



WA Country Health Service Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014–2018



WA Country Health Service would like to respectfully acknowledge the Elders past and present of this country in which we live and share. WACHS acknowledges the ongoing contribution of Traditional Owners as caretakers to their country and communities.



CEO message

I am pleased to endorse the WA Country Health Service (WACHS) Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014–2018.

The strategy will guide WACHS for the next four years to maintain and build on past achievements in developing and implementing key initiatives to improve Aboriginal employment practices.

The strategy acknowledges the unique skills and knowledge that Aboriginal employees bring to bridge the cultural gap to improve access to our health services for our most 'at risk' clients – Aboriginal people.

WACHS is committed to increasing and retaining our Aboriginal workforce and whilst there are challenges in achieving this outcome there are clearly many opportunities as outlined in this strategy, for all staff to promote WACHS as a workplace of choice for Aboriginal people.



A stylized, handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jeff Moffet'.

Jeff Moffet
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER





Vision

Improved health outcomes for Aboriginal people through the provision of culturally respectful and competent services throughout the WA Country Health Service.

Introduction

The WA Country Health Service (WACHS) Aboriginal Employment Strategy (AES) 2014-2018 is underpinned by the *WA Country Health Service Strategic Priorities 2013-2015*. The WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2018 builds on past successes and describes how WACHS will continue to address key health challenges in its regions. This includes improving the health of Aboriginal people by supporting workforce excellence and stability.

The WACHS AES 2014-2018 will consolidate, expand and enhance the work established under the previous strategy and will reinforce WACHS's commitment to increasing and retaining its Aboriginal workforce. WACHS recognises that the best way to achieve this is to promote substantive equality in employment and provide supportive work environments with opportunities for professional development and a range of career pathways.

The WACHS AES 2014-2018 was developed from consultation with Aboriginal staff and key stakeholders in all WACHS regions during 2013 and took into consideration all the previous strategy's priorities.

Common themes include:

- cultural awareness training for managers
- mentoring
- staff development
- career pathway planning
- permanent opportunities
- recognition of cultural understanding held by Aboriginal staff
- improving Aboriginal staff input into the decision making.

The WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014–2018 was a collaborative effort of the Country Health Aboriginal Workforce Committee (CHAWC), which includes members from the Aboriginal Health Improvement Unit and WACHS central and regional staff.





Background

The WACHS implementation of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) National Partnership Agreements (NPAs) for *Closing the Gap in Health Outcomes (CtG)* and the *Indigenous Early Childhood Development (IECD)* highlighted the lack of an available Aboriginal health workforce and the need to invest in strategies to increase and retain our Aboriginal staff if we are to close the gap in life expectancy for Aboriginal Western Australians. As a result, the inaugural WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2010–2014 was developed and launched by the Honourable Dr Kim Hames, Minister of Health on the 9th September 2010.

Increasing the number of skilled Aboriginal employees remains a focus for WACHS which currently employs approximately 340 Aboriginal staff over a range of roles and positions. This accounts for 3.6% of the total workforce within WACHS catchments, and is above the Public Sector Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2011–2015 target of 3.2% within the WA Public Sector.

The implementation of the 2010–2014 strategy has given WACHS the foundation and experience in developing Aboriginal employment and retention initiatives including:

- mandatory Aboriginal Cultural Awareness e-learning
- the WACHS Aboriginal Mentorship Program
- establishment of the Country Health Aboriginal Workforce Committee (CHAWC)
- traineeships
- cadetships
- regional Aboriginal Health Coordinator positions
- partnerships with government and non government employment agencies and regional training organisations.

While progress has been made to date, there is still room for improvement if WACHS is to provide an environment that is conducive to high quality health care for Aboriginal patients and be an employer of choice for Aboriginal employees.

Establishing the CHAWC and the Regional Aboriginal Health Coordinator positions have been pivotal in keeping Aboriginal employment high on the WACHS agenda and driving change.

An identified challenge for the revised WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2018 will be to increase and maintain the WACHS Aboriginal workforce in an environment of limited guaranteed resources.

With a significantly sized workforce of 10,000 employees, WACHS is appropriately positioned to offer employment opportunities to Aboriginal people across a variety of disciplines and occupational levels.

The updated WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2018 will strengthen and build on past successes and seek new opportunities through increased collaboration, partnerships and shared responsibility for increasing Aboriginal employment and improving retention rates.

The WACHS Aboriginal Employment Strategy 2014-2018 aligns with the WA Health Aboriginal Workforce Strategy 2014-2024 which has an overarching aim to develop a strong, skilled and growing Aboriginal health workforce across WA Health including clinical, non-clinical and leadership roles.





