

# Aboriginal Employment

A guide to better attraction,  
selection and retention strategies  
across WA Health



No Longer Applicable  
Withdrawn April 2015



## Foreword

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders remain significantly under represented in the WA Health workforce, even in regions with a significant Aboriginal client base. While increased Aboriginal employment across regions with large numbers of Aboriginal people is a government objective, our success has been limited.

According to the Health Reform Committee's report, '*A Healthy Future for Western Australians*', the way forward to a healthier future for Aboriginal peoples is ensuring Aboriginal ownership and participation in health professions. Consequently, this Guide has been developed to provide best practice principles and strategies for the attraction, recruitment and retention of Aboriginal employees across WA Health.

It is recommended that all staff involved in the attraction, recruitment and retention of staff familiarise themselves with this resource, and implement its recommendations into daily work practice.

Diversity is a source of strength for WA Health. By having a better understanding of cultural difference, and taking it into account through policies and practice, we enhance the integrity of our service and improve our ability to meet the needs of our diverse population in meaningful, appropriate ways. The diverse skills of Aboriginal people are essential for WA Health to better design and deliver services that meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

**Kim Hames MLA**  
MINISTER FOR HEALTH

### **Compiled by:**

Aeron Simpson, Project Officer, Office of Aboriginal Health, 2009.



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## Introduction

Comprising all state government departments, the West Australian public sector is the state's largest employer. As the largest employer within the public sector, WA Health has a commitment to increase Aboriginal employment across all levels of policy and service delivery.

Overall, Aboriginal peoples are greatly under-represented in the workforce. This is particularly noticeable in senior positions and specialist medical professions as Aboriginal employment is predominantly concentrated in low salary levels. In 2008 Aboriginal public sector employees held 0.5% of salary ranges 9 and 10, and 4.7% at salary ranges 7–10 (*OEE0 2008 Annual Report*). There are a number of factors that contribute to this, including:

- negative perceptions of the public sector
- negative perceptions of management and colleagues in the workplace
- the high value the public sector places on formal qualification as opposed to real life experiences and expertise
- positions designed without consideration for career progression
- static, clinical or unwelcoming work environments
- culturally void work environments (no Aboriginal art i.e. framed paintings, photos, floor tiles, mosaic pathways, alfrescos etc)
- unfriendly or culturally unaware front of house staff (reception, security, concierge etc).

This resource has been developed to assist management and human resource personnel to better attract, recruit and retain suitable Aboriginal employees into the WA Health workforce.

If your region comprises a significant Aboriginal population, these strategies can be useful to ensure that you attract the most suitable applicants for your advertised vacancies that may not otherwise apply.

We thoroughly endorse these guidelines and encourage their application in the employment of Aboriginal people.

**Conjoint Prof Ken Wyatt AM**  
Director  
Office of Aboriginal Health  
Department of Health

**Mr Kevin Cox**  
Director  
Aboriginal Health  
WA Country Health Service



## Attraction

### Attracting applicants

The last 200 years of Australian history has contributed to some Aboriginal peoples feeling pressure from perceived or real hostility from non-Aboriginal communities, services, organisation, companies and individuals. Whether accurate or not, these feelings and experiences actively reduce the likelihood of some Aboriginal peoples applying for employment.

So how can government services work to increase the rate of Aboriginal applications? Services should:

- actively work to build relationships between themselves and local Aboriginal communities
- consult with Aboriginal health professionals/organisations to identify the most suitable qualification and experience an appropriate Aboriginal applicant may require
- identify the minimum requirements for ANY employee to ensure that qualifications and experience requirements are not overstated in job description forms
- use existing professional networks to gain access to, and support application from local Aboriginal communities
- invite respected community elders to participate on the selection panel. Provide training for all panel members to increase their understanding of Aboriginal culture
- communicate to potential employees the networks and support mechanisms that are in place to support them in their role
- provide applicants with electronic and hard-copy job application kits as candidates may not have internet access. Subject to prescribed requirements (e.g. Public Sector Standards), assess whether applicants can apply for a position by completing a personal details form and submitting their resume as opposed to addressing selection criteria.

A case study discussion how the South Metropolitan Area Health's Public Health Unit have used innovative recruitment strategies to improve recruitment process for Aboriginal Health positions can be found in Attachment 1.

