



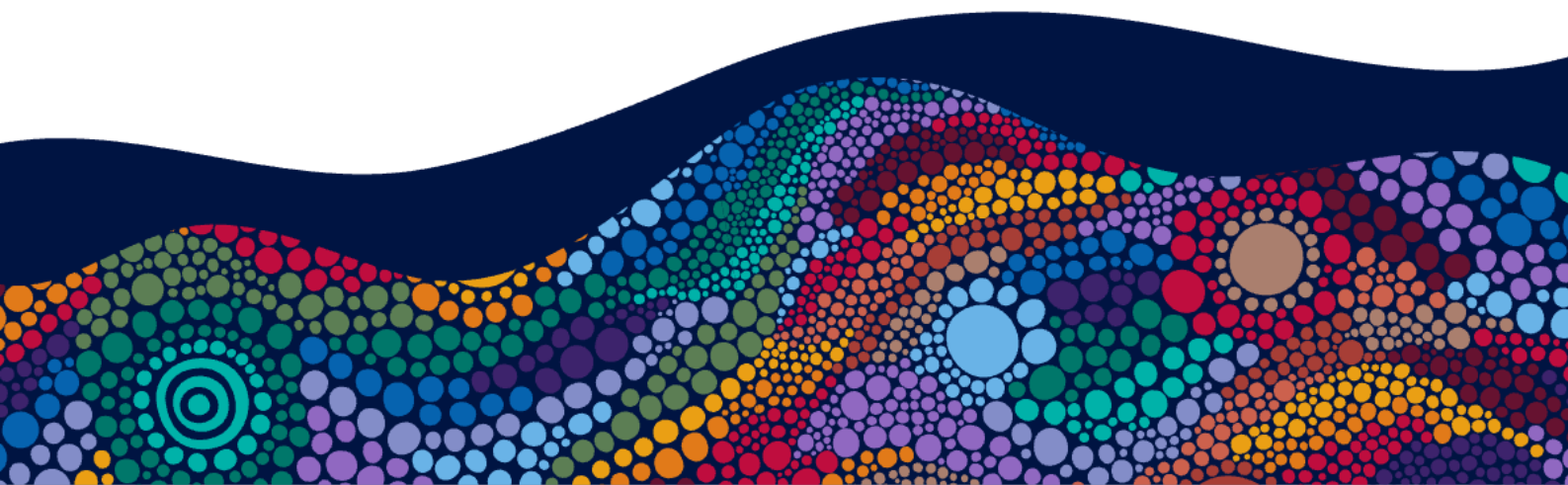
NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation

Consultation on the draft content for the First Nations Education Policy

Submission to the Department of Education

August 2026



About NACCHO

NACCHO is the national peak body representing 148 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). We also assist a number of other community-controlled organisations.

The first Aboriginal medical service was established at Redfern in 1971 as a response to the urgent need to provide decent, accessible health services for the largely medically uninsured Aboriginal population of Redfern. The mainstream was not working. So it was, that over fifty years ago, Aboriginal people took control and designed and delivered their own model of health care. Similar Aboriginal medical services quickly sprung up around the country. In 1974, a national representative body was formed to represent these Aboriginal medical services at the national level. This has grown into what NACCHO is today. All this predated Medibank in 1975.

NACCHO liaises with its membership, and the eight state/territory affiliates, governments, and other organisations on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing policy and planning issues and advocacy relating to health service delivery, health information, research, public health, health financing and health programs.

ACCHOs range from large multi-functional services employing several medical practitioners and providing a wide range of services, to small services which rely on Aboriginal health practitioners and/or nurses to provide the bulk of primary health care services. Our 148 members provide services from about 550 clinics. Our sector provides over 3.1 million episodes of care per year for over 410,000 people across Australia, which includes about one million episodes of care in very remote regions.

ACCHOs contribute to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing through the provision of comprehensive primary health care, and by integrating and coordinating care and services. Many provide home and site visits; medical, public health and health promotion services; allied health; nursing services; assistance with making appointments and transport; help accessing childcare or dealing with the justice system; drug and alcohol services; and help with income support. Our services build ongoing relationships to give continuity of care so that chronic conditions are managed, and preventative health care is targeted. Through local engagement and a proven service delivery model, our clients 'stick'. Clearly, the cultural safety in which we provide our services is a key factor of our success.

ACCHOs are also closing the employment gap. Collectively, we employ about 7,000 staff – 54 per cent of whom are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islanders – which makes us the third largest employer of Aboriginal or Torres Strait people in the country.