Aims

The WACHS AES 2014–2018 will deliver a culturally respectful and competent health service for Aboriginal people by:

- increasing the number of Aboriginal people employed in WACHS across all occupational groups, that accurately represents the Aboriginal labour force ratio in WACHS regional catchments
- increasing the length of employment of Aboriginal employees in WACHS (long term/permanent positions)
- providing professional development opportunities for Aboriginal employees
- increasing collaboration and accountability and sharing ownership for Aboriginal employment with senior management across all regional areas of WACHS
- developing and implementing Regional Aboriginal employment action plan (refer to WA Health Retention Framework 1.4 p10), and
- increasing the cultural safety of the organisation.

Regional contribution

Aboriginal people within a WACHS catchment area account for 8.4% of the total population (ABS Census 2011). The table below provides percentages of Aboriginal people within each of the seven regions:

Region	Total population	Aboriginal population (as percentage of total population within region)	Aboriginal population (as percentage of total Aboriginal population within WACHS catchments)
Kimberley	35,706	45%	34.0
Pilbara	48,610	16%	13.0
Midwest	65,600	12%	17.0
Goldfields	61,391	12%	16.0
Wheatbelt	77,227	5%	8.0
South West	162,164	2%	7.0
Great Southern	59,412	4%	5.0
			100.0

Source: WACHS Regional Health Profiles, published April 2012, estimates as at 2010.

Whilst some regions have higher percentages than others, it is recognised that education levels, unemployment and workforce participation, among other factors, vary considerably between regions. Additionally, the Aboriginal demographic profile in WA is relatively young, with a median age of 22 years, as opposed to 36 years in the non-Aboriginal community. Of the Aboriginal population, 35% is 14 years of age or younger which further reduces the available labour force.

Taking these issues into account each region should develop a Regional Aboriginal employment plan that will equitably contribute towards a goal of 8.4% Aboriginal employment.





Challenges and opportunities

Challenges

WACHS presents a unique set of challenges in its ability to achieve Aboriginal workforce goals. These must be acknowledged and then factored into its employment practices. Some of the challenges faced by WACHS include:

- The high percentage of tertiary-qualified positions within WACHS. As a result of social determinants, the Aboriginal community demonstrates lower rates of university completions. This significantly reduces the available Aboriginal workforce possessing minimum requirements for a large number of occupations within the public health system.
- WACHS is guided by the Public Sector Standards in recruitment and selection of its employees; however, strategies to incorporate improved marketing and reach to the Aboriginal community are often overlooked or not considered due to a possible perception that Public Sector Standards are restricted to the current conventional methods for recruitment and selection.
- The high rate of contract positions occupied by the WACHS Aboriginal workforce which are tied to funding rounds, combined with the current cap on the Full Time Equivalent (FTE), inhibits the capacity to establish new and permanent positions and reduces WACHS's ability in becoming an employer of choice for Aboriginal people.
- WACHS is a very large organisation with over 10,000 staff, and this presents inherent difficulties to implementing substantive equality measures. Executive support for substantive equality is fundamentally guaranteed, however, the transition of this support into operational practice becomes a lengthy process.

Opportunities

Whilst acknowledging the challenges that may impede progress, there are also many areas for potential growth and change.

- All Regional Directors have performance targets for Aboriginal employment and are accountable to the Chief Executive Officer. Within the context of '*Aboriginal health is everyone's business*' all operational areas have a role to play to meet those targets and ensure Aboriginal specific positions are retained.
- The Country Health Aboriginal Workforce Committee (CHAWC) provides a lead role in driving Aboriginal workforce initiatives across WACHS. This group ensures representation from all regions and offers local insight and knowledge. In addition to being an advisory group, CHAWC is also committed to performing an operational function to promote and instigate solutions.
- There are many education and employment support agencies that provide funding and programs to assist Aboriginal people and employers. This sector assists Aboriginal people in job readiness and the establishment of entry level positions such as school based traineeships, full time traineeships, cadet and graduate programs. Utilising and partnering with these agencies will augment WACHS human and financial resources in implementing workforce development initiatives.
- The use of Section 50(d) and Section 51 of the Equal Opportunity Act provides an opportunity to increase the recruitment of Aboriginal people, redesign roles and create leadership opportunities. Recruiting Aboriginal employees is beneficial to enriching workplace culture and informing better service delivery. With the Aboriginal community suffering the worst health outcomes of any group in Australia, it is vital to have Aboriginal employees assisting WACHS to deliver a quality health service appropriate to community needs.
- The WACHS Aboriginal Mentorship Program provides a unique and important opportunity to further support our Aboriginal Workforce and our non Aboriginal staff to engage in cross cultural exchange.





