

Aboriginal Employment Plan

2026





Artwork

Artist Bio: Rubii Red is a proud 23-year old Lama Lama woman from the Cape York Peninsula, but has grown and lived in Naarm (Melbourne, Victoria) for the majority of her life. Rubii is an aspiring film-maker, gamer and Twitch streamer, a First Nations activist and (mainly) a digital artist, although she does also work with traditional mediums from time to time. A lot of Rubii's artwork focuses around original characters that represent her culture and community in a fun and vibrant way. She also uses her work to react to big issues and events that have happened nationally or internationally, and to bring awareness to those issues visually. She is heavily inspired by people and the environments around her as well as comic-books, anime shows, science-fiction and fantasy based movies and video games. Her goals for the future are to eventually produce her own comic-book or graphic novel that represents First Nations people and her community. She also wants to continue to give back to her community, as they've helped to build her up into the young woman she is today.



Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

Austin Health acknowledges the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nation as the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work. We pay respect to Elders past and present and recognise that this land was, is, and always will be Aboriginal land – sovereignty was never ceded. We acknowledge the commencement of Treaty processes in Victoria and commit to walking alongside Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in this continued path of justice, healing and self-determination.

Contents

- 1. Acknowledgements**

- 2. CEO Message**

- 3. Short Message from the Director of First Nations Health and/or Chief People & Culture**

- 5. Context & Cultural Foundations**

- 6. Vision & Commitments**

- 7. Key Employment Principles**
 - Self-determination
 - Cultural safety
 - Pathways and
 - Progression

- 8. Action Plan**
 - Priorities
 - Actions
 - Roles and
 - Timelines

- 9. Governance, KPIs and Monitoring**

- 10. Implementation Timeline**
 - More Mob - Attraction & Recruitment
 - Mob Matters - Connecting and Supporting Mob

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We acknowledge and thank the members of the Aboriginal Employment Plan Working Group, whose commitment, guidance and collective wisdom were central to the development of this plan. This group brought together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, leaders and community voices alongside non-Indigenous colleagues, working in partnership to shape a meaningful and culturally informed path forward.

We extend our appreciation to our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who generously shared their experiences, aspirations and cultural knowledge. Their perspectives have strengthened this plan and will continue to guide its implementation.

Finally, we thank the broader community partners and stakeholders who offered advice and expertise. Their ongoing relationships with us ensure that our efforts remain aligned with community needs, shared priorities and culturally safe practice.



Message from our CEO

On behalf of Austin Health, I am pleased to share our Aboriginal Employment Plan 2025.

In introducing this plan, it is important to acknowledge the priority the executive, and all our leaders, place on addressing systemic barriers and injustices that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have experienced. Austin Health is committed to listening, to learning from the past, and we have a responsibility to be part of meaningful change moving forward.

While Austin Health has taken initial steps to address inequities, more work remains to be done, and this plan is part of our commitment to the future. Ensuring greater opportunities for employment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, embedding culturally safe practices, and improving the access and quality of care provided to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients are all strategic priorities for Austin Health. This plan is a demonstration of our commitment to becoming a leader in healthcare for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and to growing and supporting our Aboriginal workforce.

Success will be achieved by growing our Aboriginal workforce, supporting them, and creating greater opportunities for Aboriginal employees through professional development and leadership pathways. We will not only enrich Austin Health with the unique skills and knowledge of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff but also ensure we deliver more equitable and quality care to our community.

Austin Health's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Plan is important not just as a standalone plan but as a key aspect of our strategic ambitions as a health service. This plan is linked to two of the guiding principles within our Strategic Plan 2023-2027: being a great place to learn, work and grow, and providing culturally safe services for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples. It is also central to our People Strategy 2023-27, where we committed to continuing to increase and support our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workforce.

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment Plan has been developed thanks to the significant contributions of passionate Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff and allies from across Austin Health. I wish to thank these staff who volunteered their time to ensure the plan was developed by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employees. Embedding self-determination within this employment plan ensures we will remain accountable, ensuring voices, opinions and lived experiences are not only heard, but actioned.