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Recommendations

NACCHO recommends:

- 1 Any interventions to address education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people align with the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform Areas.
- 2 Further opportunities to comment on a version of the First Nations Education Policy with more operational details on funding, architecture and interactions with other policies.
- 3 An accompanying Implementation Plan with specific targeted actions.
- 4 Clear actions to grow the community-controlled sector across early childhood, schooling and tertiary education, in line with Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.
- 5 Bilingual schooling is prioritised and funded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- 6 Further investment in cultural and language programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- 7 Explicit actions to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching workforce.
- 8 Targeted actions to address systemic barriers, including racism, which prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from studying.
- 9 Explicit commitment to the National Anti-Racism Framework.

Acknowledgements

NACCHO welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Department of Education. NACCHO would like to acknowledge the valuable input received to this submission. NACCHO supports any submissions to this consultation made by NACCHO Members and Affiliates.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

Advocating for and securing the National Agreement on Closing the Gap was an historically significant act of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander self-determination. The National Agreement is evidence of a new era of engagement by and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It commits Australia to a new direction and is a pledge from all governments to fundamentally change the way they work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations – to support self-determination and build the capacity of the community-control sector.

There are 5 Closing the Gap targets that directly relate to education:

- Target 3: By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95 per cent.
- Target 4: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children assessed as developmentally on track in all five domains of the Australian Early Development Census (AEDC) to 55 per cent.
- Target 5: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining year 12 or equivalent qualification to 96 per cent.
- Target 6: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70 per cent.
- Target 7: By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67 per cent.¹

Progress towards the Closing the Gap targets is complex. While there is mixed progress towards the targets, and there remains a gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people across all targets except Target 3.

This Government's first Closing the Gap Implementation Plan commits to achieving Closing the Gap targets *through implementation of the Priority Reforms*. This represents a shift away from focussing on the Targets, towards the structural changes that the Priority Reforms require, and which are more likely to achieve meaningful outcomes for our people in the long term.

The reforms and targets outlined in the National Agreement seek to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians. Governments at all levels have committed to the implementation of the National Agreement's four Priority Reform Areas, which offer a roadmap to meaningfully impact structural drivers of poor health and social outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

Priority Reform Area 1 – Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

This Priority Reform commits to building and strengthening structures that empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to share decision-making authority with governments, and to accelerate policy making that centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices.

¹ Closing the Gap, Closing the Gap Targets and Outcomes, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/targets>.

Priority Reform Area 2 – Building the community-controlled sector

Recognising that community-controlled services achieve better outcomes, employ more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and are often preferred over mainstream services, this Priority Reform commits to building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors to deliver services to support Closing the Gap.

Priority Reform Area 3 – Transformation of mainstream institutions

This Priority Reform commits to systemic and structural transformation of government organisations to identify and eliminate racism, embed and practice cultural safety, deliver services in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, support truth telling about agencies' history with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and engage fully and transparently with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people when programs are being changed.

Priority Reform Area 4 – Sharing data and information to support decision making

This Priority Reform commits to shared access to regional data and information to inform local-decision making and support achievement of the first three Priority Reforms. This Priority Reform supports principles of Indigenous Data Sovereignty.

Despite some progress, the need for fundamental systemic reform remains evident. In its first review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Productivity Commission found that governments are not adequately delivering on their commitments. Despite support for the Priority Reforms and some good practice, progress has been slow, uncoordinated, and piecemeal.

The Commission noted that to enable better outcomes, governments need to relinquish some control, share decision making and acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people know what is best for their communities. Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations must be treated as critical partners rather than passive funding recipients, and trusted to design, deliver and measure government services in ways that are culturally safe and meaningful for their communities.

‘Too many government agencies are implementing versions of shared decision-making that involve consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on a pre-determined solution, rather than collaborating on the problem and co-designing a solution’²

NACCHO recommends any interventions to address education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people align with the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform Areas.

Introduction

NACCHO wishes to begin by commending the Department of Education on its approach to co-design the First Nations Education Policy in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak organisations.

Education is a fundamental determinant of health. Literacy is a hugely important health enabler – for example, people need to be able to read medicine bottles in order to determine dosage and frequency of use. Health literacy – or a person's ability to find, understand and use health information to make informed decisions³ – is also crucial. Reflecting this, NACCHO has a strong focus on education, from early childhood programs through the Connected Beginnings program to coordination of Vocational Education and Training

² Productivity Commission, Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Study Report, Canberra, 7 Feb 2024 <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/closing-the-gap-review/report>.