**NB:** Information concerning alternative methods of recruiting applicants can be obtained from Office of the Public Sector Standards Commissioner or the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity.

<http://www.opssc.wa.gov.au/documents/hrm/innovativerecruitmentnov03.pdf>



Where significant Aboriginal populations exist it may be appropriate to appoint an Aboriginal Employment or Development Coordinator. As part of their range of duties, this person would:

- liaise with job networks
- liaise with Aboriginal job applicants
- work with selection panels
- provide Aboriginal applicants with support in preparing their application (i.e. addressing selection criteria)
- offer application and interview advice
- work with human resources staff to develop and implement targeted recruitment and retention strategies
- contribute to induction process for Aboriginal employees
- help identify Aboriginal employees learning and development needs
- liaise with managers to rectify incidents of discrimination and racism
- support Aboriginal employees once employed.

Such a Coordinator would assist agencies to gain a clear understanding of the complexities of Aboriginal culture and family structures. As a manager recruiting Aboriginal employees it is your responsibility to understand and provide for the needs of your staff. Be aware that Aboriginal people may be required to attend multiple family commitments such as funerals and sorry time. It is important to have Aboriginal mentor/counsellors on hand to support your Aboriginal staff through these times.

## Advertising

There are a number of factors that should be considered when you are advertising vacancies to Aboriginal communities.

- Who are you advertising to? Is the language targeted at a health professional, or a student who may have only recently completed tertiary studies?
- Where should you be advertising? Are you looking to recruit from local communities, from Aboriginal health organisation, or from the wider population?
- What media should you use to advertise? Will you reach your preferred target through local newspapers, Aboriginal newspaper, local radio, Aboriginal radio, or ads at University/TAFE Aboriginal study centres?
- Can you use Aboriginal organisations or communities to advertise job vacancies? Many Aboriginal Australians find out about work vacancies through word of mouth or personal referral.

- What WA Health networks can you use to advertise? Aboriginal Employment Development Officers or Aboriginal Liaison Officers can be great avenues through which to make contact with local Aboriginal communities.
- What are you looking for in your applicants? Skills and abilities, qualifications, previous experience etc? Aboriginal people often have fewer formal qualifications. Is your selection criteria acting as deterrent? Listing unnecessary formal qualifications or failing to recognise personal and professional experience may rule out highly suitable Aboriginal applicants.
- What additional attributes are required? Does your applicant need to have cultural awareness of all local communities (there are often more than one community residing within a region).
- What language are you using? Use plain English in advertisements, keep messages brief, make them eye catching (i.e. using artwork).
- Who is the contact person? Are you using someone culturally unaware? Would it be useful for them to complete WA Health Cultural Awareness training? Think about how this may affect an applicant's likelihood of applying for your vacancy.
- Who else can you use to identify potential applicants? University Aboriginal centres, Aboriginal Liaison Officers (usually working out of hospitals and Aboriginal Medical Services) etc?
- Can you establish a recruitment pool that can be drawn from each time you have a relevant advertised vacancy? When advertising, consider advertising a group of positions as a pool with an end date. Advise in the advert that applicants to one job may be considered for similar jobs. Alternatively, you can advertise an open-ended pool for vacancies to similar jobs.

WA Health strongly encourage the use of the following statement in all position advertisements: "WA Health is committed to achieving a diverse workforce and strongly encourages applications from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, people from culturally diverse backgrounds and people with disabilities."



## Selection

### Selection tools

Be creative with your application requirements. If historically you have had poor application rates or poor selection criteria responses from Aboriginal people, you may consider an alternative such as requesting work samples.

WA Health is flexible in its recruitment process, as long as the same selection tools are used for each applicant.

### Selection panel

There are a number of strategies that can be used to ensure Aboriginal applicants are given a fair go throughout your selection process. For example:

- Include an Aboriginal professional on your selection panel

You must ensure that this Aboriginal representative is fully informed of your chosen selection process and their role on the selection panel. As a member on the selection panel, this representative must have equal decision-making capacity to other selection panel members. It is important that the Aboriginal representative is skilled in recruitment and selection techniques. If your representative does not have these skills, Recruitment and Staff Selection training is offered by the Department.


