services.
- New services started and better access to care.
- Placed-based service models developed, where appropriate, to meet community needs.

Consumer Experience

- Easier, clearer systems for travel and accommodation support.
- Feedback collected on patient travel experiences.
- More people reporting positive experiences with travel and accommodation.

Across the Torres and Cape, TCHHS is working hand-in-hand with communities to deliver care that is closer to home, culturally safe, and driven by local priorities.

These four case studies showcase the real outcomes being achieved through partnership, innovation, and listening to community voices.

Together, these stories reflect the power of community-led, culturally respectful care in closing the gap and strengthening health outcomes across the region.



Cape York, ENT Team

Caring for every Mother and Child

Strengthening Access Across Cape York

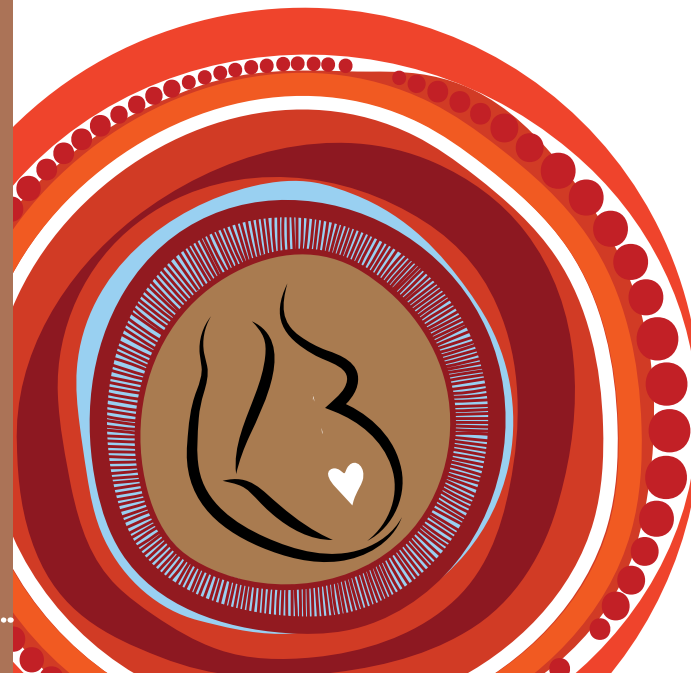
TCHHS has expanded midwifery outreach and child health services in several Cape York communities. This includes placing dedicated midwives, maternal child health nurses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers in remote locations, running culturally safe clinics, and increasing the availability of telehealth support for pregnant women and mothers.

These services reduce the need for women to travel long distances away from Country and family during pregnancy and early motherhood. The Continuity of Care and Carer Model continues to guide the way TCHHS approaches maternal care with a focus on family, culture, and the whole health of women, babies, and communities.

In Aurukun, Lockhart River, Pormpuraaw, Kowanyama, Wujal Wujal, Laura and Hope Vale families have welcomed the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers who support mums from antenatal care through to postnatal checks and early child health checks, immunisations, parenting support and health promotion. Their work helps ensure families feel safe, heard, and supported at every step.

In May 2025 alone, the Maternal and Child Health team delivered **629 appointments**, reflecting strong demand and growing trust in culturally safe, community-led care.

“Having the midwife come to us makes a big difference. I didn’t have to go away from my kids to get the help I needed when I was pregnant. It’s good to feel like the service understands our way of life.” Mum, Cape York



Smiles That Matter



Bringing Free Dental Care to the Torres Strait

This year, TCHHS partnered with the Army Aboriginal Community Assistance Program (AACAP) to deliver free dental clinics to remote communities in the Torres Strait Islands. AACAP, established in 1997 as a joint initiative between the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and the Australian Army, brings skilled professionals into rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to deliver infrastructure, health, and training support.

This year, a team of experienced dental clinicians joined the program, working closely with TCHHS and local primary health care teams to provide check-ups, dental treatment, oral hygiene education, and preventative care for children, families, and Elders across the region. In addition, the Badu Dental Blitz, a local initiative in partnership with a locum dentist, Torres Strait Island Regional Council, and Tagai State College, successfully screened all children on Badu Island and offered dental appointments to the wider community.