³ World Health Organization, Health Literacy, December 2025, <https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/health-literacy>.

(VET) courses through the First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program and the Building the First Nations VET Workforce Program, as well as organising multiple health promotion campaigns.

NACCHO has made a number of previous submissions on education policy, which remain relevant. These include:

- [Inquiry into the factors driving educational attainment](#)
- [Universities Accord \(Australian Tertiary Education Commission\) Bill 2025 and a related bill](#)
- [Universities Accord \(Opening the Doors of Opportunity\) Bill 2026](#)
- [Foundation Skills Study](#)
- [Royal Commission into Early Childhood Education and Care](#)
- [Early Childhood Education and Care](#)
- [Australian Universities Accord](#)
- [Future delivery of foundation skills training in remote Australia](#)
- [Delivery of the Skills for Education and Employment \(SEE\) Program 2023](#)
- [Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance 2021](#)

Further details required

In principle, NACCHO supports the Policy's 10 year vision statement: "Fair and equitable education systems where First Nations learners are equipped with the skills and knowledge needed to thrive. Education is self-determined, accountable, free from racism, enables culturally safe learning, and affirms identity, culture and connection." It is, however, a very ambitious vision and the consultation paper's high level statements do not fully explain how this systemic change will happen.

The consultation paper does not provide detail on how the First Nations Education policy will interact with existing policy pieces – the National Skills Agreement, Thriving Kids, the Universities Accord, the Better and Fairer Schools Agreement. It is further unclear whether funding will be attached to the policy's implementation, and if so, how much of this will be earmarked for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

Due to the nature of the education sector, the First Nations Education Policy will require a complex Commonwealth/State architecture. The rollout of the National Skills Agreement has provided lessons learnt in operationalising policies in this environment.

Case study: The National Skills Agreement

The National Skills Agreement (NSA) is a 5-year joint agreement between Commonwealth and states and territory governments to strengthen the VET sector, which came into effect on 1 January 2024.¹⁵ However, implementation of the NSA has seen varying levels of commitment to engagement with Aboriginal Community Controlled RTOs by jurisdictional governments, who tend to preference the TAFE institutions that they manage. At the Commonwealth level, implementation of endorsed approaches has been slow, held up by bureaucracy. Overall, progress toward working in genuine partnership with the sector has been frustrating given the National Agreement on Closing the Gap is embedded in the NSA.

A specific Implementation Plan with further details on targeted actions is warranted in order to gain more of an understanding of how the First Nations Education Policy will be realised.

NACCHO recommends further opportunities to comment on a version of the First Nations Education Policy with more operational details on funding, architecture and interactions with other policies.

NACCHO recommends an accompanying Implementation Plan with specific targeted actions.

System change

NACCHO understands the First Nations Education Policy is taking a student-centred approach and that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people already carry knowledge, ideas and potential. However, we also know that the education system within Australia does not allow all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to thrive.

“Policies, research and teaching often disregard the misalignment between western education structures and First Nations cultural practices, values and beliefs.”⁴

In order to create lasting change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, the system in which they learn needs to be reformed. Reforms are required to build the community controlled sector; increase bilingual education and the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers; address systemic barriers to education; enshrine truth-telling and strengthen commitment to anti-racism.

Building the community controlled education sector

The consultation document does not include the need to build and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled education sector, one of the Priority Reforms of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Community controlled organisations are present across the education sector, from early childhood to schools and registered training organisations. The most effective way of eliminating racism, embedding cultural safety, and improving engagement and partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities is to support and grow the community-controlled education sector.

Community controlled early childhood services

The Connected Beginnings program provides a framework and funding to support the integration of early childhood, maternal and child health, and family support services with schools so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are ready to thrive at school. It is a community-owned and led program that enables Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a say in how activities funded are delivered to their people, in their own places and on their Country. It is ‘place-based’, and prioritises investments that meet the needs and aspirations of community whilst building Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sectors. The program currently supports just under 25,000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 0-5 years through its 50 sites across Australia.⁵

A mid-term evaluation of the program commissioned by the Department of Education and (the then) Department of Health and Aged Care in 2022, found that Connected Beginnings was positively contributing to the four Priority Reforms under Closing the Gap. A cost-benefit analysis undertaken as part of the evaluation demonstrated that **for every dollar invested, potential positive outcomes and impact amounting to between \$2.12 and \$4.24 is likely returned.**⁶

⁴ Australian Education Research Organisation, Cultural responsiveness in education, September 2025, <https://www.edresearch.edu.au/summaries-explainers/research-summaries/cultural-responsiveness-education>.