- Provide Cultural Maintenance training for selection panel members

When Aboriginal applicants are interviewed, it is essential that all selection panel members are aware of culturally appropriate communication techniques and potential gender issues for Aboriginal applicants. For example, if the interviewee is an Aboriginal male, he may be uncomfortable shaking hands with female panel members, direct all responses to the Aboriginal or male panel members, and avoid eye contact when responding to questions. While these behaviours may appear disrespectful, they can in fact be cultural displays of respect or confusion as to the meaning of questions.

### Interview techniques

Some Aboriginal applicants may find a pre-interview briefing session useful. Such a session will inform applicants of how to prepare for their interview and what to expect on entering the interview room. This session is also an ideal opportunity for applicants to be introduced to the panel, ultimately reducing the potential for 'stage fright'. There is nothing wrong with showing applicants around prior to an interview. This may also make them feel more comfortable and confident in their interview.





The benefit of having trained, cultural aware interviewers on your panel is that they will be able to reword questions using plain English to suit individual applicants. The Department of Health permits prompting of answers; however this must be done appropriately.

By restructuring, or rewording questions to suit individual applicants you can ensure that each applicant is provided with equal opportunity to respond appropriately.

An example of how you can reword a formal question into an informal style would be:

**Formal:** Why are you the most suitable candidate for this job?

**Informal:** Why do you think you are the best person for this job?

**NB:** Remember that if you chose to question in an informal style, ensure that all applicants are questioned in this manner.

Some Aboriginal people find it difficult to back themselves, particularly if it will make them sound proud or pompous. Consequently some applicants may use 'us' or 'we' instead of 'I' or 'me'. Panels should be sensitive to this and have the "people skills" that enable them to understand this. In this instance it may be worthwhile considering to allow applicants to bring support with them to the interview. If this is the case the panel must be fully briefed about how to deal with supporting personnel.

Some applicants may feel threatened by interviews conducted in small closed rooms. To reduce unwarranted stress, try to avoid placing physical objects (i.e. desks) between the selection panel and the applicant, hold interviews in larger rooms, or consider interviewing outdoors (when suitable). There is nothing wrong with having an interview at a local coffee shop, or anywhere the applicant might feel more comfortable.

**The need to consider these techniques is in its simplest interpretation, a sign of respect for differences in culture.**



## Induction

It may be useful for successful Aboriginal applicants to be taken through their induction program by Aboriginal colleagues. This will enable the new staff member to be shown around the service while being introduced to culturally appropriate mentors. An added benefit of this is that new staff will begin their work with WA Health through a stress free, supportive process that supports their individuality, culture and personal needs.

### Induction packages

To assist all employees to understand and become comfortable with their work environment induction packages should include as a minimum:

- Structure of the Department of Health and local work site.
- Values of the Department and Code of Conduct.
- Learning and professional development opportunities.
- Agency specific information such as roles and responsibility of staff and reporting structures.
- Information of Performance Development Plan specific to the employee's role.
- Who to ask day to day questions.
- Advice of industrial entitlements and obligations such as hours of work, bereavement leave and cultural leave.
- Information about flexible work practices and work life balance options (available on the work life balance website at [www.health.wa.gov.au/worklifebalance/welcome](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/worklifebalance/welcome)).
- Dress standards.
- Who to ring when absent.
- Use of vehicles.
- Mentoring and coaching process, provide a coach/buddy if possible.
- Details of any relevant networks or support available.

Induction programs should be flexible so that they can be adjusted to meet individual employee's needs.



## Cultural Awareness + Cultural Safety = Cultural Maintenance

Fostering a culturally aware workplace will support an environment which enables optimal work performance from all individuals, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal alike. As such, all induction programs should include cultural maintenance training. WA Health has a standardised Cultural Maintenance training toolkit that is available for use by all WA Health services. This training is designed to be delivered by designated Aboriginal health professionals working in your local area. This training is to be incorporated into induction programs for all new employees. If an employee is new to your site but has been working with WA Health for some time, they are still required to complete this training if they have not done so within the past two years. This training should be completed by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members.

