

2018–2021

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN



Royal Flying Doctor Service



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN
STRETCH



Our Vision for Reconciliation

The Royal Flying Doctor Service of Australia (RFDS) is committed to improved health outcomes and access to health services for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

The RFDS respects and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the first Australians and our vision for reconciliation is a culture that strives for unity, equity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians.

The RFDS aims through this RAP to enhance the delivery and accessibility of services, and ultimately improve health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians through deeper relationships with the peoples, their cultures and histories.





Our Business

The RFDS was the world's first - and is today one of the largest and most comprehensive - aeromedical organisations in the world. Using the latest in aviation, medical and communications technology, the RFDS delivers extensive primary health care and 24-hour emergency health services to those who live, work and travel throughout remote, rural, regional and more recently metropolitan areas of Australia. The RFDS has been named Australia's most reputable charity for seven years in a row.

The RFDS employs just over 1,400 people across Australia, 12 of who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. With 24 aero bases, 69 aircraft and around 115 health care vehicles, the RFDS sees more than 300,000 patients each year. Almost half those the RFDS provides health care services to are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In 2016-17 we travelled 26 million kilometres by air – equivalent to 34 return trips to the moon, and 5 million kilometres by road – equal to 350 times around Australia - to provide critical health services including 17,094 primary health care clinics, 88,541 telehealth consultations, 10,832 dental health consultations, and transportation for 107,509 patients by road or air from around Australia.

Flight paths





Our RAP

The RFDS RAP has been developed as the means of continuing the commitment of the RFDS to the efforts of Reconciliation Australia to create social and economic opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the RAP Framework. As a key provider of health services in rural and remote Australia, the RFDS is also committed to the “Close the Gap” campaign to improve both health outcomes and access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The RFDS identifies that enhanced cultural competency of current staff, as well as training, employment, and support of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in health and aviation roles is necessary for the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to improve.

This 2018-2021 *Stretch* RAP was initiated by the Board of Directors of the Federation of the RFDS and focuses on Relationships, Respect, and Opportunities. This RAP was developed by our RAP Working Group, which was Chaired by the CEO of the RFDS Queensland Section and comprising staff members representing each of the companies to the joint venture federation of the RFDS as follows:

- General Manager People & Culture, RFDS Central Operations;
- General Manager People & Culture, RFDS Western Operations;
- General Manager People & Corporate Services, RFDS Queensland;
- General Manager People & Culture, RFDS Victoria;

- General Manager People & Culture, RFDS South Eastern Section;
- CEO RFDS Tasmania;
- CEO, RFDS Federation Office;
- Director of Programs and Policy, RFDS Federation Office;
- Training Coordinator, RFDS Queensland (internal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representative).

Each member of the RAP Working Group consulted and sought the advice of senior leadership and other staff in their Section/Operation as this RAP was drafted. Ongoing advice from other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders was sought and incorporated during development of this RAP.

The CEO of the RFDS Queensland Section, Chair of the RAP Working Group, will be the Champion of this RAP. As with the previous *Innovate* RAP, the RAP Working Group is responsible for championing this RAP in their Section/Operation, including through locally-based RAP Implementation Committees or equivalents. Implementation of this *Stretch* RAP will be monitored by the Federation Board, with reporting coordinated by Federation Office and input provided by RAP Working Group members for each Section/Operation. As a joint venture federated charity, each autonomous company to the joint venture federation has its own strategic imperatives, operational priorities, and differing approaches to service delivery. This RAP has been designed to allow continued flexibility as to how companies to the joint venture federation fulfil the aspirations of the RAP.



Our Reconciliation Journey

Our RAPs are important strategic tools to facilitate awareness and change throughout the RFDS, to ensure our services are culturally safe, accessible and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Our first *Innovate* RAP 2016-17 focused on building the foundation for reconciliation through improved cultural knowledge and awareness amongst our employees, and demonstrating our respect for the unique customs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by adopting relevant cultural practices and protocols.

