



Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Policy (Version 1.0)

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1. Introduction

Community Housing Limited Group of Companies (CHL) is a leading provider of social and affordable housing solutions and services in Australia. It is committed to being a culturally competent and sensitive organisation and ensuring respect for and inclusivity of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, contractors, customers and visitors as they interact with our services and all those who may be affected by our operations.

CHL celebrates the survival and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures across Australia's many traditional lands and language groups. CHL also recognises the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to determine their own future and to live in accordance with their own cultural values and customs. Together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, CHL is committed to securing and respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' diversity and cultures.

CHL recognises the valuable contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and looks forward to working together in partnership, with mutual respect and on an equal footing.

2. Aim

The aim of this policy is to ensure the ongoing cultural competence of CHL and developing and maintaining a culturally inviting environment for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, contractors, clients and visitors in our organisation. The following principles will be of assistance in maintaining the standards of competence throughout our operations across Australia as CHL adopts a leading practice approach to cultural competent service delivery and ensure culturally inviting environments for our employees, contractors, clients and visitors.

3. Principles

These principles guide the overall mechanisms that CHL employs to create and maintain a leading practice approach to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These standards enable the organisation to be confident it is providing a nationally consistent approach within each jurisdiction, regarding the ways in which CHL work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and proactively contribute towards the journey of reconciliation whilst providing an environment that is culturally inviting for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In addition, CHL ensures that its organisation is compliant with National and State based regulations, industry standards, contractual obligations, legislation and organisational policies and procedures in relation to acknowledging respect, equality and equity as it pertains to all that exist with the national diversity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community who access our organisation.

Principles of Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples include but are not limited to;

- Access to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers, community Elders, local forums and/or advocates
- Appropriate communication tools and resources list
- Cultural Awareness training including strategies capturing local cultural resources and forward planning into operational practice
- The importance of localised knowledge
- Understanding the impact of social and historical factors, including widespread loss of cultural knowledge, inherited trauma and an ongoing legacy of social exclusion
- Engagement and participation
- Inclusive systems and policies

3.1. ACCESS TO ABORIGINAL AND/OR TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER WORKERS AND/OR ADVOCATES

CHL understands that there are many occasions when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people prefer and/or request to work or speak with a member of their community. CHL will ensure that every operation across its business is able to provide access to an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander worker or advocate.

CHL operations without a nominated Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representative/s are required to develop and maintain a database of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advocacy services that would be able to assist people in any of these areas and will assist in the referral process if required.

CHL will work supportively with advocates in any such circumstances to ensure its employees, clients, contractors or visitors are able to engage with us and that this requirement is never an obstacle to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working with or for CHL.

3.2. APPROPRIATE COMMUNICATION

CHL acknowledges that English is a second language for many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people across Australia and that English literacy rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are below the average of non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. CHL acknowledges that due to this,

many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are hindered in their attempts to develop of some of the functional skills required to participate in some communication activities.

CHL will always use clear and simple language, in its communication with its clients, employees, contractors and visitors. CHL understands that communication is a “two-way street” and will always seek to ensure that communications are understood and that people know they always have a right to ask CHL to continue explaining until they are confident they have understood.

CHL will always respond in a timely manner to all enquiries to ensure feedback and information is provided in line with operational practices.

CHL staff will always be able to arrange to have in-person meetings with people to discuss any issues or communications as it acknowledges that written communication, while important for confirmation and evidence, is not always successful in appropriately delivering the required information and message.

3.3. CULTURAL AWARENESS TRAINING

CHL is aware that many people do not necessarily come to the organisation with a developed knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, their histories, their beliefs and their cultures. It is a mandate of CHL that all employees and contractors that work with or on behalf of CHL undergo Cultural Awareness Training. It is a minimum requirement that all employees and contractors complete the CHL Cultural Awareness E-Learning program upon induction to the organisation. Permanent employees of CHL are required to participate in and complete localised face-to-face cultural awareness training at least every 2 years. Training is to be provided by a recognised training provider that encompasses localised cultural knowledge and protocol in each operational area.

3.4. THE IMPORTANCE OF LOCALISED KNOWLEDGE

CHL acknowledges that Australia is home to more than 400 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups and nations and understands that the traditional custodians of country and waters across the nation maintain their own customs and practices, as well as their own histories. CHL acknowledges the importance of localised Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge within the areas it works across Australia and values the connections it makes with local people, corporations and organisations and actively works to further develop these relationships to ensure its operations are well informed and relevant to the local community.

CHL works with all its service delivery teams to ensure they develop and maintain a database of strong networks with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and people to deliver a leading practice service.

3.5. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL FACTORS

CHL acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia have been the target of myriad discriminatory practices and failed government policy for over 200 years and up to the present day. CHL acknowledges the resilience and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in their survival throughout these failures of government and social practices. The impact of these practices and policies however on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been profound. The legacy and inter-generational wounding occasioned, sees Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia today leading the statistics in both juvenile and adult incarceration, infant mortality and life expectancy, suicide, school attendance and educational attainment, unemployment and poor socio-economic status.

CHL understands that many of the gaps between non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups are wide and the challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are many and often complex. CHL will endeavour to maintain a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at all times and will work with people towards solutions and achievable outcomes. CHL will employ ongoing training initiatives and actively promote awareness by incorporating culturally appropriate practice into its operational processes and policy development that is mindful of such factors that may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. CHL understands the importance of being invited by the local custodians and to consistently consult with appropriate leaders within each individual community.

3.6. ENGAGEMENT AND PARTICIPATION

CHL will always seek and encourage the engagement and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in its operations and development of its service delivery, in all areas of the organisation. CHL is committed to ensuring its organisation is culturally competent and it understands that the voice of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is essential to this. CHL resources and supports an internal employee alliance for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to provide peer support and mentoring, as well as provide a resource to the organisation.

This group functions as an invaluable resource for CHL. It provides feedback and input on the development of its services, review and development of policies and procedures, innovative ways in which to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness across the organisation. The group also assist as relationship building partners as CHL continues to build stronger connections in local communities and with clients. Through the employee alliance, regular team meetings and other forums, CHL encourages all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff to contribute their views and perspectives.

A Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Handbook has been developed for CHL by the group and is to be implemented in all CHL operations across Australia in conjunction with this policy.

CHL values Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff in a wide variety of roles across the company, and seeks to employ, retain and promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff. With the support of the human resources department, managers proactively identify recruitment opportunities, and develop retention and promotion strategies for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees.

3.7. INCLUSIVE SYSTEMS AND POLICIES

CHL is committed to consistently working towards leading practice as it pertains to being a culturally competent organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. CHL is aware that to be both a competent and safe organisation, its systems and policies must seek to be inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their voices, and being respectful to their histories and their customs.

CHL mandates that all formal meetings, events and conferences held at its locations open with an 'Acknowledgement to Country', as described in the CHL Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Handbook. All offices are to display an 'Acknowledgement to Country' plaque, together with an ATSI Map of Australia, to acknowledge the many first nations within the one we live and work on today.

CHL is contributing to the journey of reconciliation with its own Reconciliation Action Plan and is working with Reconciliation Australia to achieve its designated actions on this journey. The work in this space will continue to promote the inclusivity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and organisations in our business systems and processes, and remains a priority for CHL.

4. Related legislation, industry frameworks and standards, CHL policy and procedures

4.1. EXTERNAL LEGISLATION AND FRAMEWORKS

Reconciliation Australia
Equal Opportunities Act
Human Rights Act
Community Housing for Aboriginal Peoples Strategy (NSW)

4.2. CHL RELATED POLICIES AND PROCESSES

CHL Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples Handbook

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