



## HTH02 ABORIGINAL ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH

Aim	This policy articulates the commitment of the Shire to help improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities within the Ashburton Local Government area in partnership with environmental health professionals working in those communities, and other relevant stakeholder organisations
Application	Elected Members and Staff
Statutory Environment	<i>Public Health Act 2016</i>
Principles	Strategic Community Plan 2017 – 2027 (Desktop Review 2019)  Goal 01 Vibrant and Active Communities Objective 1 Connected, caring and engaged communities Objective 3 Quality education, healthcare, aged care and youth services  Goal 03 Unique Heritage and Environment Objective 2 Leading regional sustainability
Approval Date	OMC 17 December 2019 (MINUTE: 722/2019)

### Background

In December 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) agreed to a partnership between all levels of government to work with Indigenous communities to close the gap in Indigenous disadvantage (Council of Australian Governments 2007).



There is evidence that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations suffer a disproportionate impact from both increased exposure to environmental hazards and decreased access to environmental health services. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are more likely to live in conditions considered to be unacceptable by general Australian standards.

This includes overcrowding, poorly maintained buildings, high housing costs relative to income, high costs for food and associated food security, poor food safety practices and a lack of basic environmental health infrastructure, such as adequate sanitation, water supplies, waste management services and appropriate housing (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation 2003).

In line with the policy principles endorsed by Health Ministers in 2010, the Shire of Ashburton (the “Shire”) agrees that good environmental health conditions are an essential requirement for maintaining and improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (Australian Health Ministers’ Conference 2010).

The Shire is committed to assisting in the national effort to achieve equitable health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations and acknowledges the inequalities, both past and present, that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have endured that present many challenges to closing the health gap. The Shire will continue to advocate for improvement in the health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in part through support of the seven key targets of closing the Gap (2016), which are to:

- Close the gap in life expectancy between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (by 2031).
- Halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade (by 2018).
- 95 per cent of all Indigenous four-year-olds enrolled in early childhood education (by 2025)
- Close the gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous school attendance within five years (by 2018).
- Halve the gap for Indigenous children in reading, writing and numeracy achievements within a decade (by 2018).
- Halve the gap for Indigenous Australians aged 20-24 in Year 12 attainment or equivalent attainment rates (by 2020).
- Halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non- Indigenous Australians within a decade (by 2018).

### **Scope**

The scope of this policy is to outline the Shire’s Aboriginal Environmental Health Policy principles and actions for its Employees and elected members and to recognise the important role of environmental health in improving health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations in the Shire.



## **Policy Principles**

To affirm that the Shire:

- Acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have suffered and continue to suffer from the legacy of dispossession economically, legally, culturally and spiritually. The Shire supports reconciliation, recognition and equal rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Acknowledges that environmental health programs serve to prevent illness, injury and even death. Such programs can result in an overall net social and economic gain for the community including disease prevention, extended lives, enhanced productivity and less time lost from family, education and work by materially reducing environmental risk factors to health and wellbeing.
- Acknowledge that environmental health programs can also help to reduce the vulnerability of communities against emergency situations such as acts of nature (bushfire, cyclones etc.) and epidemics etc.
- Endeavour to ensure that each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community should benefit, wherever possible, from the services of relevant and targeted environmental health programs.

## **Actions**

The Shire will:

- Encourage greater participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the environmental health profession and workforce;
- As a contribution to the Closing the Gap framework, advocate that environmental health programs servicing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities be supported, by the State Government, to allow maintenance at the staffing and funding levels necessary in order for them to deliver health outcomes and or continue to be effective, empower localised workforce and to and satisfy environmental health standards;
- Develop programs for improved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes in partnership with the State Government and relevant stakeholders such as Aboriginal Corporations, other service providers and not for profit organisations;
- Encourage the development and involvement of appropriately qualified and trained environmental health practitioners in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Refer to relevant Government guidance documents such as the Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology Queensland Health 2011 on appropriate terminology when working and corresponding with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and for use in all relevant policy,



planning, programs and resource development;

- Undertake an annual review of baseline data (including information such as resident population, infrastructure, maintenance programs, waste disposal programs, emergency preparation etc.) of the Shire's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as a reference point for consideration of future Environmental Health programs;
- Engage with any State Government consultation regarding future planning for remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the Shire of Ashburton and ensure that the views of local communities are adequately invited and considered.

### **Definitions**

(Adapted from Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology Queensland Health 2011, except Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Practitioner) *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

According to s51 (25) of the High Court of Australia (1983): An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

### **Community/communities**

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, community is primarily about country, (extended) family ties, and shared experience. Community is about inter-relatedness and belonging and is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

It is generally acceptable to use the term 'community' to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people living within a particular geographical region. However, the diversity of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within that community should be considered where applicable.

### **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Practitioner**

A person employed to work in environmental health with some level of accredited training. This term encompasses 'Indigenous Environmental Health Worker (IEHW)', and 'Aboriginal Environmental Health Worker (AEHW)'. It can also be used to collectively refer to any person with or without environmental health qualifications working in this area, such as an Environmental Health Officer, Environmental Health Coordinator, Environmental Health Supervisor, Healthy Housing Workers and Animal Welfare Workers.



## References

Australian Health Ministers' Conference 2010, *Policy Principles on which to Base Improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health*, viewed 2 December 2016

<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohphttp://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-environment-policy-principles-atsienvironment-policy-principles-atsi>

Council of Australian Governments 2007, *National Agreement*, viewed 2 December 2016,  
<http://www.coagreformcouncil.gov.au/agenda/indigenous.cfm>.

Commonwealth of Australia 2010, *Environmental Health Practitioner Manual*, viewed 2 December 2016, <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/ohp-enhealth-manual-atsi-cnt>

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013-2023, Department of Health viewed 15 May 2014,  
<http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/natsih-plan>

2016 Closing the Gap report, Council of Australian Governments (COAG). Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.  
<http://closingthegap.dpmc.gov.au/>

Queensland Aboriginal and Islander Health Council 2011, *Making Links for Healthy Places*, viewed 15 May 2014, <http://www.qaihc.com.au/resources/publications/>.

Queensland Health 2011, *Guidelines for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Terminology Queensland Health*, viewed 15 May 2014,  
<http://www.health.qld.gov.au/atsihealth/documents/terminology.pdf>.

## LOCAL PLANNING

Refer to the Building and Planning section of the Shire of Ashburton website for all Local Planning Policies  
<http://www.ashburton.wa.gov.au/building-planning/town-planning-/local-planning-policies>.