Significant Achievements of our first RAP included:

- **The establishment of our RAP Working Group**

this group comprises a representative from each RFDS Section and Operation, as well as Federation Office. Recognising local differences in operational and service priorities throughout the RFDS Federation, this group is responsible for overseeing, championing and providing advice on the implementation of the RAP. Bringing this group together proved to be significantly beneficial to provide the opportunity for the sharing of information, lessons learned and challenges faced in the implementation of the RAP and related activities locally. This group was responsible for driving the development of the new *Stretch* RAP, informed particularly by their role implementing the *Innovate* RAP.

- **Research Publication**

The RFDS committed under the *Innovate* RAP to use research and policy to improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The first ever RFDS research paper into Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, '*Providing Aeromedical Care to Remote Indigenous Communities*', was released in October 2016. Around half the 300,000 people that the RFDS cared for in 2016 were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, mostly located in remote parts of Australia. The report highlights the significant impact of illnesses and injuries on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and the role of the RFDS in providing aeromedical retrievals to ensure equity of access to care for sick or injured Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in remote and rural areas. The research paper presents, for the first time, national RFDS data on the causes of deaths and hospitalisations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

This paper shows that common reasons for aeromedical retrieval by the RFDS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians were:

- > Injury, poisoning and certain other consequences of external causes (17.9%)
- > Diseases of the circulatory system (14.4%)
- > Diseases of the respiratory system (12.8%)
- > Diseases of the digestive system (7.8%)
- > Pregnancy/childbirth (7.2%)

Importantly, the paper and the data presented provides a platform for discussion between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and other service delivery organisations, researchers, policymakers, corporate and private sectors and philanthropic organisations. In particular, evidence is provided to inform discussions,



which should seek to identify collaborative, innovative approaches to improving the health status of remote and rural Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and to reducing the incidence, prevalence and impacts of illnesses and injuries that require emergency treatment

All RFDS research reports can be found on our website: <https://www.flyingdoctor.org.au/what-we-do/research/>

- **RFDS Indigenous Health Scholarships**

In partnership with the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association (AIDA), the Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINAM); and Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA), in 2017 the RFDS offered scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the fields of medicine, nursing, midwifery and allied health, to provide financial support for clinical placements in a remote or rural area. This program was well-received and will continue in 2018.

- > **Reflections from a scholarship recipient:**

- Amy Thompson**

Amy Thompson, is a Dunghutti woman from Kempsey NSW, a 3rd year nursing student at the University of Newcastle (Port Macquarie campus) and a mum of two young boys with special needs. The RFDS scholarship enabled Amy to complete her final two clinical placements in Katherine NT, including a nine week placement at the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service, Wurli-Wurlinjang. Amy is currently awaiting her graduation in 2018 and registration as a Registered Nurse, having completed all the necessary university requirements since this placement.

My experience with attending the clinical placement was a once in lifetime adventure and I am very privileged to be given the opportunity to have attended my final placement within a remote location and working alongside my people.

My Welcome to Country was in conjunction with a water blessing in the Yalong (meeting place and where they make decisions as a family gathering moment) spoken in their traditional language. I was quite moved by this blessing as I fell to tears when I was being blessed and Elder, Aunty May, was calling the spirits/ ancestors to welcome me to the land. This blessing meant a lot to me coming from another country and walking on another country that is unknown to me and to be blessed in the correct way was very humble, nurturing and I knew I was safe to walk their land.

During my clinical placement, I was involved in setting up and attending diabetes days, outreach visits, nursing assessments, after hours clinic, wound care dressings, RHD [rheumatic heart disease] consultations and follow up assessments, NAIDOC celebrations, STI screenings etc. There was a vast variety of clinical areas that were suitable to participate within a learning environment, that enabled me to competently complete my clinical placement requirements.



- **Cultural Safety in Healthcare**

In 2017, together with Reconciliation Australia Chair, Professor Tom Calma, and one of Australia's leading authorities on cultural safety, Professor Dennis McDermott, the RFDS undertook research into disparities in health outcomes between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians attributable to care received within hospitals and health services. The research reveals Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have poorer outcomes, access appropriate care less often, and that improving cultural safety within health care services can positively improve health outcomes. The research proposed deeper embedding of cultural safety within Australia's health care system's quality and safety standards. The research was subject to peer review and was published in the Medical Journal of Australia. The research has challenged the RFDS to assess its own commitment to cultural safety and that commitment is reflected in this RAP.