It is strongly advised that all existing staff complete the cultural maintenance training if they have not already done so. This includes Directors, Managers, Supervisors, HR staff, administrative staff, etc. By supporting a system wide approach to cultural awareness, WA Health aims to foster a supportive and competent workforce that is equipped with the skills and knowledge required to deliver culturally competent work practice and service.

**Cultural maintenance training should always be delivered by a suitably trained Aboriginal health professional.**

For more information on WA Health's Cultural Maintenance training package, contact the Office of Aboriginal Health on (08) 9222 4024.

### Management

It is essential for Managers to develop clear and open communication systems with their Aboriginal employees. Where suitable, managerial relationships should be initially developed through Supervisors. This will assist Aboriginal employees to building confidence and knowledge of their workplace, and become familiar with reporting and accountability pathways.

On commencement of employment, the manager (and whenever suitable, supervisor) of the new employee should make time to sit with the Aboriginal employee in a semi-formal meeting. Discussions should take place around:

#### 1. Understanding of work environment

This is a perfect time for management to identify the extent of the employee's understanding of the organisational structure and work requirements relevant to their role. This discussion should focus on where the employee's role fits within the structure of your workplace and how their duties will affect/interact with other colleagues.



## **2. Application**

This discussion will be useful to identify why the employee has chosen to work in this role. Identifying their personal values, commitments to their work, and perceptions of work standards and timelines will assist management in identifying what induction and training programs may be required to support the employee in achieving desired work performance.

## **3. Personal development**

It will be useful to discuss the employee's work characteristics. Are they able to work effectively under limited supervision? Do they prefer to work in teams? How constructively do they take criticism? Whose responsibility do they perceive it to be if they are unable to meet work demands, etc? Understanding the employee's perspective on subjects such as these will facilitate management to implement suitable structures to support the staff member to develop professionally, in addition to addressing any apparent perceptual conflicts (i.e. if the employee does not see themselves as responsible for their work outcomes or ability to meet deadlines).

## **4. Quality of work outcomes**

This initial meeting will provide an ideal forum to discuss the new employee's expected work performance. Having the manager and supervisor present will enable the employee to receive a complete managerial perspective of the scope of duties and standard of work required from them.

Initial discussions such as these can be a useful tool for identifying the work ethic, understanding of organisational protocols, and personal competencies of any new employee.

During this time the Supervisor should agree with the employee on a regular supervision schedule. This may involve meeting weekly or monthly depending on the perceived necessity of performance feedback, debriefing and support. It is recommended that these meetings be used as a structured forum in which the Aboriginal worker and supervisor discuss the employee's expectations, performance, work related issues, mentoring and training requirements.



## Retention

### Open door policy

Make formal and informal appointments with your staff to discuss how their work is going. Find out if there are any areas in which they would benefit from professional development and training, discuss how their work arrangements and hours are suiting their needs, and talk about the opportunity for mentoring and support.

During team meetings make time to recognise and complement staff on their work. Share this time between recognising the work of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff members so that each feel equally appreciated as part of the team.