This partnership between TCHHS, the Australian Army, council, school and communities, reflects how listening to community voices and working together can deliver real, practical health solutions. By increasing access to oral health care right here on Country, we are creating a future where no one is left behind because of where they live. Together, we are closing the gap in care one smile at a time.

“It’s good to see dental care coming to our island. Some of our mob can’t get to the mainland easily. Having the service here means our kids can stay healthy and keep smiling.”

Community Member , Torres Strait Island



Badu Island



Weipa

Birthing On Country Returns

Weipa Hospital Welcomes Babies Once Again

TCHHS is proud to announce the reopening of the Weipa Birthing Service, marking a powerful milestone in our commitment. After nearly 25 years, Weipa Hospital is once again supporting births, with the capacity for up to **50 births** each year.

This long-awaited return means that more mothers across Cape York can now access maternity care and give birth closer to home, on Country.

This initiative is not just about restoring clinical services, it is about honouring the cultural significance of birthing on Country, where mothers and babies are spiritually and physically connected to their land, ancestors, and community.

The reopening fosters cultural continuity, safety, and trust, supporting stronger beginnings for families and healthier outcomes for babies.

The return of birthing to Weipa is a true example of health equity in action shaped by the voices of women, families, and community Elders who have long advocated for this service.

Together, we are reclaiming safe, supported, and culturally respectful birthing care where it belongs.

“Being able to give birth here, on our own land, surrounded by family—it means everything. This is the way it should be.”
Local Mother, Cape York.

Dialysis Comes Home

Kowanyama's New Renal Unit Changes Lives

A powerful example of care closer to home is now a reality in Kowanyama: a new four-chair renal dialysis unit at the Kowanyama PHCC. This facility marks a major step forward in providing local, life-saving care, supporting up to **28 patients** each week. For Dale Josiah, a proud Aboriginal man and father of four from Kowanyama, this change means everything. Dale lives with kidney disease and, until recently, he and his family had to relocate to Cairns so he could receive dialysis treatment. For years, patients like Dale were forced to leave their communities, their support networks, and their way of life to access vital health care. The emotional, cultural, and financial toll was immense — not just for the individual, but for their whole family. Now, that is changing.

“It was hard being away from home, from Country. Everything was different,” Dale shared. “Now I can get my treatment here, see my family, and feel connected again.”

Care Closer to Home, On Country

The new renal dialysis unit does not just offer clinical support, it provides care that is culturally respectful, community-based, and rooted in place. From the warm welcome of the clinic staff to the photos of the community that decorate the space, every detail reflects the importance of healing on Country.

The Kowanyama renal unit is more than just a building, it is a symbol of equity in action, shaped by community voices and grounded in the belief that everyone deserves quality healthcare, no matter where they live.



Kowanyama.



Kiriri (Hammond Island)



Waibene (Thursday Island)



Kiriri (Hammond Island)



Aurukun



Badu Island



Waibene (Thursday Island)



Boigu Island



Cairns



Kirri (Hammond Island)

Priority Area



Influence the social, cultural, and economic determinants of health

Understanding the importance of influencing the social, cultural, and economic determinants of health

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health is inseparable from the broader social, cultural, and economic environments in which people live, work, and connect. Social determinants such as employment, income, education, housing, and access to services play a critical role in shaping health outcomes. In these remote and regional communities, access to secure housing, affordable fresh food, transport, and meaningful employment opportunities are often limited, further impacting wellbeing. Cultural determinants including cultural identity, self-determination, connection to family, kin, community, Country, and access to traditional lands and foods are equally important and uniquely protective for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These factors foster resilience, identity, belonging, and spiritual wellbeing.

