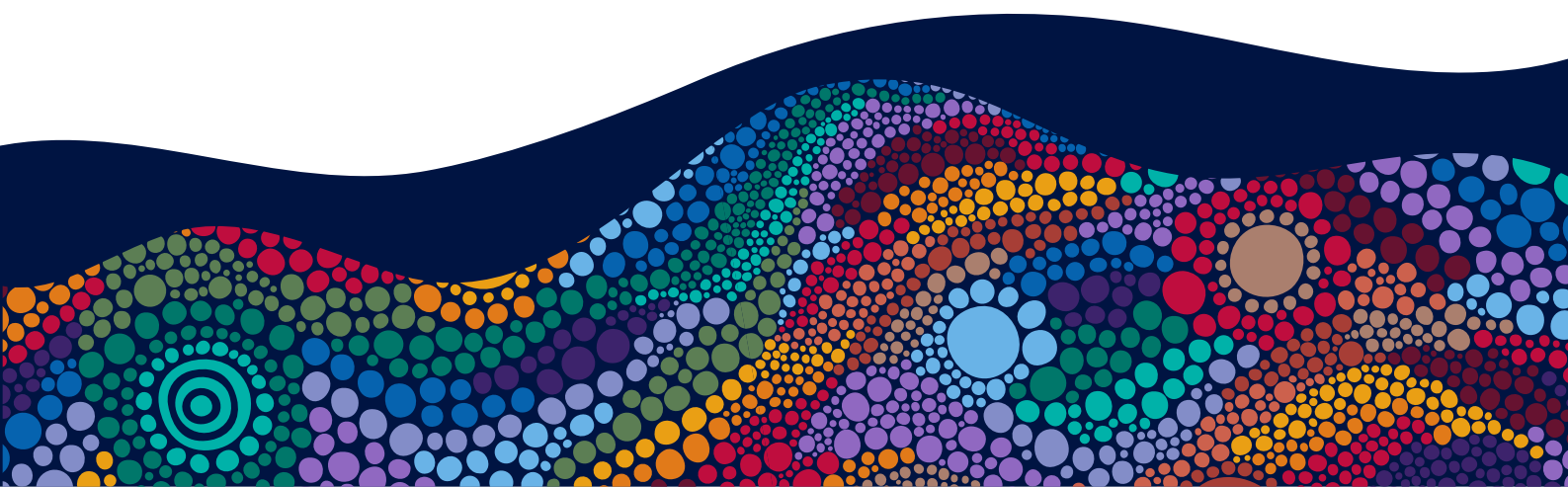


Have your say on the Tertiary Roadmap

Submission to Australian Tertiary Education
Commission

July 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.

Enquiries about this submission should be directed to:

NACCHO

Level 5, 2 Constitution Avenue

Canberra City ACT 2601

Telephone: 02 6246 9300

Email: policy@naccho.org.au

Website: naccho.org.au



Recommendations

NACCHO recommends:

- 1 Any interventions to address tertiary education align with the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform Areas.
- 2 A coordinated approach to improving access to education and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that spans across all levels of government.
- 3 The ATEC facilitates the inclusion of both learning and holistic support roles embedded within the university and VET systems, learning from the successes of ACCRTO student support staff and clinical educators.
- 4 The ATEC commits to growing the community controlled/ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Registered Training Organisation sector.
- 5 The ATEC emphasises the need for culturally safe training environments in mainstream training providers.
- 6 ACCRTOs are funded in the same way as TAFEs under the National Skills Agreement – including provision of operational funding and loadings for delivery to high needs students and remoteness.
- 7 The ATEC prioritises the development of stronger pathways from VET qualifications into higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.
- 8 A comprehensive review of higher education qualifications, identifying those that could potentially provide early exit with VET qualifications.
- 9 Restructuring registered nursing qualifications to allow for early exit with enrolled nurse qualifications.
- 10 Amendments to existing of RPL and credit transfer policies to nationally streamline and harmonise.
- 11 Micro-credential needs are reviewed and addressed based on health workforce plans and initiatives at state, regional and local levels. This will assist in building pathways.

Acknowledgements

NACCHO welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Tertiary Education Commission on its Tertiary Roadmap. NACCHO supports the 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.

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.

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’¹

NACCHO recommends any interventions to address tertiary education align with the National Agreement and its four Priority Reform Areas.

