

**ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services**  
**Reconciliation Action Plan for the Year 2009-10**

**Chief Executive's Foreword**

Our Department plays an important role in working towards Reconciliation. We do this by working in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community partners, and by supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, young people and their families.

Working in partnership towards a "Shared Responsibility-Shared Future" is a guiding principle for our work. We acknowledge that the wellbeing of communities is shared by individuals, families, communities and government. Everyone must work together to improve the economic, social and cultural status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In our organisation we endeavor to create an environment in which the principles of Reconciliation are upheld and in which all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel pride in their culture as well as a sense of belonging. With this purpose in mind, we strive for unity and the celebration of our cultural diversity. In developing our Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we recognise the importance of putting in place measures which enable us to progress reconciliation and healing.

This RAP has been developed to reflect that the services we provide with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the opportunity to "close the gap" and address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage. Our RAP will be an overarching guide to ensure that we are all working towards a common goal.

In developing our vision of the Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP), we were inspired and moved by the words of the United Ngunnawal Elders Council (UNEC) in their Charter and their insight into Reconciliation: *"In this Journey we strive for Unity. We do this by empowering people, creating confidence, self-esteem and room for difference so we can work and laugh together, moving forward all the while."*

In this year, the United Nations Year of Reconciliation and in the true spirit of reconciliation, I am proud to present our Department's RAP.

Martin Hehir  
3 June 2009

Our Department works with people who are experiencing disadvantage. We work with Government and our community partners to help deliver our services and to ensure that our programs meet the needs of the whole community.

**Our Department believes Reconciliation is:**

- acknowledging our past and moving forward towards a shared future that embraces all Australians;
- working in partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community partners;
- recognising that working towards reconciliation is ongoing;
- exploring ways to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage and assist in closing the (national) 17 year life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non Indigenous peoples;
- giving more attention to programs and initiatives which aid the areas of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and education;
- focusing on measures which enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to rise above their socio-economic disadvantage;
- assisting our employees with practical tools to challenge and combat racist attitudes; and
- having all areas of our department involved in developing and reviewing our RAP.

**Our business**

The ACT Department of Disability, Housing and Community Services has responsibility for a wide range of human services functions in the ACT, including multicultural affairs, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs, community services, older people, women, public and community housing services and policy, children, youth and family support services and policy, disability policy and services, therapy services, Child and Family Centres, the ACT Government Concessions Program, homelessness and community disaster recovery.

We provide high quality, coordinated human services to significant sectors of the ACT community. This is achieved by delivering our work through five strategic themes:

- improving outcomes for our clients
- engaging and involving our clients
- building better community partnerships
- contributing to good governance
- performing as a best practice organisation

## Our RAP Journey

Our Department's journey to develop a RAP began on 13 February 2008, after the National Apology by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and the presence and energy of The Stolen Generations in Canberra during that period. Conversations took place between staff about what might be our next steps in our reconciliation journey and how we could contribute to Reconciliation in our community.

From the beginning of our journey we had consultations with Reconciliation Australia. A Reconciliation Statement of Commitment was signed by the Chief Executive on 29 May 2008. This statement outlined a commitment from our Department to develop a RAP by the end of May 2009.

While there was a lot of energy around reconciliation, we established a RAP working group to progress our reconciliation Statement of Commitment. The working group comprises 12 committed Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-indigenous representatives from across our Department. The working group met and agreed that we wanted our plan to be real, achievable and easy to pick up and read. We did not want the RAP to be just our own ideas so we set about consulting with staff members of our Department, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and service providers and received lots of feedback. We wanted it to be a living document.

We made the decision to involve departmental staff, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and other organisations we work with. We did this through workshops, questionnaires and discussions. Staff were asked to comment on the areas of relationships, respect and opportunities and what individuals, their units and our Department could do in relation to reconciliation in these three areas. There were many common threads and similarities in the feedback.

On our journey we found that establishing respectful relationships was critical. Our journey to establish our RAP led us to develop new relationships both in the working group and in the community. One outcome of involving (non-indigenous) staff members was that they wanted to know more and it created a thirst for knowledge and cultural learning. While this RAP will not eliminate racism, it will bring cultural awareness from the subconscious to the conscious and in doing that we hope it will affect real change. We know that the development of our RAP is just the beginning.

Our Department strives to build relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples. We seek to explore ways our reconciliation journey can assist us deliver services that will make a difference in the national effort to close the 17 year life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous peoples.

<b>Relationships</b>	<b>Building respectful relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, our clients and each other is crucial in providing quality services that meet the needs of the community. It is our responsibility as an influential organisation to promote respectful relationships. These relationships will demonstrate that diversity is valued by our community.</b>		
<b>Focus area: To further foster and support respectful relationships between our department and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in order to build cultural competence in the delivery of our services.</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measurable Target</b>
1(a). Implement a whole of Department approach for funding and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander funded services.	Business units with service funding agreement responsibilities.	Quarterly meetings commencing in July 2009	Improved satisfaction recorded by funded services (initial survey, followed by survey in June 2010).
1(b). Develop a model of service delivery that incorporates best practice approaches when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples /community and organisations.	Business units providing services for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples	30 June 2010	Model of service delivery to be placed on intranet and internet.
2(a). Identify existing data collections for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients for evidence based service delivery and policy development.	Data and Research and relevant business units	30 June 2010	Identification of existing data collection on service delivery for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
2(b). Government and funded services identify client's cultural background (where possible) in order to establish evidence based service delivery and policy development.	Business units with funding agreement management responsibilities	30 June 2010	Map current data collection in departmental intake services and service funding agreements with partner organisations.  Commence development of common data practice for the identification of cultural background in data collections.
3. Staff supported in implementing actions in the RAP.	Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party	30 June 2010	Number and type of assistance provided by Working Party members.
4. Develop a DHCS newsletter to report progress of actions in the Reconciliation Action Plan.	DHCS Executive Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party	Biannual reporting on RAP progress	Two newsletters per annum published on DHCS portal.
5. Continue support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander networks, forums, conferences and working groups in the ACT Government.	All business units	30 June 2010	Number of networks, forums, conferences and working groups supported - reported through the Departments' annual report
6. Continue to promote our programs, services and opportunities to participate to local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through community events (eg NAIDOC Family Day).	All business units	30 June 2010	Participation in community events (see also action above)