When these social and cultural determinants intersect with health risk factors such as smoking, poor nutrition, alcohol use, and limited access to primary or preventative health care, they significantly contribute to poorer health outcomes. Research indicates that up to 35% of the health gap is attributable to social determinants, 30% to health risk factors, and 35% remains unexplained, though is likely linked to systemic issues such as racism, intergenerational trauma, and loss of cultural continuity. Improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires a whole of government and whole of community approach. Health does not exist in isolation, it is shaped by a broad range of social, cultural, and economic factors including housing, education, employment, income, access to services, and cultural connection. Health services have a vital role to play in influencing these determinants by working in genuine partnership with other sectors including housing, education, employment, justice, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led organisations.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“Better collaboration between all organisations – police, education, health, council to address the broader health.”

“Data presented to communities to understand burden of illness and impacts tailored to the individual community.”

“Cannot be reactive to health issues - need to be able to prevent this and therefore need health promotion activities in community.”

We heard that

- Health and wellbeing are seen as a top priority for community.
- There is not enough information about the social, cultural, and economic factors that affect health. Community wants to understand these more and how they show up in their own lives.
- Health care often feels reactive. Community want more focus on prevention and early support before things get worse.

What we are going to do

- Train staff to collect, understand, and share local health data in culturally appropriate ways.
- Increase health checks and screening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Strengthen partnerships with local councils and organisations through formal agreements.

What success looks like

Local Health Understanding

- Increased the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff trained in data analysis and reporting.
- A greater number of community health reports are shared with local communities.
- Communities report stronger understanding of health factors.

Health Checks and Screening

- Improved access and attendance for regular health checks.
- More community members involved in health promotion and education.

Partnerships and Collaborations

- More formal partnerships and agreements with local councils and organisations.
- Better coordination between services.
- Stories showing how partnerships are improving health outcomes.

Across the Torres Strait, community-led initiatives are making a real difference in health and wellbeing.

These two success stories show how partnership, cultural respect, and local leadership are transforming lives. Together, these stories reflect what is possible when we listen, partner, and act in genuine collaboration with our communities.



Cairns, Midwifery Navigation Team

Listening to Our Young Ones and Community

School and Community Health Checks Making a Difference on Thursday Island

Local TCHHS PHCC staff continue to lead the way in delivering regular health screening events on Thursday Island — one for young people in schools and one for the wider community.

These events reflect a deep and ongoing commitment to community health and wellbeing, with the tradition of local screenings now spanning over a decade.

By showing up year after year, staff have built trust, consistency, and cultural connection, ensuring health care is accessible, respectful, and right here on Island home — for children, families, and Elders. Regular health checks are essential at every stage of life. They help detect health issues, support prevention, and ensure everyone stays strong, well, and connected to care.

For children, screenings can catch developmental, hearing or vision concerns early making sure they are supported to grow strong, learn well, and feel confident in the classroom. For adults, regular checks support prevention, and help manage chronic conditions like diabetes and heart disease. For Elders, they provide vital support for healthy ageing and quality of life.

Our school-based and community screening programs brings together nurses, doctors, dental staff, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, working alongside teachers and families. It is about more than just medical checks — it is about making sure our people feel safe, understood, and cared for in a way that respects culture and family. At TCHHS, we believe health starts early and close to home. By working in partnership with schools like Tagai State College and the community, we are making sure no child, family, or Elder is left behind when it comes to good health and wellbeing. Together, we are planting the seeds for a healthier future one child, one family, one community at a time. Over the past 12 months, local TCHHS PHCC across the Torres Strait Islands have completed more than **2300+ health screenings** across all age groups, demonstrating our commitment to early intervention, prevention, and care that is close to home and grounded in cultural respect.