Incorporation and alignment with the National Agreement

The newly established Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC) must align with and specifically reference the National Agreement and the four Priority Reforms. There are important Targets under Closing the Gap² that the ATEC must contribute to, specifically:

- **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%.
- **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%.

ATEC’s website states they will “will seek to positively contribute towards [these] Closing the Gap targets”³, however this choice of wording lacks commitment. Similarly, the Discussion paper mentions ‘First Nations learners’ and graduates several times, however there is no mention of critical levers for ensuring the tertiary education system is appropriate for these students – such as explicit commitment to the National Agreement and its Priority Reforms.

This is another missed opportunity to improve outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While it minimises effort and cost to government, it continues to deny Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access, opportunity and self-determination. It is indicative of government agencies failing to rise to the challenge of Priority Reform 3 to fundamentally change the way they do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and organisations.

Background

The proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have completed a tertiary qualification as their highest educational attainment has been steadily rising over the last two decades, and based on the 2021 Census, 47% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25–34 had completed a tertiary qualification. This proportion decreases however based on remoteness – the more remote the area, the lower the completion rate of tertiary qualifications (57% in Major cities to 17% in Very remote areas).⁴

¹ 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>.

² Closing the Gap, National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Socio-economic Targets, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/nationalagreement-closing-the-gap/7-difference/b-targets>.

³ Australian Tertiary Education Commission (ATEC), First Nations, <https://www.atec.gov.au/what-we-do/first-nations>.

⁴ Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), Australia’s Welfare: Education of First Nations people, 16 October 2025, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/indigenous-education-and-skills>.

The Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) workforce plays a central role in the provision of culturally safe, trauma-informed care primary health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Our sector is the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people nationally across comprehensive primary healthcare and human services such as disability, aged care and mental health. However, ACCHOs are currently facing critical workforce shortages, which are exacerbated in remote areas.

Although Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are employed in the health and care sector more than any other industry, they remain underrepresented. In the 2021 Census, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people represented just 1.8% of the health workforce, despite being 3.4% of the Australian population (3.2% of the working age population).⁵

NACCHO supports a holistic, whole-of-government approach that brings together multiple departments and agencies to address systemic barriers and expand access to culturally safe education and employment pathways. This includes embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led strategies across health, education, skills, and regional development portfolios, and ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities are active partners in policy design and implementation.

A coordinated approach will enable governments to leverage existing investments, avoid duplication, and scale successful models—particularly those led by ACCOs and ACCHOs. It will also strengthen accountability and ensure that Closing the Gap targets are embedded across all relevant workforce and productivity reforms.

NACCHO recommends a coordinated approach to improving access to education and employment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that spans across all levels of government.

Cultural safety

Cultural safety is critical for improving tertiary enrolments and completions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, and structural change is required to deliver this. Systemic racism within the Vocational Education and Training (VET) and university sectors must be addressed and training needs to be tailored to the needs and priorities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Cultural knowledge held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students must be given equal value to other areas of knowledge.

Cultural safety and student success is an organisation-wide responsibility.⁶ It must be led from the top and have genuine oversight through national governance structures. Locally contextualised cultural safety training for all staff is critical: from the Vice Chancellor and Executive to academic and professional staff. Cultural safety must be embedded in organisational culture – this is critical to developing and supporting culturally safe practice and environments. Without a supportive organisational leadership and culture, training for client-facing or senior staff alone is unlikely to deliver culturally safe learning environments. The University of Newcastle's Cultural Capability Framework 2020-2025⁷ is an excellent example of how cultural safety training can be supported across the workforce.

As defined in the National Agreement:

Cultural safety is about overcoming the power imbalances of places, people and policies that occur between the majority non-Indigenous position and the minority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person so that there is no assault, challenge or denial of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person's identity, of who they are and what they need. Cultural safety is met through actions from the majority position which recognise, respect, and nurture the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

⁵ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2021, Tablebuilder Microdata, extracted June 2026. Note: 'Health workforce' defined as INDP variables Q85 Medical and Other Health Care Services and Q24 Hospitals.

⁶ Taylor, K., First Nations students need culturally safe spaces at their universities, The Conversation, 4 February 2022, <https://theconversation.com/first-nations-students-need-culturally-safe-spaces-at-their-universities-175521>.

⁷ University of Newcastle, Cultural knowledge and understanding: Building a culturally responsive environment, <https://www.newcastle.edu.au/our-uni/indigenous-collaboration/fostering-cultural-competency>.