### Understanding Aboriginal family structure

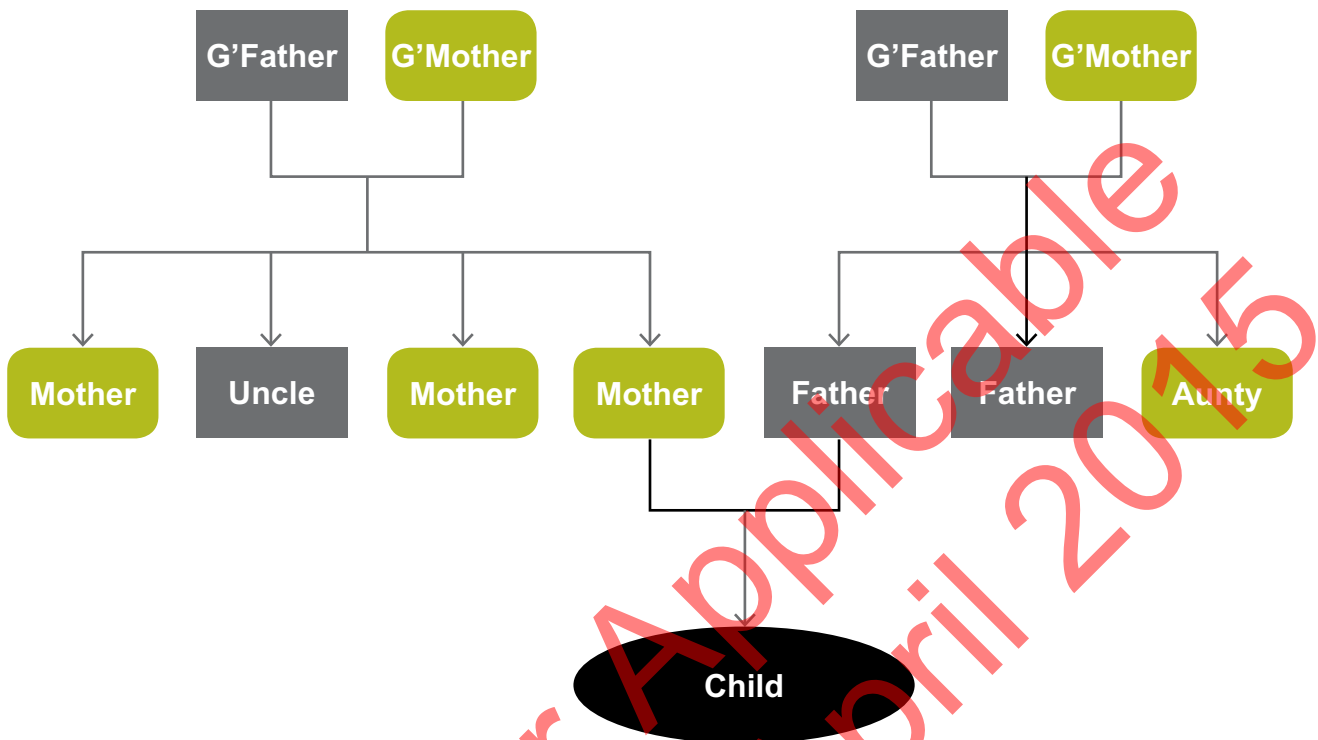
It is important for Managers and Supervisors to be understanding of cultural and extended family obligations that may impact on an Aboriginal employee's time. Some Aboriginal employees may require frequent or extended time off in order to fulfil their often unavoidable obligations.

In order to understand Aboriginal family obligations, management needs to appreciate the social organisation of Aboriginal communities, and the extent to which they vary from traditional western structures.

An example of the complexity of Aboriginal family relations is that an Aboriginal child's father and all paternal uncles are considered to be fathers. A child's mother and all maternal aunts are considered to be mothers. As such, parental responsibilities such as legal consent, discipline and personal care can be shared between several relations. In addition to this, cousins may be recognised as sisters and brothers, and close unrelated paternal/maternal figures may be identified as uncles/aunties.



## Fraction of an Aboriginal Family Unit



Aboriginal people are expected to attend all funerals within their family. Given the high mortality rates of Aboriginal Australians, Aboriginal employees may be required to attend numerous family commitments such as these. It is important that management is supportive of employee's personal commitments, and provide support structures to assist people through such times.

Be frank and open when discussing work performance and time management. If you are open to cultural differences there should be little difficulty adapting time lines and working hours to meet the workplace and employee needs.

There are many flexible work options that management can explore that may meet workplace and employee needs. These include:

- job sharing between employees from different community groups
- flexible daily work hours
- rostered days off every fortnight
- family friendly work policies
- encouraging Aboriginal employees to provide advanced notice or leave requirements (whenever possible)
- flexible leave opportunities (for example exploring opportunities for cultural leave).

The department's Work Life Balance Unit website hosts information regarding the flexible hours and working arrangement available to WA Health employees. This information can be obtained from: [www.health.wa.gov.au/worklifebalance/options/hours.cfm](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/worklifebalance/options/hours.cfm)

Occasions may arise when you have concerns regarding an employee's work hours and/or performance. If this does occur, always approach the employee directly and discuss the issue in a respectful manner. Some tips to remember are:

- Deal with the issue as soon as it arises.
- Approach the employee in a calm, respectful and friendly manner.
- Do not jump to conclusions. Their reasons may be completely warranted.
- Listen to the employee's reasons with the intent of understanding their point of view.
- Do not get frustrated or angry if the employee is having trouble explaining their reasons to you. This does not indicate guilt, they may be unsure of how to explain their situation in terms you will be able to relate to.
- Discuss ways in which both you and the employee see that work demands can be met while accommodating personal commitments. It may be suitable for the employee to reduce their hours, begin job sharing, or change to a part-time contract.
- If relevant, suggest the employee complete time management training.