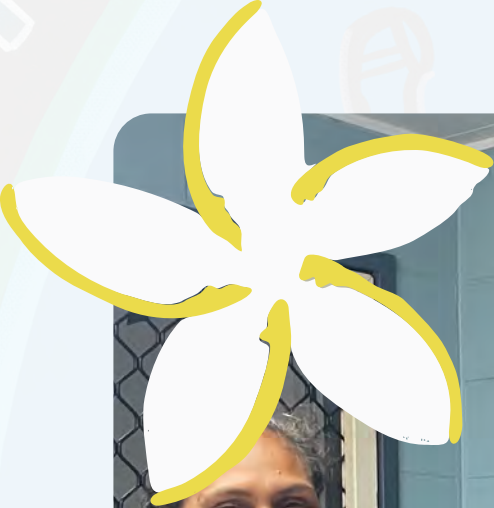
“The school health check found my boy had hearing problems. We didn’t know before. Now he’s getting the help he needs, and it’s made a big difference.” Parent, Thursday Island



Badu Island, Child Health Team



Cape York, ENT Team



Badu Island

Stronger Families, Healthier Futures

Badu Leads the Way with Safe and Healthy Homes

Launched in 2022, the Healthy Housing program has worked with over **50 families** on Badu to improve understanding of how home living conditions affect the health of families.

This locally led initiative, delivered in partnership with Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service (CHHHS) Public Health, Department of Housing, TCHHS Badu PHCC, and the Badu Island Council, recognises that healthy homes are the foundation for healthy lives especially for our children and families. The program brings together housing officers, environmental health workers, and PHCC Teams to support families in making practical, lasting improvements in their homes.

From ensuring safe water and proper food storage to addressing mould, ventilation, and overcrowding, every action supports long-term health. Together, they provide practical support, education, and culturally appropriate health promotion that reflects local values and living situations. Importantly, this work is delivered in a culturally respectful and collaborative way, reflecting Badu values and ways of living. Education is done through yarning, hands-on demonstrations, and trust-building. As it is shaped by the community, it strengthens self-determination, helping families take the lead in creating safer, healthier environments.

The Safe and Healthy Homes program is a clear example of health equity in action, bringing services closer to home, addressing the root causes of poor health, and making sure every family has the opportunity to live well in a safe and supported environment. Together, we are creating strong homes and strong futures right here on Badu.

“They didn’t just come in and tell us what to do. They showed us why it matters and worked with us to make real change.”

Community Member, Badu Island





Poruma (Coconut Island)







Wujal Wujal



Warraber Island



Wujal Wujal



Cooktown



Arakai (Kubin Community)



Coen

Priority Area

Deliver sustainable, culturally safe, and responsive healthcare services

Understanding the importance of delivering sustainable, culturally safe and responsive healthcare services

Access to culturally safe, responsive, and equitable healthcare is essential for improving health outcomes and achieving health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Culturally safe care recognises and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' identities, values, worldviews, and lived experiences. It requires healthcare environments that are free from racism and judgement, and where people feel safe, heard, and respected.

Sustainable, culturally responsive services are led by community, shaped by local knowledge and cultural practices, and responsive to the diverse needs of individuals, families, and communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led models of care have been proven to effectively address health inequities and improve engagement, trust, and outcomes. Delivering culturally safe, responsive care is not a onetime initiative, but an ongoing commitment to equity, self-determination, and healing. It requires health services to walk alongside communities, listen deeply, and act with accountability and cultural humility.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“Integrating mainstream western practices with cultural practices - more emphasis on traditional practices, such as bush medicine and traditional resources.”

“The turnover is high, makes it difficult to establish relationship and not always easy to open to someone new. We also get tired of repeating our health concerns.”

“Limited Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce - makes it difficult to deliver culturally safe care.”

We heard that

- Community want health services to reflect local cultural practices and protocols, alongside western clinical care.
- Community want more focus on hiring, keeping, and supporting First Nations local staff, including career pathways and transition planning.
- Community said all staff should be trained to understand local culture and protocols in health care.

What we are going to do

- Set up strong governance to track and support cultural safety in clinical care.
- Refresh our Cultural Capability Program to give staff more chances to learn, including on-country cultural induction.

What success looks like

Cultural Governance Mechanisms

- Governance frameworks in place to oversee cultural safety.
- More consumers say their cultural and spiritual needs are being met.

Cultural Practices and Policies

- Staff have access to cultural practices and policies
- Key clinical and operational policies reflect cultural protocols.

