



Legislative Assembly for the
Australian Capital Territory

Standing Committee on Public
Accounts and Administration

Submission Cover Sheet

Inquiry into Public Sector (Closing the Gap) Legislation Amendment Bill 2025

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Submitter: CATSINaM

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CATSINaM would expect to see this legislation implemented in a way that ensures all public servants uphold the principles of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap in their day-to-day work, including by promoting and demonstrating Cultural Safety, and actively addressing institutional racism. This includes:

Priority Reform 1 - Shared Decision-Making:

- Formal partnerships should begin at the start of any relevant policy development, program of work or project, be truly co-designed and led, with transparency and accountability mechanism built into the partnership approach.
- There should be appropriate time for relationship building, and opportunity for conflict resolution throughout the process, acknowledging that new ways of working will require ongoing negotiations on how to work best together.

Priority Reform 2 - Building the Community-Controlled Sector:

- Funding must increase to reflect needs but also be sustained. This means funding organisations appropriately, for longer periods of time to ensure the Community-Controlled services can get traction and mature as organisations.
- Investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery workforce, as the largest health workforce and most prolific across all parts of the hospital and health service, is pivotal to improving Cultural Safety, addressing racism, and investing in innovative approaches to care.

Priority Reform 3 - Transforming Government Organizations:

- All government organisations should support a collective process of truth telling, to understand the history of government and respective organisation since colonisation and how their organisation has improved over time but may also continue to contribute to compromised health injustice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- There must be processes involved that detect and eliminate systemic racism and other forms of discrimination. These must be adequately resourced, and matured reporting pathways for all forms of discrimination and racism. These reports are serious and should be responded to seriously. As a restorative city, Canberra must champion restorative approaches to addressing racism and other forms of racism, along with supporting other approaches.
- All government organisations should undertake regular Cultural Safety education, which goes beyond 'cultural awareness and cultural competency' and examines the power and power imbalance that exists, and ways power-sharing can be truly enacted.

Priority Reform 4 - Data Sharing and Transparency:

- There should be Indigenous Data Sovereignty Groups (IDSG) within the government who work with external Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation partners to determine the policies and processes of data sharing and transparency to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders within and outside of government have the best available data on hand to make informed decisions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- These IDSG's should be led, and measurements determined, by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples internal and external to government.
- The data should contain measurements that capture Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ability to demonstrate self-determination, feel Cultural Safe and other measurements meaningful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of knowing, being and doing.

This is an opportunity for the government to learn from its mistakes from previous government policies, and to realise a new way of working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is also an opportunity for the Australian Government to transform the United Nations Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) from a symbolic gesture to an actual reality.

CATSINaM emphasises the importance of respecting the definition of **Cultural Safety** outlined in the National Agreement, which states that only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person receiving a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.

This definition of Cultural Safety puts the power in the hands of persons on the receiving the interaction. Giving this power to the individual (or group) is at the core of what a government aims to do; give power to the people. Without upholding these principles, government is not actually achieving its core business.

CATSINaM recognises that potential disagreements may arise during interactions and should be resolved. It is important to distinguish 'potential disagreement' and 'forms of discrimination and racism.' Potential disagreements are inevitable. Cultural Safety accounts for this, to understand how we can be in better relations with each other, and where people (or institutions) have power, how they can respectfully work through potential disagreements and find resolution.

However, forms of discrimination and racism are not 'potential disagreements.' They are systemic, intergenerational, and problematic to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' self-determination and sovereignty. All forms of discrimination and racism must be taken seriously. Cultural Safety allows for government services to recognise these forms of systemic injustice and requires people to challenge cultures of power that perpetuate these forms of discrimination and create cultures that address and eliminate these respectfully.

Cultural Safety serves as hope to and pathways for governments to become less harmful to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It can transform the way government sees and then realises its role as more mature, less-harmful colonial-settler governments determined to work with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, for our collective liberation from harmful colonialism.