Jodie Geissler
Chief Executive Officer

Context

Context provided by proud Gunditjmara woman Victoria Blundell

The Yoorrook Justice Commission's Truth Telling inquiry has confirmed that Victoria's Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people endured genocide and crimes against humanity through colonial systems and that Victorian Government institutions such as education, criminal justice and healthcare continue to exclude Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples through their colonial design.

Austin Health operates on the stolen and unceded lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nation. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung people who lived, fought and died to protect the lands which Austin Health now stands, and the resulting stolen wealth that continues to impact Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people today.

We acknowledge that as a westernised health institution, we have in the past systematically excluded Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from employment opportunities and have not consistently provided culturally safe spaces for our Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients, staff and visitors.

Aboriginal employment is essential to creating a culturally safe, responsive and equitable health service. A strong Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workforce brings cultural knowledge, lived experience and trusted community connection that strengthens patient confidence and improves health outcomes. However, meaningful representation requires more than recruitment programs alone.

It demands structural change—addressing the colonial foundations, policies and practices that continue to create barriers to employment, retention, progression and cultural safety. Transforming these structures ensures that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff are not only welcomed into Austin Health but are supported to thrive.

While this plan is required because of this painful past and the inequitable present it has created, it also creates the opportunity for Austin Health to ensure greater hope for the future. We have a rare opportunity to be a leader in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Health and adapt to contemporary societal needs. Society is evolving, and we are committed to ensuring our services continue to mirror the greater needs of the community; supporting minority groups benefits everyone overall.

We do not need to look far for an example of the societal good our health service can offer. Austin Health's founder, Elizabeth Austin, fought during the 1800's to provide education and stability to women from lower-socioeconomic backgrounds in Victoria who historically were denied such rights. A pioneer in Australian liberal feminism, Elizabeth Austin embodies the desire for systemic change, equity and diversity within the health sector, with many of her ideas now reflected in government policy as basic human rights. Now, in the 21st century, these values must extend to and intentionally include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other minority groups.

Vision & Commitments

Austin Health is committed to becoming a leader in health healthcare for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and to growing and supporting our Aboriginal workforce.

We will do this by growing our Aboriginal workforce, putting in place the structures to support them, and creating more opportunities for Aboriginal employees to further their careers through leadership pathways and professional development.



Key Employment Principles

Self-determination, Cultural Safety, Pathways and Progression

Austin Health's Aboriginal Employment Plan is grounded in four core employment principles that guide how we build, support and grow our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce. These principles ensure that our commitments are meaningful, actionable and aligned with our responsibilities to justice, equity and cultural safety.



Self-determination

Self-determination is foundational to this plan and reflects our commitment to ensuring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people lead, shape and influence decisions that affect their employment, careers and workplace experience.

This principle is embedded by:

- Ensuring Aboriginal voices guide the design, implementation and monitoring of the plan.
- Recognising the expertise, authority and lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff as essential to decision-making.
- Strengthening structures such as the Aboriginal Governance Committee and dedicated First Nations workforce leadership roles to maintain accountability.

By centring self-determination, Austin Health commits to shifting power structures, addressing systemic barriers and building an organisational culture where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff can thrive.



Cultural safety

Cultural safety is a non-negotiable expectation of every Austin Health workplace, leader and team. Cultural safety goes beyond cultural awareness—it requires ongoing learning, accountability and organisational change.

This principle is upheld by:

- Embedding cultural safety standards, KPIs and training across all staff and all levels of leadership.
- Creating culturally safe recruitment, onboarding and supervision processes that recognise colonial load and support Aboriginal staff without additional burden or expectation.
- Ensuring workplaces are free from racism and discrimination, with clear mechanisms for reporting, redress and continuous improvement.
- Implementing policies such as the Cultural Leave Guideline, which recognises cultural obligations as integral to wellbeing, identity and community connection.

Cultural safety is essential not only for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, but for the delivery of equitable, high-quality care to Aboriginal patients and families.

Meaningful pathways

Meaningful pathways create opportunities into employment that recognise the strengths, experiences, and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. They ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates connect with Austin Health in ways that are supportive, equitable and culturally safe.