Cultural Education and Policies

- Increase the delivery and staff participation in cultural education programs.
- Communities help shape and lead culturally significant events.



TCHHS is delivering more connected, coordinated, and accessible care.

These two success stories highlight how smarter systems and expanded services are helping close the gap and improve outcomes. Together, these initiatives are delivering timely, culturally responsive care closer to home, supporting better health outcomes across our region.

Connecting Care, Closing Gaps

The Care Coordination Centre Opens

TCHHS is proud to be working in partnership to strengthen health care access across Far North Queensland. In 2022, a new Care Coordination Centre was established through a joint partnership between CHHS, TCHHS, and the Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council (QAIHC).

The Centre was created in response to ongoing community feedback and workforce input about challenges in navigating the health system especially for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients who often need care from multiple services and locations. The Care Coordination Centre is a specialised hub designed to support smooth, timely, and culturally safe transitions of care between services. Staffed by experienced health professionals and Patient Experience Officers, the centre helps patients: navigate referrals between hospitals and clinics; coordinate appointments and follow-up care; understand treatment plans and health journeys; and receive support that is tailored to their needs, culture, and family circumstances.

Since opening, the Centre has supported **over 1,800 patients** in accessing timely, high-quality healthcare closer to home. What has changed: Timely access to care has improved through faster, coordinated referrals. Cultural safety has been strengthened with clearer communication, supported by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Patient Experience Officers and Liaison staff. System navigation has become easier, reducing stress and confusion for patients and families. Health outcomes have improved too, with better continuity of care and fewer missed appointments.. The Care Coordination Centre represents a new approach to delivering care that is person-centred, culturally responsive, and grounded in equity. It ensures that our mob are not falling through the cracks, and that patients, particularly those from rural and remote

communities, feel supported every step of the way. Together, we are transforming the healthcare journey, one connection at a time.

Real Impact: A Patient's Journey

A Torres Strait Elder with multiple chronic conditions, was often confused about her appointments and found it hard to travel between health services. After being referred to the Care Coordination Centre, a liaison staff worked with her to map out her appointments, link her with transport options, and ensure she could access local follow-up care closer to home.

“They listened. They helped me understand what’s going on. I feel like I’m not on my own anymore.”

Community Elder, Torres Strait



Strengthening Care Close to Home

Allied Health Services Expanded Across the Cape and Torres

One of the key areas of improvement in recent years has been the expansion of allied health services, bringing essential care closer to home for people living in rural and remote areas of the Cape and Torres Strait. Allied health professionals play a critical role in keeping our communities strong, healthy, and independent. This includes physiotherapists, occupational therapists, speech pathologists, social workers, podiatrists, dietitians, and more, who often work as part of a multidisciplinary team alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health workers and community engagement officers. To meet growing community needs and address long-standing service gaps, TCHHS has: Recruited more allied health staff to live and work in communities, expanded outreach and fly-in-fly-out services, increased the use of telehealth to connect people with allied health support, strengthened collaboration with schools, aged care, disability, and primary health teams. This means faster access, better continuity of care, and services delivered in culturally appropriate ways, whether that's at the clinic, in schools, in people's homes, or on Country.

The expansion of allied health services means that more people in the Torres Strait and Cape York can now access life-changing support without having to leave their community.



Cape York, Allied Health Services

These services are essential to healing, recovery, learning and living well and they are now being delivered in ways that reflect the culture, priorities, and strengths of our communities. Together, we're making health care work better—right here, where it's needed most.

Real Results

- **Over 3,000 occasions of service** delivered by the Cape York Allied Health Service
- **225 outreach visits** across Aurukun, Coen, Kowanyama, Lockhart River and Pormpuraaw since November 2023
- **More than 2,060 occasions of service** delivered by the Child Development Service since February 2024 and 101 outreach visits across Torres and Cape facilities
- **Around 155 children referred** to the NDIS Early Childhood Approach team— **40 children** currently supported by speech pathologists, occupational therapists and early childhood educators

These numbers reflect the real and growing impact of this investment in allied health.