Four priority areas of the 2014-2018 strategy

- 1 Increase employment opportunities to attract and retain Aboriginal staff**

WACHS will maintain its engagement with the local community to promote employment opportunities and will target Aboriginal workers through appropriate advertising and recruitment. WACHS will expand and retain 50 (d) positions and provide a supportive culturally secure work environment. WACHS is committed to substantive equality practices in all area operations.
- 2 Actively support Aboriginal employees to develop skills that are valued by WA Health as an employer**

WACHS aims to support entry level opportunities made available to Aboriginal people including school-based traineeships, full-time traineeships, cadetships and other graduate programs. Aboriginal employees will be supported in developing their careers through training, professional development and leadership programs. Aboriginal employees will be encouraged to take up the Aboriginal Mentorship Program as mentors and mentees.
- 3 Develop a workplace environment that values the employment and retention of Aboriginal employees**

All Aboriginal employees will be offered mentoring through the WACHS Aboriginal Mentorship Program. All staff will be encouraged to undertake face to face Aboriginal cultural awareness training. Aboriginal employees' cultural knowledge and the benefits of bridging the cultural gap will be acknowledged and promoted.
- 4 Facilitate workforce flexibility that supports career progression and mobility**

Aboriginal employees will be given opportunities to advance career progression through up-skilling and secondment placements. WACHS recognises the unique skills and attributes of Aboriginal employees in improving Aboriginal health outcomes. WACHS acknowledges that in consideration of substantive equality, the beliefs, values and perspectives of Aboriginal people must be esteemed during the development of operational policy that impacts its workforce.

Strategies and Actions

1 Increase employment opportunities to attract and retain Aboriginal staff

- Utilise Aboriginal and community networks to identify people interested in working for WACHS.
- Develop recruitment advertising that attracts Aboriginal employees to job opportunities within WACHS.
- Support the development, retention and utilisation of positions that are specified positions under section 50(d) of the *Equal Employment Opportunity Act 1984*, particularly entry level positions.
- Increase the accessibility of general WACHS vacancies to prospective Aboriginal employees.
- Ensure that recruitment and other HR processes are sensitive to the cultural needs of Aboriginal employees and applicants.
- Ensure that induction programs raise awareness of Aboriginal culture to promote culturally secure workplaces.
- Ensure that induction programs include information about support structures for Aboriginal staff including, where possible, the identification of 'buddies' to assist in orientation of new Aboriginal staff.
- Establish and maintain an Aboriginal Mentorship Program.
- Collect information from WA Health Exit Surveys and other data collection tools to identify barriers to the retention of Aboriginal employees.

2 Actively support Aboriginal employees to develop skills that are valued by WA Health as an employer

- Establish partnerships with external agencies to increase workforce skill development and access to training programs.
- Support Aboriginal workforce development opportunities through school work experience, school-based traineeships, general traineeship programs, cadet and graduate programs.
- Support Aboriginal employees to identify and pursue career pathways including opportunities for skill development that support identified career progression and advancement.
- Increase the participation of Aboriginal employees in leadership and other development programs.
- Build the cultural leadership capabilities of existing and emerging leaders.
- Utilise and build upon the skills within the WACHS workforce to promote sharing of Aboriginal cultural knowledge and skills in community engagement and liaison to promote consumer centred care.





3 Develop a workforce culture and environment that values the employment and retention of Aboriginal employees

- Provide access to mentoring opportunities for Aboriginal employees and managers.
- Ensure that all staff complete face to face training in Aboriginal cultural awareness.
- Promote understanding and recognition of the unique work/life balance needs of Aboriginal employees in the workplace.
- Support managers in providing workplaces and work teams that support, acknowledge and value Aboriginal employees.
- Promote accountability for Aboriginal employment and development outcomes through targets for senior WACHS leaders.
- Develop and promote Aboriginal employee networks across WACHS.
- Measure, monitor and report on the participation of Aboriginal employees in the WACHS workforce.
- Move towards greater alignment between percentages of Aboriginal people in the WACHS workforce and Aboriginal people in communities at a regional level.

4 Facilitate workforce flexibility that supports career progression and mobility

- Develop and implement an endorsed model for career progression for Aboriginal people as recognised health workers and practitioners.
- Establish a rotation and mobility program to enable up-skilling of Aboriginal employees.
- Support Aboriginal people to identify career pathways and undertake career planning through mentoring and performance development processes.
- Review and refine HR practices to reduce barriers to workforce flexibility, skills development and mobility for Aboriginal employees.
- Acknowledge and promote the unique skills and characteristics of Aboriginal employees in community engagement, community respect and acceptance; and the ability to achieve improved health outcomes for Aboriginal people.



“Aboriginal health is everyone’s business”



The painting used for graphic illustration in this document is the work of artist Aaron Hayden. It depicts the unsung Aboriginal people and leaders working within communities, to pave the way for Aboriginal people to follow and work toward a brighter future. Aaron's home town is Merredin. He is a descendant of the NjakiNjaki, Balardong, Mirning and Kokotha peoples.

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