⁵ Department of Education, Connected Beginnings, January 2025, <https://www.education.gov.au/early-childhood/providers/extrasupport/community-child-care-fund/connected-beginnings>.

⁶ Department of Education, Evaluation of Connected Beginnings: mid-term report 2023, <https://www.education.gov.au/earlychildhood/resources/evaluation-connected-beginnings-midterm-report-2023>.

Community controlled schools

Research shows that community controlled schooling create better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.⁷ They are an important step in overcoming historical educational exclusion. Self-determination is crucial to this.⁸

These schools assist students to learn while building student confidence and deepening cultural connection.⁹ Local staff are employed to help facilitate communication between teachers and students. In a small number of remote communities, schools offer bilingual programs – using multiple languages to teach subject areas such as maths, science, history or geography, rather than only learning language as a subject.¹⁰ The Warlpiri Education and Training Trust (WETT) is controlled by their local community, with school programs designed to meet community-identified education priorities. WETT has been an exemplar in support for community controlled bilingual, bicultural education and lifelong learning programs, earning them the Indigenous Governance Award in 2018.¹¹

School-based VET pathways

School-based VET pathways (VET in Schools and School Based Apprenticeships programs) allow secondary students to gain nationally recognised VET qualifications, skills, and credits towards their senior secondary certificates by completing accredited courses, apprenticeships, or traineeships at school. These programs provide a critical pathway to further education, training, or employment by offering hands-on, industry-specific experience and qualifications while students are still completing their senior schooling.

However, school-based VET pathways could further their uptake among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students through:

- Supporting the innovative traineeship and apprenticeships models being delivered by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled RTO sector. This includes:
 - The Department of Education developing its relationships with Aboriginal Community-Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) to strengthen their role providing VET in schools.
 - Incentivise industry partnerships with the ACCRTO sector to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander apprentices and trainees receive cultural supports.
- Increased funding for schools and employers to incentivise uptake.
- Adding all qualifications in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care and Indigenous Environmental Health training packages to the Australian Apprenticeships Priority List.

Community controlled and First Nations-led Registered Training Organisations

VET is the preferred method for tertiary education for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. However, within the VET sector, availability of culturally appropriate student supports and wrap around support is vital.

ACCRTOs play a vital role in delivering culturally safe, community-led education and training, across a number of sectors (from health to retail and hospitality to the creative arts). They are uniquely positioned to respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander learners by embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge systems, local languages, community priorities into vocational pathways and providing essential wrap around supports

⁷ Hand, S., and Thomas, A., Community-controlled schools create better education outcomes for First Nations students, University of New South Wales, January 2024, <https://www.unsw.edu.au/newsroom/news/2024/01/community-controlled-schools-create-better-education-outcomes-fo>.

⁸ Thomas, A. (2023). 'We wanted to be boss': self-determination, Indigenous governance and the Yipirinya School. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 55(3), 257–273. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220620.2022.2151578>

⁹ Office for the Arts, National Indigenous Languages Report, 2020, <https://www.arts.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/national-indigenous-languages-report-lowres.pdf>.

¹⁰ First Languages Australia, Jintangka marlpa jungu nyinanjaku: What is bilingual education?, November 2015, <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/news/jintangka-marlpa-jungu-nyinanjaku-what-is-bilingual-education?rq=bilingual%20education>.

¹¹ Central Land Council, Warlpiri Education and Training Trust, <https://www.clc.org.au/wett/>.

ACCRTOs are critical enablers of educational pathways. They provide a diversity of both accredited and non-accredited training to ACCHOs and their wider communities to build a skilled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. Central to this is a model of delivery that embeds high levels of holistic, wrap around supports, including:

- continued genuine supervision and mentoring,
- tutoring both on the job and as part of the training, including language, literacy, numeracy and digital support,
- delivery of block training and project-based knowledge and skill assessments,
- wrap around supports that consider everything from students' lived experiences (including negative relationships with education and early school leavers), home/personal situations, family commitments such as childcare needs, and cultural commitments such as Sorry Business and community responsibilities
- travel and accommodation needs.