Cairns, Allied Health Services

Real Impact: Helping Young Ones Grow Strong

Lenny was born with a serious heart condition and spent his first months in hospital. When he finally returned home to community, he still relied on a feeding tube and had complex medical needs. His mum felt overwhelmed and unsure how to access the specialist care he needed.

Thanks to the expanded allied health team, support came to their doorstep.

A speech pathologist and dietitian helped Lenny learn to eat and drink, slowly building his strength. In time, his feeding tube was removed, and he began to grow on his own. A social worker supported his mum emotionally and helped with housing and Centrelink. A physiotherapist and occupational therapist tracked Lenny's development—making sure he was moving, playing, and learning like any healthy child.

“Now, Lenny is thriving. He’s growing more every day and running around. We don’t have to wait months or travel far. The help came to us,” says his mum



Cairns, Allied Health Services



Cooktown





Torres Strait Islands



Cooktown



Laura



Umoo



Lockhart



Pormpuraaw



Umagico

Priority Area



Work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to design, deliver, monitor and review health services

Understanding the importance of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to design, deliver, monitor and review health services

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold deep cultural knowledge, lived experience, and community insight that are vital to creating effective, equitable, and culturally safe health services. Authentic engagement and partnership means going beyond consultation, it involves co-designing, co-delivering, monitoring, and reviewing health services with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, not just for them. This process repositions decision-making power, strengthens community trust, and leads to services that are more relevant, accessible, and impactful.

Working in this way ensures health services:

- Reflect local cultural values, identities, and priorities.
- Address the broader social, cultural, and economic determinants of health.
- Reduce systemic racism and build cultural responsiveness.
- Improve equity in access, quality, and outcomes of care.

Genuine collaboration across the health system, rooted in respectful relationships and community-led governance, enables meaningful and lasting change. It centers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, supports self-determination, and creates a shared responsibility for better health outcomes.

Delivering on this commitment means embedding community partnerships at every stage from planning and policy to frontline service delivery and continuous quality improvement.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“Communication is key - if government departments understand the importance of joint decision making, programs that are developed without consultation in community does not work.”

“Community needs to have a say in what services are being offered in communities - establish Health Action Groups in communities.”

“Ensuring the governance structure implemented have equal representation of community members and are mechanism for grass roots people to elevate their voices.”

We heard that

- Community want more chances to give regular feedback and be properly consulted on health service changes.
- People said there are not enough community voices in decisions and leadership.
- People want clear and regular information about what health services are available and doing.

What we are going to do

- Work with communities regularly to plan, deliver, and review health services.
- Ensure visits by TCHHS executive leaders to communities to provide health service updates.
- Promote health equity activities and forums.

What success looks like

Collaborative Leadership:

- TCHHS executive leadership engage in regular visits with community to foster strong partnerships and seek feedback.

Promoting Health Equity:

- Health equity messages and updates shared regularly.
- Increased promotion and awareness of health checks and community activities



TCHHS is putting culture and community leadership at the centre of health system reform.

These two success stories show how cultural governance and co-design are shaping more responsive, respectful, and effective care. Together, these stories highlight the power of listening, respect, and partnership in delivering health care that truly belongs to community.



Waibene (Thursday Island)

Stronger Together

Cultural Governance at the Heart of Health Equity

At Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service (TCHHS), we are committed to building a culturally and clinically safe, equitable health system that responds to the voices and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. A key part of achieving this is through strong cultural governance and ongoing community engagement. We believe decisions about health should include the people most affected by them and that means listening, partnering, and walking alongside community leaders every step of the way.

Leadership by Community, for Community, TCHHS is proud to support and be guided by the Health Equity Committee (HEC), the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Council Committee and the Consumer Advisory Committee (CAC) that represents the voices of communities across Cape York and the Torres Strait. These groups provide critical cultural insight, lived experience and leadership, and help guide the TCHHS Executive Leadership Team and Hospital and Health Service Boards in all decisions related to health equity, safety and accountability.