RELATIONSHIPS

The RFDS is committed to improved health outcomes and access to health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. Our ability to improve health outcomes and access to health services will benefit from deeper relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations.

FOCUS AREA

As an aeromedical and primary health care service provider, the Federation of the RFDS will prioritise relationship development with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander controlled organisations that foster health and wellbeing.



ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
1 RAP Working Group actively monitors RAP development and implementation	Federation CEO	From April 2018	Oversee the development, endorsement and launch of the RAP.
	Federation CEO & RAP Working Group Chair	By May 2018	Ensure there are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on the RAP Working Group.
	Federation CEO & RAP Working Group Chair	By December 2020	Ensure RAP Working Group meets at least four times per year to monitor and report on RAP implementation.
	CEOs	By April 2018	Appoint an internal RAP Champion/s from senior management.
	Federation CEO & RAP Working Group Chair	By April 2018	Establish Terms of Reference for the RAP Working Group.
	Federation CEO & RAP Working Group Chair	By June 2018	Establish a national external Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Reference Group to provide cultural advice and guidance through the RAP Working Group.
	Federation CEO & RAP Working Group Chair	By April 2018	Develop and distribute an expression of interest to join the RWG to appropriate community members.
2 Celebrate National Reconciliation Week (NRW) to strengthen and maintain relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and other staff	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members	27 May–3 June 2018, 2019, & 2020	Organise at least one internal NRW event each year in each Section and Operation.
			Register our NRW events via Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.
			Encourage staff and senior leaders to participate in external events to recognise and celebrate NRW.
			Invite an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community member/s into each Section and Operation to connect and share experiences.
			Support an external NRW event that could include in kind support and/or partnering with community organisations.
			Ensure our RAP Working Group participates in at least one external NRW event each year.

RELATIONSHIPS continued

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
3 Maintain and leverage mutually beneficial relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and organisations to support positive outcomes	Federation CEO	By May 2018	Review and continue an engagement plan to work with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation and their state/territory based affiliates, and our other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.
	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members	By June 2018	Meet with State and Territory Aboriginal Medical Service organisations to continue input on planning and delivery of services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
	Federation CEO	By May 2018	Commit to continuing formal two-way partnerships to build capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through AIDA, CATSINAM and IAHA.
4 Raise internal and external awareness of our RAP to promote reconciliation across our business and sector	RAP Working Group Chair and members	From May 2018	Implement and review a strategy to communicate our RAP to all internal and external stakeholders.
			Promote reconciliation through ongoing active engagement with all stakeholders.
			Ensure the continued engagement of our Boards and Management teams in the delivery of RAP outcomes.





The RFDS works in and serves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia. It has demonstrated respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and histories through this service role over many decades. Respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is a cornerstone of developing strong relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia, and we believe our service delivery is enhanced by demonstrating respect. Through this RAP, commitments to tangibly demonstrate respect are proposed.

FOCUS AREA

As a large employer, the RAP focuses its actions on building the cultural capability of its workforce. As a large service provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the RAP focuses the RFDS on strengthening guidance, input, and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in service planning and delivery.



ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
5 Increase knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories and achievements	Section and Operation Human Resource leaders	January 2019	Review, and where appropriate, implement cultural awareness training for Section and Operation staff (through either online, face to face workshops or cultural immersion).
		February 2021	All clinical staff to undertake online cultural learning activities.
		February 2021	50% of clinical staff to undertake face to face cultural workshop learning activities.
		February 2021	10% of staff to undertake cultural immersion learning activities.
		December 2019	All RAP Working Group members undertake cultural learning activities.
		December 2019	All senior executive and Board members undertake cultural learning activities.
		December 2018	Promote the Reconciliation Australia's Share Our Pride online tool to all staff.
6 Demonstrate respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities by embedding cultural protocols as part of the way our organisation functions	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members	February 2021	All new staff to complete online cultural awareness training.
		From April 2018	Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural protocols are embedded within the protocol document, relevant to State and/or Territory and specific local communities
			Ensure continued use of the protocol document, including for Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country.
			Invite a local Traditional Owner to provide a Welcome to Country, at significant events, including at least one event in each Section/Operation and nationally per year.
			All staff and Senior Leadership to provide an Acknowledgement of Country at all public events, informed by the national RFDS protocol document.
			Maintain and review a list of key contacts for organising a Welcome to Country.
			Include Acknowledgement of Country at the commencement of important internal meetings.
			Create and display an Acknowledgment of Country in our offices, and display both the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags in a main management offices.