<b>Respect</b>	<b>Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, connection to land and history is an important way our staff and community partners show the respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Acknowledging the past and affirming respect is central to reconciliation and creating an environment in which all cultures are celebrated.</b>		
<b>Focus area: Demonstrating our respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through public acknowledgements, participation in community events and the ongoing development of our cultural competency.</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measurable Target</b>
1. <i>United Ngunnawal Elders Council Charter (2003)</i> placed on website.	Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party	30 June 2009	United Ngunnawal Elders Council agrees to place Charter on website.
2. Develop guideline(s) for acknowledgement of traditional custodians of the land and guidelines for when it is appropriate to ask traditional owners to "welcome to country".	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Affairs	31 July 2009	Guidelines developed and made available for staff
3. Staff development will offer a: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural component in DHCS Orientation;</li> <li>suite of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence training including a specific focus on the culture and experience of the Ngunnawal people; and</li> <li>refresher opportunities for staff to enhance Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness.</li> </ul>	Learning and Community Education  All business unit managers	30 June 2010	Number of people attending programs. Evaluation of the suite of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural competence training Review of cultural diversity plan
4. Acknowledge of country statements in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>meetings and events;</li> <li>e-mail signature blocks;</li> <li>DHCS letterhead; and</li> <li>Welcome signs.</li> </ul>	DHCS Executive and Staff	30 June 2010	Acknowledgement of country statements in meetings and events. Acknowledgement of country statements in emails and departmental letterhead are used. (Measured by staff survey prior to annual reporting on RAP)
5. Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and artwork in all our buildings	Policy and Organisational Services	30 September 2009	Flags displayed and additional flags available for events. Artworks and artists displayed acknowledging artists, title, locations etc.
6. Promote, support and celebrate significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural events	Relevant business units	30 June 2010	Number of DHCS (internal) events celebrated Number of external events held
7. Develop calendar of cultural events for: NAIDOC Week, Sorry Day,	Office for Aboriginal and Torres Strait	30 September 2009	Calendar of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural events developed and made available for staff.

Respect	Understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, connection to land and history is an important way our staff and community partners show the respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Acknowledging the past and affirming respect is central to reconciliation and creating an environment in which all cultures are celebrated.		
Focus area: Demonstrating our respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through public acknowledgements, participation in community events and the ongoing development of our cultural competency.			
Action	Responsibility	Timeline	Measurable Target
Reconciliation Week, 1967 Referendum, Mabo Day and Coming of the Light to encourage both internal and external (community) events	Islander Affairs DHCS Executive promote cultural events		DHCS Executive promote cultural events
Promote a positive view of Indigenous culture to clients and community	Relevant business units	30 June 2010	Departmental publications and promotional material reflect appropriate cultural content.

<b>Opportunities</b>	Creating opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians to work together in our organisation is important to our department. Our workplace will be one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people <i>want</i> to work. The actions below are designed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are more likely to engage with our services.		
<b>Focus area: Foster diversity and inclusion and actively encourage the development of skills to enhance the career development of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees. Create opportunities for non-Indigenous Australians to increase their knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures. Increase the confidence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities in our services.</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measurable Target</b>
1. Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff in our Department	DHCS Executive	30 June 2010	Increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed from 2.7% of staff in 2007-08.
2. Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recruitment and Retention Strategy.	Organisational Services	31 December 2009	Strategy developed and integrated into routine recruitment.
3. Design and implement a cultural coaching and mentoring system for all staff.	Policy and Organisational Services (POS)	30 June 2010	Cultural coaching and mentoring is available for all staff.
4. Explore the development of Cultural Development Plan for use with Performance Management and Development Plans.	Executive Directors	31 March 2010	Report on potential to include Cultural Development Plans in the Performance Management Framework.
5. DHCS Reconciliation Awards for recognition of individual and team contributions towards reconciliation in the workplace and the community presented by Chief Executive.	All business areas (nominations) RAP Working Party (promotion)	Reconciliation Week 2010	Presentation of annual award during Reconciliation Week 2010.

<b>Tracking progress and reporting</b>			
<b>Action</b>	<b>Responsibility</b>	<b>Timeline</b>	<b>Measurable Target</b>
Report progress in implementing RAP	DHCS Executives	Twice a year	RAP report at Senior Managers Meetings twice a year
Feedback from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous stakeholders	Chief Executive and RAP Working Party	Twice per year	Feedback is incorporated into annual review of RAP
Consult with Reconciliation Australia on the report and refresh the RAP annually	RAP Working Group	30 June 2010	Report sent to RA identifying lessons learnt Refreshed RAP approved by RA and Chief Executive Report/refreshed RAP uploaded on both websites
Publish report on progress of RAP	POS	September 2010	Progress in implementing RAP is publicly reported annually