**An example of how you could approach an employee who has been having difficulty committing to scheduled work hours is:**

I've noticed that some days you appear to be flustered when you get to work. Is there anything we can do to make your working hours easier for you? I'm sure we can work something out if you have a moment for a chat.





## Mentors

Mentoring is a supportive relationship between two employees through which advice, support, encouragement, and reciprocal learning takes place. These relationships are designed to help individuals achieve their full potential, both professionally and personally, through their work experiences.

Aboriginal mentors can be useful for not only Aboriginal employees, but for supporting and informing whole of service work practice. For example, mentors can:

- Provide information on suitable Aboriginal organisations that may be able to assist in identifying and recruiting suitable Aboriginal applicants.
- Provide support and debriefing opportunities to new Aboriginal staff.
- Provide insight to non-Aboriginal staff on culturally appropriate work practice.
- Provide culturally appropriate techniques for dealing with difficult work and patient experiences.
- Support staff in servicing Aboriginal patients.
- Act as a mediator between Aboriginal patients and health professionals.
- Identify suitable Aboriginal contacts for consultation on community initiatives.
- Assist managers to identify developmental needs of Aboriginal staff.
- Identify staff who may require additional Cultural Maintenance training.
- Support management with a confidential Aboriginal perspective on workplace issues.

Mentors can be Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal. They must be able to:


- Show a comprehension and commitment to equal opportunity and respect of Aboriginal culture.
- Generate trust and respect.
- Provide useful advice that draws from their own experience of working in the public sector.
- Communicate openly and honestly about their experiences and learning.
- Recognise that a mentor is a buddy, not a personal advocate.

Mentor and mentee do not necessarily have to be employees of the same organisation.

## Staff networks

Peer support is essential for the well being of all WA Health employees. In order to support the interests of Aboriginal employees, work sites are encouraged to develop Aboriginal networks.





These networks provide Aboriginal employees with opportunities to share experiences, foster culturally appropriate support structures, and offer invaluable opportunities for debriefing.

Such networks can also be useful in identifying incidents of harassment or discrimination, and assist in such incidents being dealt with in a firm and timely manner.

Aboriginal staff networks can operate on a formal or informal basis and are an ideal mechanism through which to orientate new Aboriginal employees to your work site.

Management support and resources is integral to the success of these networks.

## Respecting culture

Publicly demonstrating respect for Aboriginal culture is strongly supported by WA Health. Such demonstrations work to raise the profile of local Aboriginal communities, enhance the reputation of WA Health as an equal opportunity employer, and promote application to enter the public service workforce by potential Aboriginal professionals.

Cultural days of significance that should be recognised and celebrated in your workplace, in consultation with your Aboriginal workforce, include:

- **21 March, Harmony Day**

This date coincides with United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and began to be commemorated in 1999 as a day to encourage tolerance and understanding between Australians of all races and cultural backgrounds.

- **26 May, National Sorry Day**

This day marks the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission report Bringing them Home, and commemorates the history of forcible removals and its effects.

- **26 May – 3 June, National Reconciliation Week**

National Reconciliation Week celebrates the rich culture and history of Aboriginal Australians. It provides us with the opportunity to think about how we can reduce Aboriginal disadvantage, and work together with Aboriginal communities for a better future together.

- **First full week of July, NAIDOC Week**

This week grew out of the National Aborigines Day (also referred to as National Aboriginal Day). This week celebrates Aboriginal culture, and promotes the building of relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians.



There may also be local days of significance specific to your region. Talk to your Aboriginal Liaison Officers or local Aboriginal Organisations to identify whether local cultural dates are to be celebrated in your area.

An additional recommendation is that if your site flies the Australian flag, the Aboriginal flag should also be flown.