Only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.⁸

Critical to the definition above, and consistent with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, is the understanding that only the person who is the recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.

This means, the list of activities or actions a VET provider or university has undertaken to improve cultural safety does not determine whether cultural safety has been achieved for students and staff, neither does data on retention, or attrition.⁹ Cultural safety is key to creating supportive learning environments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The need to offer additional support to students at key transition points is well-established.

Research by Gwynne et al shows strong evidence that the provision of wrap-around supports result in improving completion rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the VET context.¹⁰ This research sought to validate identified enablers from preregistration tertiary nursing students to the VET context. The research validated the five previously identified enablers, and identified a further two:

- 1 Student motivation to undertake and complete study
- 2 Teachers' understanding of Aboriginal cultures and their ability to translate this into their teaching methods
- 3 Students' sense of connection to other people, including students, support staff and teachers, and belonging to the training place
- 4 Strong commitment by the institution to encouraging Aboriginal students to enrol and complete their studies
- 5 Support of the family of the student undertaking study and the family seeking to understand the associated challenges
- 6 NEW – support of the student's employer to release them to undertake study
- 7 NEW – continuous improvement - listening to feedback and making improvements.

Focussing on these enablers delivered a completion rate of 30 of 31 students (96.8%). Such approaches would be well considered in the higher education context.

To adequately support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be successful in higher education, incentives such as scholarships and access to culturally safe support services, including mentoring and tutoring, are required. Cultural safety considerations are also critical in courses that involve supervision and placements and must be addressed explicitly, as culturally unsafe placement environments remain a significant factor contributing to student attrition across the sector.

NACCHO recommends the ATEC facilitates the inclusion of both learning and holistic support roles embedded within the university and VET systems, learning from the successes of ACCRTO student support staff and clinical educators.

NACCHO recommends the ATEC commits to growing the / Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and community controlled Registered Training Organisation sector.

⁸ Closing the Gap, National Agreement on Closing the Gap: Definitions, <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement/national-agreement-closing-the-gap/12-definitions>.

⁹ Universities Australia, Indigenous Strategy annual report, May 2022 https://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/UA_Indigenous_Strategy_Annual_Report_May-2022.pdf.

¹⁰ 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

NACCHO recommends the ATEC emphasises the need for culturally safe training environments in mainstream training providers.

The Vocational Education and Training sector

Vocational Education and Training (VET) is the sector of choice for post-school education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. VET training provides important entry-level pathways and skill-set development for local people, particularly in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including Aboriginal Health Workers and Health Practitioners who play an important public health role. Moreover, VET qualifications offer excellent work ready pathways and provide opportunities to build multidisciplinary teams via upskilling. However, the sector also suffers poor retention and completion rates particularly in mainstream providers.

One of the Discussion Paper's questions is "What does the VET sector do well that you would like to see adopted in higher education?". There are a number of aspects of the VET sector, including:

- Having community controlled/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) which can provide place based and culturally appropriate education
- Wrap around student support (particularly in Aboriginal Community Controlled RTOs, also called ACCRTOs)
- The ability to provide Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) – although this system is not perfect.

NACCHO's VET sector workforce development

NACCHO running several programs to increase the VET-qualified ACCHO workforce through several programs.

- NACCHO's **First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program** is designed to address the critical shortage of qualified Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) and Aboriginal Health Practitioners (AHPs) within the ACCHO sector. Recognising the importance of strong training pathways, the program embeds additional wrap-around support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, aiming to improve course completion rates and ease the transition of new graduates into the workforce.¹¹
- NACCHO's **Trainer and Assessor Program**, delivered in partnership with the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations and MRWED Training and Assessment, provides culturally appropriate wrap around supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students studying their TAE qualification – strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander capability in the VET sector.¹²

These programs all serve to build the VET qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce in ACCHOs. However, feedback from the sector has highlighted the need for university pathway. This is particularly true for the First Nations Health Worker Traineeship Program – where at least 15% of trainees have expressed interest in or commenced within the university sector aspiring to become nurses, allied health professionals and doctors.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Registered Training Organisations

Aboriginal Community-Controlled Registered Training Organisations (ACCRTOs) deliver culturally contextualised training in a culturally safe environment. They also provide a range of social, cultural, educational and wellbeing supports to their students. They offer flexibility in delivery and assessment to support their students where they are and help them to complete their program of study. As such, they are

¹¹ NACCHO, Workforce and Training, <https://www.naccho.org.au/workforce-training/>.

