phn NORTHERN SYDNEY
An Australian Government Initiative

Sydney North Health Network

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander -Primary Health Care

February 2026

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Major causes of death in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population

- Coronary Heart Disease
- Diabetes
- Chronic Lower Respiratory Diseases
- Cancers of the lung, bronchus and trachea
- Intentional Self-Harm

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024).

Factors influencing health in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Population

- Demography- Living “remote” or “very remote”(15%) vs non-remote dwelling(85%).
- Cultural protective factors-Country and caring for Country, knowledge and beliefs, language, self-determination, family and kinship, and cultural expression.
- Racism- leading to reduced access to social resources-jobs, education, housing and health care and other services.
- Psychological distress and likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours.
- Injury from assaults.
- Trauma across generations of First Nations people.
- Social determinants of health- circumstances in which people grow, live and work.
- Individual risk factors.

Leading disease in 2023	% ch
Coronary heart disease	
Back pain and problems	
Anxiety disorders	
Depressive disorders	
Dementia	
Suicide and self-inflicted injuries	
COPD	
Asthma	
Lung cancer	
Osteoarthritis	
Autism spectrum disorders	
Type 2 diabetes mellitus	
Rheumatoid arthritis	
Stroke	
Bowel cancer	
Poisoning	
Falls	
Hearing loss	
Alcohol use disorders	
Chronic liver disease	
Breast cancer	
Bipolar affective disorder	
Eating disorders	
Drug use disorders (excluding alc..	
Dental caries	

Burden of Disease

In 2018, the burden of disease among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people was 2.3 times that of non-Indigenous Australians.

Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2023)

The leading contributors to burden for First Nations people were, in order: mental and substance use disorders, injuries and chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, cancer, musculoskeletal conditions and respiratory disease

Reducing the Burden of Disease

- Access to appropriate, high-quality, timely and culturally responsive health care throughout life
- Increasing health literacy and self-management of chronic disease, providing links to services within and outside the health system and improving screening and treatment of acute and chronic illnesses.
- Access to high quality primary health care

GP Practices- Reducing the Burden of Disease

- Cultural safety and empowerment.
- Chronic Disease Management-including screening for ear disease and eye disease, referral to appropriate services.
- Addressing social determinants of illness & ensuring care is accessible and appropriate - lack of transport, referrals, access to free or lower cost services, access to cheaper medications.
- Mental health and suicide prevention- access to services.
- Free annual health check every 9-12 months (AMS/BB Practice).

Principles for Care Provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

- Principles for Care Provision for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - Community HealthPathways Sydney North
- Health Assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Aged 0 to 14 Years - Community HealthPathways Sydney North

Item 715

Should cover:-

- BP, BSL and assessment of cardiac and diabetes risks
- Height and weight
- Blood and urine test
- Discussion on family history
- Discussion on health goals
- Sight & hearing assessments
- Movement assessments
- Oral health
- Mental Health

Sample Assessments

- Health-check-Infants-and-preschool.pdf.aspx
- Health-check-Primary-school.pdf.aspx
- Health-check-Adolescents.pdf.aspx
- Health-check-Adults.pdf.aspx
- Health-check-Older-people.pdf.aspx

Post-Assessment

- Suggest regular appointments with GP
- Up to 10 services per year with an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioner or Practice Nurse.
- Mental health plan and/or GPCCMP to manage chronic conditions.
- Relevant referrals.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Review

Resources

- HealthPathways-

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health - Community HealthPathways Sydney North

- RACGP

RACGP - Webinar series

References

- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2024). *Health and wellbeing of First Nations people*. Retrieved from https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-health/indigenous-health-and-wellbeing
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- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare. (2025). *Closing the Gap targets: key findings and implications*. Canberra: AIHW. doi:10.25816/gqtf-2k57