



# Northern Health

## Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025-27





# Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which our health service is built, those of the Taungurung and Wurundjeri people, and we acknowledge their continuing connection to land, waters and community.

Northern Health celebrates, values and includes people of all backgrounds, genders, sexualities, cultures, bodies and abilities.





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# Background

Northern Health is the major provider of acute, maternity, sub-acute, mental health, specialist, community and home-based services in Melbourne's rapidly growing outer north. It comprises of five major campuses working together to provide a unique mix of services including medical, surgical, emergency, intensive and coronary care, paediatrics, women's and maternal health, allied health, mental health, aged care, palliative care, and rehabilitation programs.

Northern Health operates in an area of significant cultural diversity, and we believe cultural diversity enriches us as a health service and as a community. Our mission is to provide exceptional care to every consumer regardless of ethnicity and the ability to speak English, as clearly outlined in the Northern Health Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Healthcare procedure.

Northern Health is committed to delivering culturally responsive care to our diverse community, which comprises people from over 185 countries, speaking more than 107 languages, and following over 90 different religions or beliefs. We value equity and strive to continually improve our responsiveness to diversity so that linguistic, religious and other cultural needs of patients is respected and upheld.

The Northern Health Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025-2027 builds on our ongoing efforts to create an inclusive and respectful healthcare environment for all. The Plan is grounded in the Centre of Culture, Ethnicity and Health's framework for cultural competence, which defines cultural competence as 'a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or among professionals; enabling that system, agency or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.'

Furthermore, the Plan is based on the understanding that cultural responsiveness is crucial to providing equitable, high-quality healthcare to our community. By embracing cultural responsiveness, we aim to:

- Enhance the quality and accessibility of our healthcare services for all community members
- Reduce health disparities among different cultural groups
- Strengthen our relationships with diverse communities
- Empower staff to provide culturally safe and effective care.

The Plan also acknowledges that cultural responsiveness is a continuous journey requiring ongoing commitment, critical reflection, and awareness of personal cultures, power differences, and historical contexts shaping individual health experiences.



As Northern Health serves a rapidly growing population projected to increase significantly by 2036, the Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025-2027 will guide efforts to ensure we remain at the forefront of culturally responsive, equitable, and high-quality healthcare service delivery for our diverse community.

Achieving true cultural responsiveness is a collective effort. We call upon every member of our organisation to embrace and engage in this plan and contribute to creating a more inclusive and responsive workplace.

Thank you for your commitment to this vital initiative. We look forward to implementing our Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025-27 and the positive impact it will have.

# Governance of the Plan

## 1. Introduction of the Cultural Responsiveness Plan Subcommittee

The Cultural Responsiveness Plan Subcommittee is committed to aligning healthcare services with the needs of a culturally diverse community. Its mission focuses on enhancing the cultural competence of the organisation and empowering the workforce by promoting the inclusion of individuals from diverse backgrounds. By valuing the unique perspectives, experiences, and skills of both consumers and staff, the Subcommittee aims to ensure Northern Health delivers culturally appropriate and safe patient care. The Subcommittee leads and monitors the implementation of this plan.

## 2. Development of the Cultural Responsiveness Plan

A working group was formed to develop the pillars of this plan through consultation with frontline clinicians of varying disciplines and consumer representatives. The Cultural Responsiveness Plan Subcommittee endorsed the Plan before it sought endorsement from the Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Steering Committee. Following endorsement from the EDI Steering Committee, the plan was submitted to the Executives and the Board of Northern Health for final endorsement.



# Northern Health Values

**safe**kindtogether

At Northern Health, our commitment to cultural responsiveness aligns with our core values of being safe, kind, and together. We are dedicated to creating a healthcare environment where every patient feels secure, respected, and valued. Our vision is to build a culturally responsive organisation that not only meets the diverse needs of our patients but also fosters a sense of belonging and community among our staff. By prioritising safety, we ensure that all interactions are free from bias and discrimination, creating a space where everyone can receive care with dignity. Through kindness, we approach each patient and colleague with empathy and recognise the unique cultural backgrounds that shape their experiences. And by working together, we harness the collective strength of our diverse team to innovate and improve the quality of care we provide.

The Cultural Responsiveness plan is a testament to these values. It guides us in developing cultural competence across all levels of our organisation, ensuring that we deliver care that is not only effective but also compassionate and inclusive. The Cultural Responsiveness Plan is a commitment to foster cultural competence, enhance patient outcomes, and create a more inclusive environment for all. It is about delivering truly patient-centered care that honours the diversity of our community.





# Pillars of the Northern Health Cultural Responsiveness Plan

## Relationships

Equity of services for all

Collaborate for lived experience representation

Build trust with all

## Respect

Increase staff understanding of cultural competence

Embrace the richness of multicultural communities

Recognition and inclusivity

## Opportunity

Seek via consumers' feedback

Capitalise on current resources

Strengthen community engagement

## Governance

Ensure culturally competent and safe service delivery

Monitor progress

Enhance workforce capability and inclusive leadership

# Relationships

## Ensure equity of services for all patients

- Continue to ensure certified interpreting and translation services are accessible for effective communication
- Continue to accommodate preferences, such as the provision of culturally appropriate meals and catering for religious specific requirements (vegetarian, Halal, Kosher), or specific gender requests when booking interpreters
- Identify barriers faced by consumers with multicultural backgrounds in accessing healthcare services via regular and formal patient and staff feedback; leveraging existing organisation survey data or new focused patient surveys environment.