¹² Ministers of the Employment and Workplace Relations Portfolio, Joint Media Release: Building the First Nations VET workforce to support Australia's skills future, 17 March 2026, <https://ministers.dewr.gov.au/giles/building-first-nations-vet-workforce-support-australias-skills-future>.

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. All of this contributes to significantly better retention and completion rates with ACCRTOs maintaining completion rates above 70%, when compared to TAFEs.¹³

ACCRTOs are critical enablers of regional workforce development and educational pathways, and to skilled-workforce growth. 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 support in language, literacy, numeracy and digital skills,
- block training and project-based 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.

Student support and its associated roles are key to providing culturally safe training environments, like those offered by ACCRTOs, and is proven to increase participation, retention, and workforce readiness. This approach has been shown as essential to improve course completion rates.¹⁴

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 ACCRTOs 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.

Critically, building genuine partnerships with the ACCRTO sector is pivotal to ensure there are supportive and clearly articulated education pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students within a health context.

NACCHO recommends ACCRTOs are funded in a similar way as TAFEs under the National Skills Agreement – including provision of operational funding and loadings for delivery to high needs students and remoteness.

VET to higher education pathways

VET is still perceived by some as lesser than higher education, yet it offers valuable and rewarding pathways and career options, particularly in the health sector. Stronger pathways from VET qualifications into higher education are required if we are to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote area nurses, registered nurses, General Practitioners and allied health staff across the ACCHO sector. Currently,

¹³ NACCHO, Build Today Lead Tomorrow: ACCRTO Implementation Plan: A ten-year strategy to ensure sustainable, high-quality Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Registered Training Organisations 2024–2034, https://www.naccho.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/NACCHO_WorkforceTraining_ImplementationPlan_250519.pdf.

¹⁴ 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.

¹⁵ Department of Employment and Workplace Relations, National Skills Agreement, December 2024, <https://www.dewr.gov.au/national-skills-agreement>.

just 1.6% of registered nurses in Australia identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and of more than 124,000 Medical Practitioners, only 797 are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander – around 0.6%.¹⁶

There is currently work underway to develop a pathway for AHPs to nursing. ACCHOs have a genuine interest in supporting senior AHW and AWP staff who wish to access higher education, to specialise or move into higher paid professional roles, including nursing and medicine, or expand into allied health, health promotion or management. NACCHO welcomes the announcement of demand driven funding in higher education for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students from 2024, which should further boost enrolments. However, the low number of successful completions reflects the fact the university system isn't working for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Health qualifications and careers span both the VET and higher education sectors and are therefore ideal for the creation of more integrated pathways. Nationally consistent pathway articulation from VET into higher education starting at Cert IV level are needed. A literature review described VET to higher education pathways as convoluted – “it is critical to streamline those in order to increase Indigenous [higher education] participation.”¹⁷

For these pathways to be successful the higher education sector needs a stronger understanding of VET training packages and how to map units of competency and work experience for credit transfer at the university level. More streamlined credit transfer and recognition of prior learning (RPL) processes are key to this.

NACCHO recommends the ATEC prioritises the development of stronger pathways from VET qualifications into higher education for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

Early exit

The ATEC is considering VET to higher education pathways. However, there remains a need to consider higher education to VET pathways – particularly, consideration of early exit pathways. This is particularly true in dual sector universities (which provide VET and higher education qualifications). This may require restructuring of some higher education qualifications to ensure they can facilitate early exits with VET qualifications.

NACCHO recommends a comprehensive review of higher education qualifications, identifying those that could potentially provide early exit with VET qualifications.

For example, we have heard from our sector that there is need for an early exit mechanism for students studying to become a registered nurse (higher education) to exit early, but still obtain an enrolled nurse (VET diploma) qualification. This would require coordination and potential redesign of the Bachelor of Nursing qualification to ensure it aligns with VET quals.

NACCHO recommends Restructuring registered nursing qualifications to allow for early exit with enrolled nurse qualifications.

Recognition of prior learning and credit transfer

A national system is required, which allows people to cross institutions easily and have consistency in RPL processes, particularly across the university sector. Genuine consideration needs to be given to strong RPL process as a way of assessing lived experience, work experience and other learning. There must be a

¹⁶ Data provided to NACCHO from Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2023.