These pathways may include:

- Entry-level opportunities such as traineeships, graduate programs, cadetships, and targeted recruitment initiatives.
- Providing pre-employment preparation, mentoring, and support to set potential candidates up for success.
- Inclusive recruitment practices which remove systemic barriers by using flexible, culturally safe processes that recognise and embrace diverse knowledge, experience, and strengths.
- Partnering with schools, TAFEs, universities, and community organisations to promote career opportunities.
- Recognising transferable skills, community contributions, and cultural knowledge as valuable lived experience.

Career progression

Progression is centred on creating meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples—not only to join Austin Health, but to grow, thrive, and succeed in their careers with us.

Career progression opportunities may include:

Professional development opportunities – offering training, coaching, and skills development opportunities that recognise individual strengths and career aspiration. This may include targeted programs, leadership development, and access to further education or qualifications.

Mentoring and support – ongoing support and connection through the Aboriginal Staff Network. This support will help build confidence, strengthen engagement, and provides guidance that aligns with both personal and professional aspirations.

Regular performance review and development (PRD) conversations – regular one-on-one meetings with managers provide dedicated time to discuss performance, progress and feedback, focusing on strengths, development areas and future opportunities. Austin Health’s Performance Review and Development (PRD) process builds on these conversations by offering a collaborative, forward-looking approach where managers and employees recognise achievements, share constructive feedback, and explore development goals and career aspirations.

Together, these principles guide meaningful and measurable change.

These Key Employment Principles shape all actions within the Aboriginal Employment Plan. They ensure Austin Health remains accountable to its commitments, honours the voices and experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, and builds a culturally safe, diverse and strong workforce that reflects and supports community.

“I think good cultural safety for staff looks like having a workplace where indigenous people are thriving and actively want to be in. I think it’s a space where community want to be and feel like that they can actively and meaningfully contribute to. I think it means having a really good staff network and being able to connect in with your colleagues and know that there’s a community of people that work here that you can rely on and can connect with.”

Sam Fisher, Koorie Mental Health Liaison Officer

Action Plan – Mob: Our Strength, Our Future

Mob: Our Strength, Our Future

Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment is embedded as a strategic priority.	Prioritise hiring an Aboriginal Employment Officer.	Aboriginal Employment Officer appointed by the end of 2025.	CAHO
Organisational culture values and celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributions.	Embed cultural safety in the review process of People and Culture policies.[JS1.1]	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultation embedded in the People and Culture review process by dec 2026	CPCO
	Introduce Mob Spotlight initiative to celebrate Aboriginal staff achievements.	At least 4 Mob Spotlight features published annually.	Comms
	Launch Aboriginal Staff Recognition Awards under culture and workforce pride outcomes.	Annual Aboriginal Staff Recognition Awards event delivered.	Comms
	Leadership storytelling and recognition initiatives. Encourage leaders to share stories of Aboriginal staff success and contributions at events, newsletters, and internal platforms.	4 leadership-led storytelling sessions conducted per calendar year.	CEO
	Regular education and awareness sessions (e.g., Spotlight, Cultural Safety audits).	Quarterly education for Executive & Board. Ongoing education agenda item to Aboriginal Health Governance Committee	CAHO AEO

Governance and Monitoring

Implementation of the Aboriginal Employment Plan will be overseen by the Aboriginal Employment Plan Working Group, comprising representatives from People & Culture, the Aboriginal Health Workforce Lead, and key organisational stakeholders. The Working Group is responsible for coordinating actions, monitoring progress, and ensuring that implementation remains culturally safe, collaborative and aligned with organisational priorities.

The Working Group will provide bi-monthly reports to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Governance Committee, outlining progress, achievements, challenges and recommendations for action. The Committee will provide oversight, strategic input and cultural governance to ensure the plan remains accountable, transparent and meaningful.

Progress and outcomes will also be shared with Executive leadership and relevant organisational committees as required, ensuring alignment with broader workforce strategies, cultural safety commitments and organisational objectives.