RESPECT continued

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
7 Celebrate NAIDOC Week and provide opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to engage with culture and community during NAIDOC Week	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members	First week of July, 2018, 2019 and 2020	Review HR policies and procedures to ensure there are no barriers to staff participating in NAIDOC Week.
			Provide opportunities for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to participate in local NAIDOC Week events.
			Support all staff to participate in NAIDOC Week events in the local community.
			In consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, hold an internal or public NAIDOC Week event.
			Support an external NAIDOC Week community event.
			Support local and/or National NAIDOC Week Committee.
8 Develop standards of cultural competency for RFDS clinical staff	Federation CEO	By May 2018	Establish a Clinical Cultural Safety Advisory Group comprising RFDS staff, expert external advisers, and appropriate nominees of governments and safety and quality bodies to develop cultural safety standards for the RFDS.
		By June 2019	Publish the RFDS cultural safety standard, which includes a process for RFDS staff nationally to seek advice on culturally safe engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals.
	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members	By July 2020	Design and deliver training for relevant RFDS clinical staff in the cultural safety standard.
			Support through staff training maintenance of the cultural safety standard.

As a provider of health services to a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout Australia, the RFDS has an opportunity to improve health outcomes and access to health services as a contribution to the 'Close the Gap' campaign, recognising mutually beneficial opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to contribute to the ongoing refinement of our services.

FOCUS AREA

As a healthcare provider to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, this RAP focuses the RFDS on enhancing the cultural safety of its health workforce in providing culturally appropriate health care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait people.



ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
9 Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and retention	Section and Operation Human Resource leaders	From January 2019	Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment to 2.5%.
		From February 2019	Implement, review and update Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and retention strategy, which includes professional development and mentoring, and a focus on capacity building for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to be placed in professional jobs with the RFDS.
		By December 2018	Engage with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to consult on employment strategies, including professional development.
		From June 2018	Engage with governments about available support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and retention.
10 Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander supplier diversity	Section and Operation RAP Working Group members & Corporate Service leaders	From January 2019	Implement, review and update an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy.
		From January 2019	Set procurement target for goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander owned businesses.
		By December 2019	Develop at least 5 commercial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.
		From April 2018	Continue as member of Supply Nation.
		From April 2018	Encourage and support RFDS suppliers to foster employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

OPPORTUNITIES continued

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
11 Continue RFDS scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health students	Federation Director of Programs & Policy	From April 2018	In partnership with the Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association (AIDA), the Council of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives (CATSINAM); and Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA) continue provision of RFDS scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the fields of medicine, nursing, midwifery and allied health, to provide financial support for clinical placements in a remote and rural area.







Tracking progress and reporting

ACTION	RESPONSIBILITY	TIMELINE	TARGET
12 Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings to Reconciliation Australia for inclusion in the RAP Impact Measurement Report	Federation CEO	30 September 2018, 2019, 2020	Complete and submit the RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire to Reconciliation Australia.
		February 2019	Investigate participation in the RAP Barometer.
		February 2019	Develop and implement systems and capability needs to track, measure and report on RAP activities.
		By February 2019	Commission the RFDS Research and Policy Unit to research and report on opportunities to measure the impact of RAP activities.
13 Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings internally and externally	Federation CEO	November 2018, 2019, 2020	Publically report our RAP achievements, challenges and learnings in each national annual report.
			Communicate quarterly updates on RAP progress to all staff
14 Review, refresh and update RAP	Federation CEO	July 2020	Liaise with Reconciliation Australia to develop a new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements.
		November 2020	Send draft RAP to Reconciliation Australia for formal feedback and endorsement.



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