

KEY ACTIONS
for health service
organisations

Identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Introduction

The National Safety and Quality Health Service Standard: Comprehensive Care Standard sets out the requirements health service organisations need to have in place to ensure every patient receives coordinated comprehensive care aligned with their needs and goals and that their risks of harm are prevented and managed. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples generally have poorer health outcomes than other Australians. To better understand the reason for these outcomes and to assist with improvements in care Action 5.8 in the Comprehensive Care Standard requires organisations to routinely ask patients if they are of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin.

The impact of under –identification¹

Under-identification occurs when Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status is not correctly collected or accurately recorded for all patients. These records are required for monitoring and understanding the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Understanding the needs and care preferences of catchment populations allows for the development and implementation of improved services

What does this mean for health service organisation?

Health service organisations are required to establish processes to accurately identify and record Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status. These processes should ensure that all people, regardless of appearance and across all service areas, are asked whether they identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin. Improving identification rates of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in health service organisations has been prioritised as part of the Australian Government's and all state and territory governments' commitment to Closing the Gap.

Some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients may not wish to declare their Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. An individual's right not to identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander must be respected. Personal, historical, family or cultural reasons may influence an individual's decision.

The standard Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander status question¹

The following question should be asked of all patients when commencing with a health service.

'Are you [is the person] of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?'

The standard response options

Five possible responses should be available for all patients answering this question (either verbally or on a written form):

- No
- Yes, Aboriginal
- Yes, Torres Strait Islander
- Yes, both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Decline to answer

If the question has not been completed on admission or other administrative forms, this should be followed up and confirmed with the patient when information is being entered into clinical records. For patients who decline to answer the question, reassure the person that their care will not be affected if they decline to answer the question.

For further guidance on strategies to use to meet Action 5.8 please see the NSQHS Standards User Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.

Resources

State/territory	Resource
NSW	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Origin – Recording of Information of Patients and Clients PD2012_042
QLD	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Identification■ Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin? video
SA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">■ Asking the Question - Are you (is the person) of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?

References

1. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. National Best Practice Guidelines for collecting Indigenous status in health data sets. Canberra: Australian Government; 2010.

Questions?

For more information, please visit:
safetyandquality.gov.au/standards/nsqhs-standards

You can also email the NSQHS Standards Advice Centre at accreditation@safetyandquality.gov.au or call 1800 304 056.

Acknowledgement: Sea urchin design:
Ms Tanya Taylor is a Worimi artist (mid-north coast of New South Wales) who is drawn to the underwater world through a deep connection with her saltwater heritage. Tanya's design is inspired by the patterns found in the sea urchins, corals and sea creatures found in the ocean.