Ongoing monitoring will enable timely adjustments to activities, ensuring the plan remains responsive, effective and reflective of community expectations and staff needs.

“Not only as myself as a nurse, but as a person that’s been in this hospital myself, showing me cultural safety is very vital in ensuring that I want to maintain keeping my care here. And that’s what they’ve done, is they’ve made me feel included, they’ve made me feel respected, they’ve made me feel safe.”

Emily Ellis, Oncology Nurse



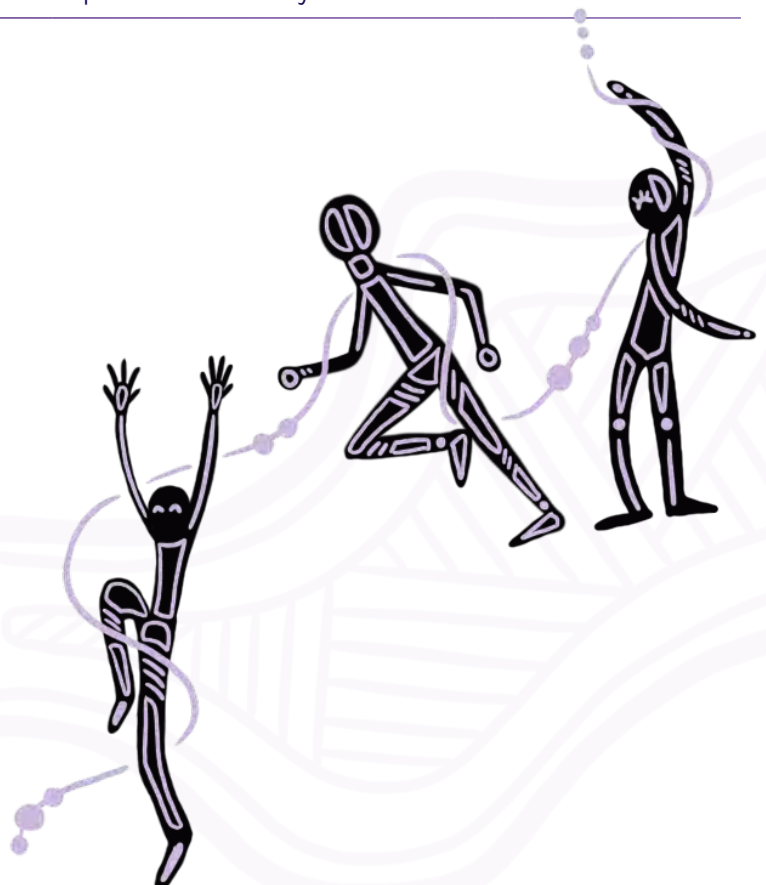
Implementation Timeline

More Mob – Attraction & Recruitment

first nations workforce and development lead Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
Increased number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants and hires.	Commit to interviewing all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander applicants who meet the key selection and core qualifications.	A year-on-year increase in the number of positions for which an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander applicant was interviewed	first nations workforce and development lead Hiring Managers
	Implement and publish Employment targets Current: 0.3% (40 staff)	Employment targets communicated org wide and published on internal and external platforms. Goal: 2026: 0.5% (58 staff) 2027: 1% (115 staff)	CEO CPCO
	Advertise roles through culturally relevant channels.	100% of externally advertised roles advertised through Indigenous-specific channels by Dec 2026	first nations workforce and development lead Talent Acquisition CPCO
Culturally safe and inclusive recruitment and onboarding processes.	Offer structured work experience, internships, and cadetships across all areas of the organisation	Partner with MEGT, Drs on Country, and/or local schools to provide real-world experience and pathways into employment.	first nations workforce and development lead Early Careers Education Coordinator Medical Education Lead Divisional managers/executives with workforce programs oversight
		Increase work experience placements offered by the end of 2026.	
		Increase number of internships offered by end of 2026	
		Increase number of cadetships offered by the end of 2026.	
		100% of new Aboriginal employees are offered an onboarding survey within 3 months.	
		Exit interviews offered for 90% of Aboriginal staff departures.	
	Implement new employee experience surveys to capture early feedback on recruitment and onboarding.		
	Establish structured exit interview process, overseen by Aboriginal Workforce Lead.		