## Collaborate with community members for capacity building and encourage lived experience representation

- Increase culturally diverse representation in Northern Health committees to promote intersectionality
- Establish new and strengthen existing partnerships with local organisations and faith communities
- Provide opportunities for community members to share their lived experience with clinicians and staff

## Build trust with consumers from multicultural backgrounds

- In different languages, communicate expectations on healthcare services with consumers and provide upfront information in patient areas such as our Emergency Department
- Offer hospital tours (for example in maternity services)
- Promote sharing of lived experience from multicultural consumers while accessing healthcare services



# Respect

## Increase staff awareness and understanding of cultural competence

- Promote cultural competence training and continue to expand on the existing modules
- Utilise feedback from staff survey to review cultural learning needs within the organisation
- Encourage dialogue about cultural differences through events such as Harmony Day that allow staff to share experiences, ask questions, and learn from one another in a safe environment.

## Embrace and respect the richness of multicultural communities

- Continue to host community cultural events or awareness days (Cultural Diversity Week) that highlight the traditions, values, and contributions of various cultural groups within the community.
- Highlight the importance of engaging multicultural consumers in consultation for projects and programs conducted within the organisation
- Recognise and celebrate cultural holidays and promote them to staff and consumers
- Respect and embrace the diverse religious needs of both patients and staff, ensuring appropriate considerations are integrated into care and workplace practices

## Recognise the diversity of staff and consumers, creating a more inclusive atmosphere

- Create a welcoming space for multicultural community members
- Promote and celebrate the strength and diversity of staff by encouraging staff to share their heritage through food, stories, and traditions
- Create an environment that accommodates cultural and religious needs, such as sacred space for staff, consumers and their families



# Opportunity

## Seek improvement opportunities via consumers' feedback

- Review patient experience surveys and use feedback to inform planning, development and evaluation of services
- Consult with consumers from multicultural backgrounds when reviewing written materials such as patient information brochures
- Provide opportunities for the community to submit feedback, complaints and/or further engagement

## Capitalise on current resources

- Where staff consent, increase the visibility of the languages spoken by staff and/or volunteers, with the aim to support patients from diverse backgrounds in navigating the health system (e.g. offer directions/remind of appointments/relay any non-clinically related information in the spoken language)
- Investigate the potential for creating multicultural library resources for staff and consumers
- Explore the opportunity to develop a multilingual resource platform for consumers to access translated health information and promote the platform on the NH website
- Explore research opportunities to develop new and/or improve initiatives and resources for cultural responsiveness
- Explore opportunities to recruit bi-lingual volunteers

## Strengthen community engagement

- Actively seek opportunities to participate in local community events and engage with the diverse communities
- Leverage Northern Health social media platforms to engage with different community groups, for example sharing stories and information about services in multiple languages to ensure accessibility and engagement
- Facilitate health education programs in the most commonly spoken languages of the catchment area (i.e. Pain management education, Musculoskeletal Wellness group, Antenatal mothers' group)



## Ensure health services are delivered in a culturally competent and safe manner

- Ongoing review of policies and procedures that improve health equity
- Sustain a dynamic and inclusive cultural diversity committee, comprising staff members from various cultural backgrounds and consumer advocates representing diverse communities
- Support the development of organisational cultural competence and allocate resources as required
- Support staff to attend cultural competence training and highlight the value (i.e. NH services a culturally diverse catchment, hence cultural competence is important in delivering healthcare services)
- Align Northern Health's service delivery with accreditation standards

## Track and monitor progress in cultural responsiveness strategies

- Establish a working group to assist the implementation of the cultural responsiveness plan, and to regularly monitor and evaluate achievements in cultural responsiveness
- Facilitate the participation of culturally and linguistically diverse consumers in research studies led by Northern Health
- Continue to monitor community profile and changing demographics to ensure signage and language services are responding to the evolving needs

## Enhance workforce capability and inclusive leadership

- Promote peer-led training sessions where staff can share their expertise on cultural competence and inclusive practices, leveraging existing knowledge within the workforce. This can be done across sites.
- Implement regular feedback mechanisms that enable staff to provide input on leadership practices and inclusivity within the organisation, ensuring that all voices are heard and considered in decision-making processes
- Utilise existing team meetings and internal communication channels to regularly discuss and promote inclusive leadership practices and share success stories of cultural responsiveness within the organisation



# Thank you and Acknowledgments

The Cultural Responsiveness Plan Subcommittee extends its sincere gratitude to the members of the Cultural Responsiveness Working Group for their dedication, time, and thoughtful contributions in shaping the **Cultural Responsiveness Plan 2025–27**. We also appreciate the staff members who provided guidance, as well as the staff and consumers who participated in consultations and workshops, helping to bring the ideas in this plan to life.

We look forward to implementing the plan and seeing its positive impact in fostering an inclusive and respectful healthcare environment for all. Through this, we will continue strengthening Northern Health's cultural competence and advancing our vision of a healthier community.

