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Summary Report

Reconciliation in the Department for Health and Wellbeing

Staff Engagement, March 2025



Government
of South Australia

SA Health

Background

The following information is taken from the [What is reconciliation?](#) page on Reconciliation Australia's website:

At its heart, reconciliation is about strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous peoples, for the benefit of all Australians.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Australia's colonial history is characterised by devastating land dispossession, violence, and racism. Over the last half-century, however, many significant steps towards reconciliation have been taken.

Reconciliation is an ongoing journey that reminds us that while generations of Australians have fought hard for meaningful change, future gains are likely to take just as much, if not more, effort.

In a just, equitable and reconciled Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will have the same life chances and choices as non-Indigenous children, and the length and quality of a person's life will not be determined by their racial background.

Our vision of reconciliation is based and measured on five dimensions: historical acceptance; race relations; equality and equity; institutional integrity and unity.

These five dimensions do not exist in isolation, but are interrelated. Reconciliation cannot be seen as a single issue or agenda; the contemporary definition of reconciliation must weave all of these threads together. For example, greater historical acceptance of the wrongs done to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples can lead to improved race relations, which in turn leads to greater equality and equity.

The Department for Health and Wellbeing (DHW) recognises Aboriginal Peoples* as the Traditional Custodians of the lands in which we work and live and we celebrate their cultures and heritage. DHW acknowledges the impact colonisation has had on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Peoples and encourages all staff to take positive steps towards reconciliation.

Since 2006, [Reconciliation Action Plans](#) (RAPs) have enabled organisations to sustainably and strategically take meaningful action to advance reconciliation. Based around the core pillars of Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities, RAPs provide tangible and substantive benefits for Aboriginal Peoples, increasing economic equity and supporting First Nations self-determination as evidenced in Reconciliation Australia's annual [RAP Impact Report](#). The four RAP types – Reflect, Innovate, Stretch and Elevate – allow organisations to continuously develop their reconciliation commitments.

DHW's current RAP, which was developed using the Stretch Framework, was released in 2022. The [DHW Stretch RAP, June 2022 – June 2025](#) outlined DHW's commitment to ensuring health equity for Aboriginal South Australians through strengthening our existing relationships and building new relationships with Aboriginal individuals, families and communities, and embedding actions that recognise and respect Aboriginal cultures and people, connection with country and the impact of history.

DHW has made some good progress towards achieving the objectives of the current RAP. However, not all actions and deliverables have been completed. As such, our next RAP will also be developed in the Stretch Framework, ensuring we have a strong foundation to build on when we are ready to undertake the next framework (Elevate).

* In alignment with the leadership of the South Australian Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, the term 'Aboriginal Peoples' is used here to be inclusive of people who identify as Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or both.

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The next RAP is being developed by the DHW RAP Working Group, which is chaired by the Director, Office of the Chief Executive, who is also the Executive Sponsor.

Membership of the DHW RAP Working Group consists of senior leaders and divisional representatives from across the department, supported by the Chief Aboriginal Health Officer and Director, Aboriginal Health Partnerships and Engagement.

Purpose of staff engagement

The DHW RAP Working Group engaged staff in March 2025 to:

- > assess their understanding of and involvement in reconciliation including the current DHW RAP
- > ask for input on challenges in implementing RAPs, what the next RAP should include and how we can increase future awareness and involvement.

Engagement methods

Engagement was undertaken from Monday 3 March to Friday 28 March using the following methods:

- > survey accessible through YourSAy
- > online forum accessible through YourSAy
- > ideas board accessible through YourSAy
- > drop-in sessions (physical and virtual)
- > direct feedback to mailbox.

Engagement was promoted through a CE Update, posters, TV screens, reminders in the DHW Weekly, a DHW staff forum and emails to DHW Executive asking them to encourage their staff to participate.

Resources developed to support the engagement included a 'What is reconciliation?' fact sheet and answers to FAQs about the development of the next DHW RAP.

Results

Level of engagement

There were 121 responses to the survey (about 7% of staff), with two comments on the ideas board and no interaction on the online forum. The scheduled drop-in sessions were cancelled due to lack of participants.

Seven of the survey respondents identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and nine preferred not to say.

The number of people from each division that responded to the survey are as follows:

- > Strategy and Governance: 31
- > Corporate and Infrastructure: 17
- > Commissioning and Performance: 15

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- > Clinical System Support and Improvement: 14
- > Corporate Communications: 12
- > Digital Health SA: 11
- > Public Health: 7
- > Office of the Chief Executive: 6
- > Office of the Chief Psychiatrist: 3
- > Other: 5

Understanding of and involvement in reconciliation

87% of respondents knew what a reconciliation action plan is, but only 17% of respondents were familiar ('quite a lot' or 'very much') with the actions and deliverables in the current DHW RAP.