More Mob – Attraction & Recruitment

first nations workforce and development lead Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
	Collaborate with schools (e.g., Worawa Aboriginal College, MITS) and universities.	Build relationships with Aboriginal liaison officers, attend career fairs, and invite them to Austin Health events to promote opportunities. Improve partnerships with schools, universities, and networks.	first nations workforce and development lead CPCO
	Create a talent pool through direct engagement with job seekers.		
	Offer new Aboriginal staff a culturally safe orientation and introduction to the Aboriginal Health Unit to ease transition and build early support networks	All new Aboriginal staff undertake culturally safe orientation.	first nations workforce and development lead, supported by P&C
	Review and update hiring managers resources.	All hiring managers have access to updated resources by 2027.	AEO



Mob Matters – Connecting and Supporting Mob

first nations workforce and development lead Outcome			
lead Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
Strong internal networks for Aboriginal staff.	Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employee Network.	Create a formal network for Aboriginal staff to connect, share experiences, and influence organisational culture and policies.	first nations workforce and development lead Senior AHLO
Increased retention and leadership development of Aboriginal employees.	<p>Launch formal mentoring and leadership shadowing programs.</p> <p>Pair Aboriginal staff with mentors and offer opportunities to shadow senior leaders, attend leadership events, and build career pathways.</p> <p>Commence mentoring/shadowing opportunities provided annually.</p>	<p>Year on year improvement in staff tenure rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees.</p> <p>Quarterly dashboards published and aligned with Aboriginal Health Governance reporting.</p>	first nations workforce and development lead
	<p>Host regular cultural and networking events (e.g., afternoon teas, NAIDOC week etc)</p> <p>Recognise colonial load and support Aboriginal staff to contribute as wanted.</p> <p>Include Aboriginal Staff Support Framework.</p> <p>Set measurable targets for scholarships, secondments, and mentoring (e.g., minimum 5 scholarships, 3 secondments, and 10 mentoring matches annually).</p> <p>Further developed and explore partnerships with with aboriginal staff</p> <p>Develop enhances data collection and reporting around aboriginal staff employment.</p>		D&I Manager
Community Connections	Collaborate with universities, TAFEs, and community organisations to share best practices and co-design initiatives.	Community of Practice developed with external partners.	first nations workforce and development lead

Mob Matters – Connecting and Supporting Mob

first nations workforce and development lead Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
Organisational accountability and visibility of progress.	Track and report progress on Oracle and report to governance committees.	Aboriginal Employment Plan uploaded to Oracle and is a regular agenda item on Exec Committee. Engagement metrics from social media and public platforms.	first nations workforce and development lead Corp Comms
	Engage with Treaty processes and embed accountability mechanisms.	Align with emerging Treaty frameworks, including corporate governance standards and potential compliance penalties. Engagement metrics from social media and public platforms.	first nations workforce and development lead Corp Comms

Mob Matters – Capability & Accountability

Outcome	Action	Measure	Responsible
Managers are equipped and accountable for creating culturally safe environments.	Develop Manager Guide/Handbook with clear expectations and practical tools.	Manager Guide published by Q3 2026.	CPCO
	Schedule regular Manager Yarning/ Practice Sessions with governance by the committee.	Minimum 4 Yarning/ Practice Sessions held annually.	first nations workforce and development lead
	Embed Aboriginal cultural safety KPIs in all performance plans.	100% of performance plans include cultural safety KPIs by end of 2026.	CAHO Line managers
All staff contribute to culturally safe and inclusive workplaces	Embed cultural safety expectations and training requirements across the entire workforce, ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff are supported by culturally safe behaviours at every level of the organisation.	100% of new staff complete cultural awareness training within 3 months.	CPCO
		90% of existing staff complete annual refresher training.	first nations workforce and development lead
		Cultural safety responsibilities embedded in all staff performance plans by end of 2026.	First nations cultural safety education lead
		Organisation-wide reporting on cultural safety metrics quarterly.	Line manager All staff

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