¹⁷ Frawley, J., Smith, J. A., Gunstone, A., Pechenkina, E., Ludwig, W., & Stewart, A. (2017). Indigenous VET to Higher Education pathways and transitions: A literature review. Access: *Critical Explorations of Equity in Higher Education*, 4(1), 34–54. <https://novaojs.newcastle.edu.au/ceehe/index.php/iswp/article/view/45>.

consistent approach adapted that is agreed across jurisdictions and training organisation including TAFE, other RTOs and the university sector to ensure RPL and credit transfer is utilised.

- RPL is already legislated within the RTO Standards (2025) however this is no incentive for the training sector to use RPL
- Linkage to Australia Tertiary Education Commission
- Utilising the Unique Student Identifier model – providing transcripts to prior learnings – accessibility to training providers?

By utilising an assessment-based approach for RPL students undertaking qualifications can demonstrate their transferrable skills, especially in circumstances where their employer may not be able to provide evidence requirements. Through an RPL matrix approach where additional requirements are added to the scope of a qualification through a training package upgrade, students may be able to undertake learning and assessment for one part of a Unit of Competency rather than attend the full block of learning.

Credit transfer & RPL are essential elements of the [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Care Traineeship Framework](#) developed by NACCHO. In partnership with the ACCRTO sector's national community of practice and the Human Skills Services Organisation (HSSO), NACCHO have designed an RPL Toolkit for a number of core units in the HLT Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care training package. This toolkit provides participating ACCRTOs with a nationally consistent approach to applying RPL.

There are a number of principles from the Framework that could be applied across the VET and university sectors. Students accessing training must be able to have their skills and experience recognised, prior to undertaking a full qualification. This model must be student-centred and is geared towards support and empowerment. Qualifications can be broken into skill sets which can be built upon leading to formal qualifications and moving into career specialisation pathways.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students it is critical to ensure that cultural safety is embedded into these tools.

Pathways may also include structured or a series of less structured jobs and education experiences that help people acquire the skills, knowledge, and experience necessary to enter or progress within the workforce. These pathways aim to align a person's interests and aspirations with relevant career opportunities while addressing the needs of employers, and in the case of some occupations, regulators.

Workforce development pathways identify and highlight the systematic and holistic approaches available for a person to acquire the necessary skills, education, experience, and support to achieve their career goals. This approach emphasises the importance of personal and professional growth, adaptability, and lifelong learning.

Skills assessment

To gain an understanding of a person's existing skills, knowledge, experience, aptitudes, and interests. Evaluation and identification of existing strengths and areas for improvement can help guide a person toward possible career options. Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) is a fundamental component.

Career exploration

The concept of development pathways emphasises the importance of career exploration to allow people to understand different job roles, and potential growth opportunities. This exploration may involve job shadowing, conversations with colleagues, work placement or internships, enabling people to make informed decisions about their interest and suitability for future career paths.

Industry-recognised credentials

Many pathways offer the opportunity to earn industry-recognised credentials or certifications. These credentials validate a person's skills and competence in a particular field, enhancing their employability and demonstrating their commitment to professional development.

Guidance

Support or guidance from experienced professionals play a vital role in workforce development pathways.

Work-based learning

The best development pathways include work-based learning experiences. These experiences allow a person to apply their knowledge in real-world settings, gain practical experience, and establish valuable connections within the industry.

Career advancement

Workforce development pathways address not only entry-level positions but also opportunities for career advancement. They provide people with a clear roadmap for progressing within their chosen field, outlining the skills, experience, and additional training required to move up the career ladder through both non-accredited and accredited training pipelines. Non-accredited training can link directly to skills based assessments for formal qualifications at both tertiary levels.

Lifelong learning

The concept of workforce development pathways emphasises the importance of continuous learning and adaptability. In today's rapidly changing job market, people are encouraged to embrace lifelong learning, acquire new skills, and stay updated with emerging trends and technologies. This approach also encourages employers to consider the ongoing development needs their existing workforce. Including but not limited to refresher training, skills-gap training and continuous professional development.

NACCHO recommends amendments to existing of RPL and credit transfer policies to nationally streamline and harmonise.

NACCHO recommends micro-credential needs are reviewed and addressed based on health workforce plans and initiatives at state, regional and local levels. This will assist in building pathways.