## **Bullying, discrimination and harassment**

The 2005 *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian Public Service Employee Census Survey* identified that 23% of Aboriginal employees had experienced bullying or harassment while at work compared to 17% of non-Aboriginal employees. In addition to this, 18% of Aboriginal employees reported having experienced racial discrimination; this is three times that of other employees (6%).

To improve Aboriginal attraction, job satisfaction and retention across WA Health, actively eliminating incidence of racism must be a priority within all work sites. Every employee has the right to attend work where they are treated with respect.

To ensure that all employees work in an acceptable fashion, exhibiting ethnical and cultural aware attitudes, all Managers are to ensure that their staff are familiar with the Department's *Prevention of Bullying, Harassment and Discrimination in the Workplace* policy. A copy of this policy can be found at: [www.intranet.health.wa.gov.au/policies/docs/Prevention\\_of\\_bullying\\_harassment\\_&\\_discrimination\\_policy.pdf](http://www.intranet.health.wa.gov.au/policies/docs/Prevention_of_bullying_harassment_&_discrimination_policy.pdf)

## Housing

The availability of quality housing is an important consideration for potential employees applying for work in rural and remote locations. It also plays a role in retaining employees located in regional areas for long periods of time.

No accommodation is provided for staff employed in the Perth metropolitan area, Mandurah and Bunbury other than in especially approved circumstances.

In country areas accommodation can be provided, as necessary, for:

- general managers
- directors
- health service managers/administrators of hospitals
- administrative co-ordinators (community health services)
- directors of nursing
- senior medical officers.

The Department of Health's Staff Accommodation Policy can be found at:  
[www.health.wa.gov.au/hrit/infrastructure/procedures/docs/Staff\\_Accom.pdf](http://www.health.wa.gov.au/hrit/infrastructure/procedures/docs/Staff_Accom.pdf)





## Professional development and training

### Career development

Encouraging individual career planning and development indicates recognition of each individual employee's value and importance to WA Health. Meet with staff to discuss what they are hoping to get out of their job, where they see their career going, and who their role models are around the service/office. It may be useful to have an Aboriginal Mentor present when discussing career prospects and planning with Aboriginal staff as some may feel uncomfortable discussing their achievements, expectations and goals.

When mapping out career plans, do not assume that you know what will be the best outcome for your staff. They may have different priorities to you, or prefer sideways career development, allowing them to move between positions that provide direct services to Aboriginal communities. Always allow staff to identify their own aspirations and priorities.

### Aboriginal leadership

By developing Aboriginal leaders, WA Health aims to foster a supportive and culturally aware workforce that can provide mentors and role models for other Aboriginal professionals hoping to enter the public sector workforce, and support existing Aboriginal workers currently delivering invaluable services to the WA community.

In order to foster Aboriginal leadership, management should:

- identify suitable Aboriginal candidates for development programs
- establish recruitment pools that will identify potential Aboriginal workers who can be notified of upcoming vacancies
- encourage Aboriginal workers to apply for transfers, secondments, and advertised vacancies in order to expand on their professional experiences
- recognise the benefit of Aboriginal employees participating in activities outside the formal work environment, such as acting on community reference groups or cultural event coordination committees
- utilise wider Aboriginal networks to identify suitable applicants for senior executive and management roles
- provide ongoing professional development, training and support programs for Aboriginal employees in senior positions such as coaching support, networking and professional leadership training
- encourage participation of Aboriginal employees at conferences and events.



## Attachment 1: Innovative recruitment at SMAHS Public Health Unit, Aboriginal Health Team

The South Metropolitan Area Health Service Public Health Unit (SMAHS), Aboriginal Health Team works directly with Aboriginal people in the community to achieve improved health outcomes. Previous advertising for Aboriginal Health Worker and Project Officer positions received a limited response. Even though talented individuals showed an interest in the position, the standard application process was a deterrent. It was critical that the Unit modify their approach to recruitment and selection in order to widen the pool of applicants and to attract people who are culturally connected and skilled to undertake the role appropriately.