This approach has been shown as essential to improve course completion rates.¹²

Recent research into the return on social return on investment found that:

- **Every \$1 in ACCRTO economic costs generates \$13.40 in social and economic value** for students, employers and communities.
- **Every \$1 invested in First Nations Owned and Led RTOs generates approximately \$9.40** in social and economic value.¹³

VET to higher education

Data on workforce in organisations funded by the Australian Government under its Indigenous Australians' Health Programme (IAHP) (the majority of which are ACCHOs) shows that the majority of clinical positions requiring higher education (such as doctors/general practitioners, nurses and midwives, dental care and other medical specialists) are filled by non-Indigenous people. There need to be VET to higher education pathways to allow for Aboriginal Health Workers and Aboriginal Health Practitioners to become nurses and doctors, where the ACCRTOs play a critical role in the student wrap around supports.

While there are not currently any community controlled higher education providers, this is an area of potential growth.

Community controlled education: return on investment

It is clear that money spent in community controlled education institutions yields strong returns. For every \$1 invested in:

- the Connected Beginnings early childhood program, potential **positive outcomes and impact amounting to between \$2.12 and \$4.24** is likely returned.¹⁴
- ACCRTO economic costs generates **\$13.40 in social and economic** value for students, employers and communities.¹⁵

¹² Gwynne K, Rojas J, Hines M, Bulkeley K, Irving M, McCowen D, Lincoln M. Customised approaches to vocational education can dramatically improve completion rates of Australian Aboriginal students. Aust Health Rev. 2020 Feb;44(1):7-14. doi: 10.1071/AH18051. PMID: 30867086.

¹³ HSSO, More than Training: The Role, Impact and Future of ACCRTOs and FNL/O RTOs, 2026, <https://hssso.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/HSSO-More-Than-Training-Full-Report.pdf>.

¹⁴ Department of Education, Evaluation of Connected Beginnings: mid-term report 2023, <https://www.education.gov.au/earlychildhood/resources/evaluation-connected-beginnings-midterm-report-2023>.

¹⁵ HSSO, More than Training: The Role, Impact and Future of ACCRTOs and FNL/O RTOs, 2026, <https://hssso.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/HSSO-More-Than-Training-Full-Report.pdf>.

- First Nations Owned and Led RTOs **generates approximately \$9.40** in social and economic value.¹⁶

The economic impact of community controlled schooling has not been analysed, however it is likely that it would also be economically beneficial.

NACCHO recommends clear actions to grow the community-controlled sector across early childhood, schooling and tertiary education, in line with Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Bilingual education

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, language is crucial in connection to land, culture and ancestors.¹⁷ The importance of language is echoed in the National Agreement on Closing the Gap's Target 16 – by 2031, there is a sustained increase in the number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

The *Don't take it as read* report that came out of the **Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance** notes that “bilingual education is backed up by international and local research and evidence of success. This research shows that building a child's skills in a first or home language can provide the best foundation for the learning of English language and literacy.”¹⁸

A good example of this is happening in north-east Arnhem Land in Yirrkala community, where kids learn 'both ways' - in Yolngu and English. You might have seen that last year, they had eight students graduate year 12 with university entry-level scores. The first time this has happened. Those kids have plans for careers in medicine, teaching and the arts.¹⁹

NACCHO recommends bilingual schooling is prioritised and funded for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

NACCHO recommends further investment in cultural and language programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching workforce

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are underrepresented in the teaching workforce – with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers accounting for 1.3% of total registered teachers (while Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students make up 6% of all students nationally).²⁰

¹⁶ HSSO, More than Training: The Role, Impact and Future of ACCRTOs and FNL/O RTOs, 2026, <https://hssso.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/07/HSSO-More-Than-Training-Full-Report.pdf>.

¹⁷ First Languages Australia, Why maintain our languages?, <https://www.firstlanguages.org.au/why-maintain-our-languages>.

¹⁸ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Don't take it as read: Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance, March 2022, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024806/toc_pdf/Don'ttakeitasread.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

¹⁹ Pat Turner providing evidence to the Inquiry into Adult literacy and its importance.

²⁰ Earp, J., Research news: Boosting the number of First Nations school teachers, Teacher Magazine, 27 February 2025, <https://www.teachermagazine.com.au/en/articles/research-news-boosting-the-number-of-first-nations-school-teachers>.

Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers has a positive impact on attendance rates, student outcomes and connections between schools and their communities.²¹ Research in the Northern Territory found that:

Aboriginal teachers are central to educational equity and cultural inclusion. In schools they contribute to:

- *improved student engagement and achievement*
- *positive identity development and self-esteem*
- *culturally responsive teaching practices that benefit all students and serve as examples to non-Aboriginal peers.*²²

Increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators, teachers, trainers, tutors and lecturers should be a priority. Previous programs such as the More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Teachers Initiative (MATSI) have aimed to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers. However, after 4 years of funding, it is unclear whether this program has continued.