23% of respondents were familiar ('quite a lot' or 'very much') with their division or area's current RAP deliverables, and 29% of respondents had been involved in the delivery of any of these.

45% of respondents knew who their divisional representative is.

17% of respondents thought ('quite a lot' or 'very much') that the current RAP has achieved tangible outcomes, e.g. employment initiatives, cultural protocols, partnerships with First Nations businesses.

Cultural safety, inclusion and participation

55% of respondents thought ('quite a lot' or 'very much') that DHW fosters a culturally safe and inclusive environment for Aboriginal staff, clients and partners.

16% of respondents thought ('quite a lot' or 'very much') that the current DHW RAP has increased their knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal history and culture.

78% of respondents thought they had completed all the required levels of Aboriginal cultural learning.

68% of respondents had undertaken at least one reconciliation-related work (including education) activity in past 12 months.

42% of respondents had undertaken at least one reconciliation-related social activity in past 12 months.

88% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that it is important for Aboriginal Peoples to have a voice/say in matters that affect them.

31% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that they have a good knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples' histories.

19% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that they have a good knowledge of Aboriginal Peoples' cultures.

74% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that it is important to know about the histories of Aboriginal Peoples.

73% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that it is important to know about Aboriginal Peoples' cultures.

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60% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that they would like to do something to help improve reconciliation.

17% of respondents 'definitely agreed' that they know what they can do to help improve reconciliation.

Input received

Following is a summary of the respondents' views about challenges in implementing RAPs, what the next RAP should include and how we can increase future awareness and involvement.

Challenges in implementing RAPs

- > General resistance to change / lack of staff engagement / engagement fatigue / staff focused on other matters.
- > Ongoing systemic racism / poor attitudes towards measures to address historical injustices and inequity.
- > Lack of time / lack of strong top-down support / no additional resources or funding.
- > Need better and more regular communication and engagement / education and cultural awareness / information about tangible outcomes.
- > Difficulty operationalising actions and deliverables when there are so many of them and they are in addition to 'normal work'. Perhaps we need to focus on what the priorities are / what's achievable? Distilling the large number of deliverables into a smaller handful may increase deliverability.
- > Difficulty translating actions and deliverables to non-managerial staff.
- > Some deliverables written in a way that was hard to measure and therefore confirm they had been met.
- > Aboriginal employment targets difficult to meet when teams/roles require specialist skill sets and experience.

What actions or deliverables would you like to see included in the next RAP?

- > First Nations leadership in health policy, program design and decision-making at DHW Executive level / First Nations representation in all areas and levels.
- > More co-design in decision making with the Aboriginal workforce.
- > Review of / increase in cultural awareness training.
- > Review of the Aboriginal Health Impact Statement Policy.
- > Better understanding of SA Health's commitments and actions towards Closing the Gap.
- > Tangible measurable actions / increasing visibility of how we are tracking to increase accountability.
- > Information on how to make Acknowledgement of Country meaningful to the specific context of the meeting and connection to country.
- > Greater internal support about how to develop, grow and sustain partnerships with Aboriginal communities / information on how to engage First Nations people in proposed plans / panel of experts to engage on projects.
- > Opportunities to actively engage staff in events and important dates.

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How do you think we can increase awareness of and involvement in the next RAP?

- > More staff engagement / in-person compulsory RAP information sessions for all staff.
- > More top-down support and visibility / increase the visibility of the people behind the RAP.
- > Involvement mandated within divisions or teams / ability for staff to participate in RAP actions in a time-limited project capacity.
- > Learn from those divisions that were more successful than others in closing out actions.
- > Include actions in divisional / team business plans and reports.
- > Opportunity for staff to contribute to time-limited projects and events.
- > Standalone monthly communication.
- > Improved and more regular reporting of RAP progress.
- > Better promotion of positive achievements.
- > Review reconciliation information on the intranet and link to it from the homepage.

Next steps

The DHW RAP Working Group will use all the input received to inform the draft of our next DHW RAP, which will be developed in consultation with the Office of the Chief Aboriginal Health Officer.

Staff will be consulted on the draft of the next DHW RAP once it has been developed.

The next DHW RAP is expected to be released later this year once it has been approved by Reconciliation Australia.

For more information

DHW Reconciliation Working Group
Email: Health.DHWReconciliationActionPlan@sa.gov.au
www.sahealth.sa.gov.au



www.ausgoal.gov.au/creative-commons