



Information sheet:

Improving identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Every patient that accesses care within your service must be asked “Are you (is the patient) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?” Every patient must be asked on each admission, emergency department presentation or outpatient or primary care registration. It’s important because:

- The Australian Government and state and territory governments have prioritised improving identification rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is now included in the second edition of the National Safety and Quality Health Service (NSQHS) Standards for hospitals. Hospitals will be assessed on identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.ⁱ It is also mandatory for general practices to identify patients
- It is standard practice nationally to ask every patient each time they present to your service “Are you (is the patient) of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?”
- We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have poorer health outcomes. Identifying patients will enable you to offer appropriate services that can help reduce these risksⁱⁱ
- Patients should be provided the opportunity to answer this question themselves. Services must never guess or make assumptions about who your patients areⁱⁱⁱ
- Information you collect will help your service to better understand the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, monitor disparities in health care and inform policy, service planning and developmentⁱ
- It will support accurate funding for services provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through activity-based funding and service loadingsⁱ



References

- i Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2017. National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards (second edition). <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/National-Safety-and-Quality-Health-Service-Standards-second-edition.pdf>
- ii AIHW factsheet: ‘Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?’
- iii Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, 2017. National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards User Guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/National-Safety-and-Quality-Health-Service-Standards-User-Guide-for-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Health.pdf>

Action 5.8: Identifying people of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin is a NSQHS Standard



How can your service improve identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples?

- Develop a policy, business rules, procedures and protocols on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identification to improve identification rates through continuous quality improvement
- Review all systems to ensure that the standard question regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander status is consistently worded and coded
- Ensure that the question is a mandatory field
- Ensure that administrative and clinical information systems are streamlined and user-friendly
- Review patient intake procedures
- Develop a prompt for the workforce to check for and follow up missing or incomplete fields
- Periodically provide regular clients with a copy of their personal details
- Introduce mechanisms for quick identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in systems
- **Provide training and support for the workforce on the importance and process of identification**
- Develop resources in collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that explain the reason for identification and encourage people to self-identify
- Routinely review the effectiveness of the identification processes

Refer to the NSQHC Standards (second edition) for more information about improving identification.

Free online training to ask the question in accordance with standard practice for health service staff is available at heartfoundation.org.au/your-heart/aboriginal-health