### How the recruitment process was modified:

The manager of the Public Health Unit liaised directly with Health Corporate Network (HCN) to agree on some simple but effective changes to the standard recruitment and selection process, such as:

- reviewing job description forms with the aim of re-defining selection criteria (or in some cases creating new job roles) which better reflect the responsibilities and cultural competencies required for the job
- using pool recruitment to enable appointments to future vacancies from the one recruitment process
- including a diversity statement in the advertisement and distributing the advert more widely by members of the team through their networks. The advert also gave a clear description of the role and its community liaison function to attract greater interest from potential applicants
- sending out applications from the Public Health Unit or allowing people to collect them from their Public Health Unit. Applicants were also asked to deliver their completed applications to the Public Health Unit. This provided a face-to-face approach and a familiar and more easily accessible location (than HCN) for most applicants
- streamlining the application process. Applicants were only required to submit their CV and address one broad question “why do you think that you are the most suitable person for this position?” Responses to this question were useful in determining applicant’s knowledge and commitment to the Aboriginal communities.



### Critical success factors included:

- having Aboriginal people on the panel to ensure the process was culturally appropriate and the desired cultural suitability of applicants could be determined. This can only be determined by Aboriginal people
- adequately preparing panel members for the interview process so they have an understanding of different and innovative recruitment processes that they are empowered to introduce in order to select the most suitable person for the job while being confident they are still complying with the public sector standards and WA Health policy
- being clear to applicants about the process and application/interview requirements. Generally people are trained (both in house and by external consultants) to focus an application against criteria. This can cause an issue when the application requirements are changed
- raising cultural awareness of the existing workforce in order to provide a culturally secure and welcoming work environment for new staff. This is also very encouraging for applicants who come into contact with staff during the application and interview process.

### Challenges arising from using an innovative approach to recruitment included:

- changing mindsets – because something has always been done this way does not mean it is the best way of doing things. Panel members were still inclined to undertake the full interview process because of its familiarity and to ensure that they complied with the public sector standards. However, through this experience the panel realised that the process they dictated could inadvertently restrict their ability to select the most suitable person for the job. Some applicants do not respond well to the traditional question and answer interview style
- some applicants were so accustomed to preparing full applications that they still prepared a statement addressing the selection criteria even though they were not required to do so for this position.

### The outcomes have been:

- an increase in the quality and number of suitable applications received for comparable positions, resulting in all applicants being interviewed and deemed suitable and two appointments being made. In addition, by using pool recruitment, one applicant remains in the pool and can be appointed when the next suitable position becomes available
- an increased awareness of the need to have a more flexible approach for the interview process
- an identified need to have longer periods for advertising due to several enquiries from potentially suitable applicants being received after the closing date. Providing longer closing dates on advertisements and promoting the positions through Aboriginal networks can work to engage a larger audience.

### Conclusion:

Changes to the traditional recruitment process have provided the Aboriginal Health Team with a greater pool of suitable applicants to select from for similar roles, and have assisted to provide a quality service that responds to the needs of the local communities.





## Further information

Further information regarding these and other strategies for improving the attraction, selection and recruitment of suitable Aboriginal applicants to the public sector can be accessed from:

### Contacts

#### **WA Department of Health, Office of Aboriginal Health**

Level 3, C Block, 189 Royal Street

EAST PERTH, WA 6004

Ph: (08) 9222 2455

Fax: (08) 9222 4378

[www.aboriginal.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.aboriginal.health.wa.gov.au)

#### **National Indigenous Cadetship Program**

Ph: 1800 062 172

Hotline: 1802 102

#### **Office of Equal Employment Opportunity**

Level 17, St Martins Tower

44 St Georges Terrace

PERTH, WA 6000

Ph: (08) 9260 6600

Fax: (08) 9260 6611

[www.oeeo.wa.gov.au](http://www.oeeo.wa.gov.au)

#### **Office of the Public Sector Standards Commission**

Level 12, St Martins Tower

44 St Georges Terrace

PERTH, WA 6000

Ph: (08) 9260 6600

Toll Free: 1800 676 607

Fax: (08) 9260 6611

[www.opssc.wa.gov.au](http://www.opssc.wa.gov.au)

#### **WA Department of Housing and Works**

203 Nicholson Road

SHENTON PARK, WA 2008

Ph: (08) 9286 6000

Fax: (08) 9286 6025

[www.dhw.wa.gov.au/396.asp](http://www.dhw.wa.gov.au/396.asp)





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