To strengthen cultural governance, TCHHS prioritised formal partnerships with local government and health organisations. We are proud to have signed Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) with 13 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Councils, creating clear pathways for: Ongoing engagement, Mutual accountability, Community-driven health priorities. Additional partnership agreements were established with key service providers, including Royal Flying Doctor Service, Northern Peninsula Area Family and Community Services, Torres Health and Apunipima Cape York Health Council. These partnerships help ensure that local knowledge, cultural protocols, and community priorities are front and centre in the design and delivery of healthcare across the Torres and Cape.

This governance model is more than a structure—it's a commitment to equity, self-determination, and respect. It ensures that TCHHS is not just delivering services to communities but working with them to shape the future of health in our region. Together, we are building a health system led by culture, driven by community, and accountable to the people it serves.



Waibene (Thursday Island)

Culturally Safe

Co-Designing a Health Facility on Mer Island

On Mer (Murray) Island, TCHHS Infrastructure team partnered with the local community to co-design a new health facility that reflects the cultural values, beliefs, and needs of Meriam people. From the outset, the project was guided by extensive consultation and co-design with the Mer community.

This included:

- Engaging Elders, Traditional Owners, and cultural advisors in planning discussions
- Yarning with community to understand preferences around space, privacy, and patient flow,
- Listening to concerns around spiritual safety, and culturally appropriate waiting areas
- Including the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker as a core project liaison
- And ensuring that the facility's design reflected community connection to land and sea — with cultural artwork, colours, and signage in language integrated into the space.

Community members were not just consulted — they were active decision-makers throughout every phase, from layout and design to landscaping and staff space.

This case study demonstrates the importance of genuine community partnership in infrastructure planning. When health facilities are co-designed with communities:

- They become places of trust and healing,
- They strengthen cultural safety and health equity,
- And they empower local voices to shape how care is delivered, not just received.

The success at Mer Island is a model for place-based, culturally safe infrastructure across Torres Strait and Cape York — ensuring every clinic is not just a building, but a reflection of the people it serves.



Mer (Murray Island)



Mer (Murray Island)



Mer (Murray Island)



COEN RIVER



Aurukun, Child Health Team





Weipa



Napranum



Bamaga



Warraber Island



Iama (Yam Island)



Cairns

Priority Area



Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health workforce

Understanding the importance of strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health workforce

Strengthening the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce is central to improving health outcomes, ensuring culturally safe care, and achieving health equity. Despite ongoing efforts to Close the Gap, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to experience persistent health inequities.

These are compounded by the under representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the health workforce, particularly in remote communities where high staff turnover disrupts continuity of care and community trust. To build a sustainable, culturally responsive health system, we must increase the representation, capacity, and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all levels from frontline care to executive and governance roles. This means:

- Investing in local “grow your own” workforce pipelines, including school-based traineeships, cadetships, scholarships, graduate pathways and community-driven training pathways.
- Creating supportive career development and progression opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in both clinical and non-clinical streams.
- Building safe and culturally supportive workplaces, where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff feel valued, respected, and empowered.
- Aligning workforce representation with local population demographics, ensuring services are delivered by people who reflect and understand the communities they serve.

A strong, skilled, and supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is key to delivering culturally safe care, improving community engagement, and addressing both health and broader social and economic determinants of wellbeing.

OUR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER VOICES

“Need to build a stronger recruitment pathway - where we are able to identify those people who are committed to working with and for community.”

“Increasing traineeships and scholarship in remote communities for all ages, advocate for community stakeholders to provide the same opportunity – a stepping stone for our youth.”

“Health workers need to feel supported and given opportunities to train and expand on their role and scope. Currently this is limited.”

We heard that

- Community would like to see more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Professions providing holistic, community-focused care.
- Community are worried about how to attract more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people into health jobs. They want more traineeships, cadetships, graduate pathways and work experience—especially for young people.
- Community members see value in supporting skill-building and career development in both clinical and community-based roles.

