



Inquiry into Annual and Financial Reports 2023–2024

Answer to question on notice

Asked by: Mr Thomas Emerson MLA

Addressed to: Minister for Health

Reference: Health – Canberra Health Services

Hearing: 20 February 2025

In relation to: Aboriginal Affairs

Question received: 24 February 2025

Answer Due: 03 March 2025

The Government Response to the Auditor-General Report No. 1 Management of Detainee Mental Health Services in the Alexander Maconochie Centre states “It is anticipated the creation of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health worker role will strengthen the interface between clinical and culturally appropriate care and engagement. CHS and JACS recognise the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health workers and the creation of this role will be explored further through the implementation of recommendation.”

1. Has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health worker role been created?
 - a) If so, has the position been filled, and is it currently filled?
2. The CHS workforce has grown to 1.14 per cent representation of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander staff in 2023-24, which is still well below the 3 per cent target. Has CHS assessed which strategies are most successful in attracting and retaining Aboriginal staff?
3. What is the retention rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, and how does it compare to the overall staff retention rate?
4. The percentage of the financial year's Addressable Spend of \$263.02 million that is spent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprises is 0.21 per cent which is one tenth of the goal of 2 per cent.
 - a) Why did the CHS not reach its goal of 2 per cent assessable spend with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Enterprises
 - b) What is CHS doing to reach that goal this year?

Rachel Stephen-Smith MLA: The answer to the Member's question is as follows:

- 1) A specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Worker role has not been created at this stage. Currently, the Aboriginal Liaison Officers (ALOs) from ACT Corrective Services and/or Canberra Health Services attend the High-Risk Assessment Team (HRAT) meetings at the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC) to provide input regarding the cultural factors that need to be considered for any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. The role of ALOs in the assessment process is also documented as a part of the HRAT Terms of Reference.
- 2) CHS promotes identified vacancies through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander job platforms and has worked with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff leaders to introduce more culturally appropriate interview practices such as 'yarning' interviews rather than traditional style interviews.

CHS also undertake a range of activities to support the retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff including:

- Celebrating days and weeks of significance such as National Reconciliation Week, NAIDOC Week and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children's Day.
- Organising regular Elders and Community Breakfasts to support staff wellbeing by facilitating connection with each other, community organisations and Elders.
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to attend professional development opportunities such as Garma Festival, Coolamon Talent Management Program and Hatchery First Nations Leadership and Allyship Summit.
- Supporting staff to design and launch an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff network.
- Piloting a cultural supervision program.
- Developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy.
- Progressing initiatives to improve the Aboriginal Liaison Officer model of care and career pathway. This includes reorganisation of the workforce into one operational Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Hub, led by a newly created Identified Senior Director position.
- Supporting the current Aboriginal Liaison Officer workforce at CHS to undertake a Certificate III in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care.
- Investigating creation of an Aboriginal Health Worker and Aboriginal Health Practitioner classification structure to enable appropriate classification and creation of roles where clinically indicated across CHS.

Once finalised, the Social and Emotional Wellbeing Strategy will include monitoring and evaluation, which will support CHS in reviewing its retention activities to identify which are most effective and to support continuous improvement. Currently, the experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff is captured through participation in the CHS culture and pulse surveys.

The majority of CHS staff are clinical professionals. There is a known national shortage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, and the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce and Strategic Framework 2021-2031](#) includes actions to attract, recruit

and retain workers across all roles, levels and locations within the health sector. The national target is for First Nations people to be fully represented in the health workforce by 2031.

The ACT Government supports growth in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce by offering scholarships and study incentives through the ACT Health Directorate, University of Canberra and Australian Catholic University, while the Australian National University offers a dedicated entry pathway for First Nations medical students. These students undertake clinical placements at CHS, offering a pathway into employment during their final years of study and following graduation.

Since 2021, the Government has also been supporting Indigenous Allied Health Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Academy to offer First Nations students in Year 11 and 12 the opportunity to complete a nationally recognised Certificate III in Allied Health Assistance through CIT, with CHS offering practical placements as part of the program.

3)

Permanent staff	
CHS overall separation rate	CHS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff separation rate
8.58 per cent	10.64 per cent

Notes:

**Permanent separation rates rather than retention rates have been provided to be consistent with metrics reported in the CHS Annual Report *Permanent separation rate = total permanent separation/average permanent headcount *Time period = 12 months (30 January 2024 to 29 January 2025)*

4)

- a) In 2023-24, one major registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise to CHS, Chemworks, sold the business to Reward Hospitality leaving it ineligible as a registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enterprise. In addition, a registered contractor, Rork Projects, which supplied construction services to CHS, was placed into administration and was no longer able to supply services. These issues had a significant impact on CHS ability to meet the 2023-24 target of 2 per cent.

The majority of CHS addressable spend relates to medical equipment, service of medical equipment and clinical consumables. There are limited registered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers in these categories.

- b) In early 2024, CHS undertook a public tender process for a panel of suppliers for food and beverage products. This tender resulted in a Supply Nation registered supplier being awarded a contract for meat products. Year to date 2024-25, there has been more than \$500,000 of meat products purchased from this supplier. Annual spend is expected to be approximately \$900,000 with this supplier.

The Panel is open to other Directorates (e.g. JACS and CIT) providing this supplier with further opportunity to supply meat products across ACT Government.

CHS is currently negotiating a contract with a local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier that has only recently entered the market supplying cleaning and kitchen products, similar to that of Chemworks. There is potential for an annual spend of up to \$1 million with this supplier.

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Later this financial year, CHS will be looking to provide several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment agencies with the opportunity to enter into contracts to provide agency resources, recruitment and immigration services for multiple categories of resource requirements.

CHS continues to engage with a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers including Projex Building Group, Physiotherapy Innovations and Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health and Community Services. CHS staff regularly attend the Supply Nation Trade Fair seeking new opportunities to engage with registered suppliers.

Approved for circulation to the Standing Committee on Social Policy

Signature:



Date:

23/3/25

By the Minister for Health, Rachel Stephen-Smith