NACCHO runs a program deliver culturally safe training for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants to undertake the Certificate IV in Training and Assessment and the Diploma of Vocational Education and Training, in order to ensure there are more qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander educators in the Vocational Education and Training (VET) Sector. This work in practice is a 'workforce multiplier' – with ripple effects across the VET sector as trainers return to their own communities, continue training and providing place-based options for students. In the words of NACCHO CEO, Dawn Casey, "When First Nations educators lead training, we strengthen the entire system and create lasting opportunities for future generations."²³

NACCHO recommends explicit actions to grow the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching workforce.

Addressing systemic barriers

Australia has a long history of housing inequity, particularly affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A history of dispossession, marginalisation, racism and the impact of Government policies since colonisation has resulted in profound inequity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This has been reinforced and entrenched by ongoing experiences of structural and interpersonal racism, discrimination, dispossession of culture, land and language, and intergenerational trauma.

*Indigenous Australians remain the most disadvantaged and marginalised group in Australia. On all the standard indicators of poverty and disadvantage, Indigenous people emerge as the most socially and economically deprived.*²⁴

Factors such as access to childcare appropriate, affordable housing impact whether a student can continue their studies. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to become mothers

²¹ House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment, Education and Training, Don't take it as read: Inquiry into adult literacy and its importance, March 2022, https://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/download/committees/reportrep/024806/toc_pdf/Don'ttakeitasread.pdf;fileType=application%2Fpdf.

²² Woodroffe, T., Increasing the number of Aboriginal teachers in the Northern Territory: Planning for the future, Australian Centre for Student Equity and Success, 2025, <https://www.acses.edu.au/app/uploads/2025/10/Woodroffe-T-2025-Increasing-the-number-of-Aboriginal-teachers-in-the-Northern-Territory.pdf>.

²³ Ministers' Media Centre, Joint Media Release: Building the First Nations VET workforce to support Australia's skills future, The Hon Andrew Giles MP and Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, 17 March 2026, <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/giles/building-first-nations-vet-workforce-support-australias-skills-future>.

²⁴ Parliament of Australia, Inquiry into Poverty and Financial Hardship, 2003, https://www.aph.gov.au/parliamentary_business/committees/senate/community_affairs/completed_inquiries/2002-04/poverty/report/index

earlier in life.²⁵ Additionally, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have community caring responsibilities outside of their own biological children. This means that often accommodation meant for students does not adequately cater for the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students – barring them from studying.

A survey of undergraduate students considering and early departure from their studies found that top issues for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students include financial difficulties, mental health, difficulty with study workload and study/life balance.²⁶ There are noticeable differences between factors affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and non-Indigenous students.

NACCHO recommends targeted actions to address systemic barriers, including racism, which prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from studying.

Strengthening commitment to anti-racism

The consultation summary notes the importance of anti-racism does not explicitly commit to the [National Anti-Racism Framework](#). Resources such as the Australian High school Anti-Racism Kit, the AIATSIS Education Strategy 2021-2025 and the Know Your Country initiative provide examples of initiatives that can be used to build schools' cultural competency and racial literacy.²⁷

NACCHO recommends explicit commitment to the National Anti-Racism Framework.

Intersectionality

A person's identity, and experience of, for example, disability, can affect their interactions with the education system. NACCHO notes the compounding impact of intersectionality and the need for approaches to be grounded in cultural safety and cultural appropriateness. There need to be appropriate supports for all learners to thrive. Culture is a key protective factor and can help in service delivery, and build strength in communities.^{28a}

²⁵ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and babies, October 2023, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/mothers-babies/indigenous-mothers-babies/contents/demographics/maternal-age>.

²⁶ Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching, Student Experience Survey 2024 Results, <https://www.qilt.edu.au/surveys/Data-Visualisation/ses>.

²⁷ Australian Human Rights Commission, Racism. It stops with me: Can I be sure my child won't experience racism at school?, <https://itstopswithme.humanrights.gov.au/ask-yourself-hard-questions/question-and-context/can-i-be-sure-my-child-wont-experience-racism-school>.

²⁸ Hunter, S.-A., Skouteris, H., & Morris, H. (2021). A Conceptual Model of Protective Factors Within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture That Build Strength. *Journal of Cross-Cultural Psychology*, 52(8-9), 726-751. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00220221211046310>.