What we are going to do

- Review role scope and responsibilities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Professions, identifying gaps and opportunities to expand functions.
- Support entry into the health workforce through traineeships, cadetships, graduate pathways and work experience programs, including the Deadly School Start Program.
- Establish identified roles across clinical and non-clinical streams.
- Strengthen professional development opportunities across technical, management, and leadership areas.
- Streamline recruitment, backfilling, and workforce development processes.
- Explore ways to expand workforce education and support career development.

What success looks like

Scope of Practice

- Document the scope of practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Professions, remove barriers to workforce operating at full scope of practice.

Entry-Level Opportunities

- Support the ongoing delivery and completion of traineeship, cadetship, and work experience opportunities.
- Increase collaboration with vocational training and pre-employment partners.
- Improved completion rates for the Deadly School Start Program.

Workforce Development

- Growth in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment, with progression into clinical and leadership roles.
- Stable staff retention rates.
- Promotion of professional development opportunities, including technical, management, and leadership courses.

Recruitment Processes

- Recruitment processes refined to better support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce entry and advancement.

At TCHHS, we know that true health equity starts with creating opportunities for our own people to lead, heal, and work in their communities.

That's why we're proudly investing in "Grow Your Own" workforce initiatives. These programs are designed to build a culturally and clinically safe, equitable service by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and young people to see a future in health and walk strong into it.

Grow Your Own: Creating Deadly Health Careers for Our Future Generations

Career Expos in Community – showcasing pathways for 2000 students across Torres and Cape

Every year, career expos are proudly held across the region and hosted at the local state high schools in Thursday Island, Bamaga, Weipa and Cooktown - connecting and bringing together more than 2000 students and schools, registered training organisations, and health services to showcase pathways into health. These events are community-driven, interactive, and filled with inspiration, information, and local role models.

***"I didn't know there were so many jobs in health. Now I want to be a paramedic and work in my community."
– high school student, Northern Peninsula Area***



Deadly Start

The deadly school start program provides school-based traineeship across TCHHS facilities - Bamaga, Weipa, Thursday Island and Cooktown with **19 students participating in this program** across our region. This early engagement program connects high school students that are studying a certificate in health with TCHHS health care workers, showing them that a career in healthcare is possible and deadly! Through school visits, interactive sessions, and hands-on activities, young people learn about jobs in nursing, midwifery, allied health, administration and more. When young people see people like themselves succeeding, it changes what they believe is possible. Deadly School Start is about more than just careers, it's about confidence, culture, and creating future leaders who are proud to walk in two worlds. Together, we're growing a strong, skilled, and deadly health workforce, starting in our own schools.

“The nurses told us their story. Now I want to be one too,” said one – school-based traineeship student, Cape York.



Cadetships & Work Experience

TCHHS offers Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health cadetships, supporting university students with paid work placements, mentorship, and practical training in a variety of health roles without having to leave their community or culture behind. Cadets are matched with mentors and health teams across TCHHS facilities including hospitals, primary health centres, and community and outreach programs and are supported while completing their studies in fields such as nursing and midwifery, allied health, medicine and paramedicine, environmental and public health, business, leadership and law, finance and accounting, these pathways help students feel culturally safe and supported while gaining real-life experience in the healthcare system. TCHHS is currently supporting **8 university students through the cadetship program**, including students studying Bachelor of Nursing, Midwifery, Speech Pathology, Physiotherapy and Law degrees.

“I feel proud to be studying nursing and learning in my own community. The cadetship helps me feel supported and seen.”
— Cadetship student, Torres Strait



Why It Matters - By growing our own health workforce, we are investing in a future where care is delivered by people who truly understand and reflect the communities they serve. It means more local jobs, more culturally responsive care and more deadly futures for our young people. Together, we're planting the seeds for long-term health equity — led by the next generation.



Poruma (Coconut Island)



Old Mapoon



Waibene (Thursday Island)





Cairns



Arkai (Kubin Community)



Coen



Dauan Island



Mura Lag (Prince of Wales)



Weipa