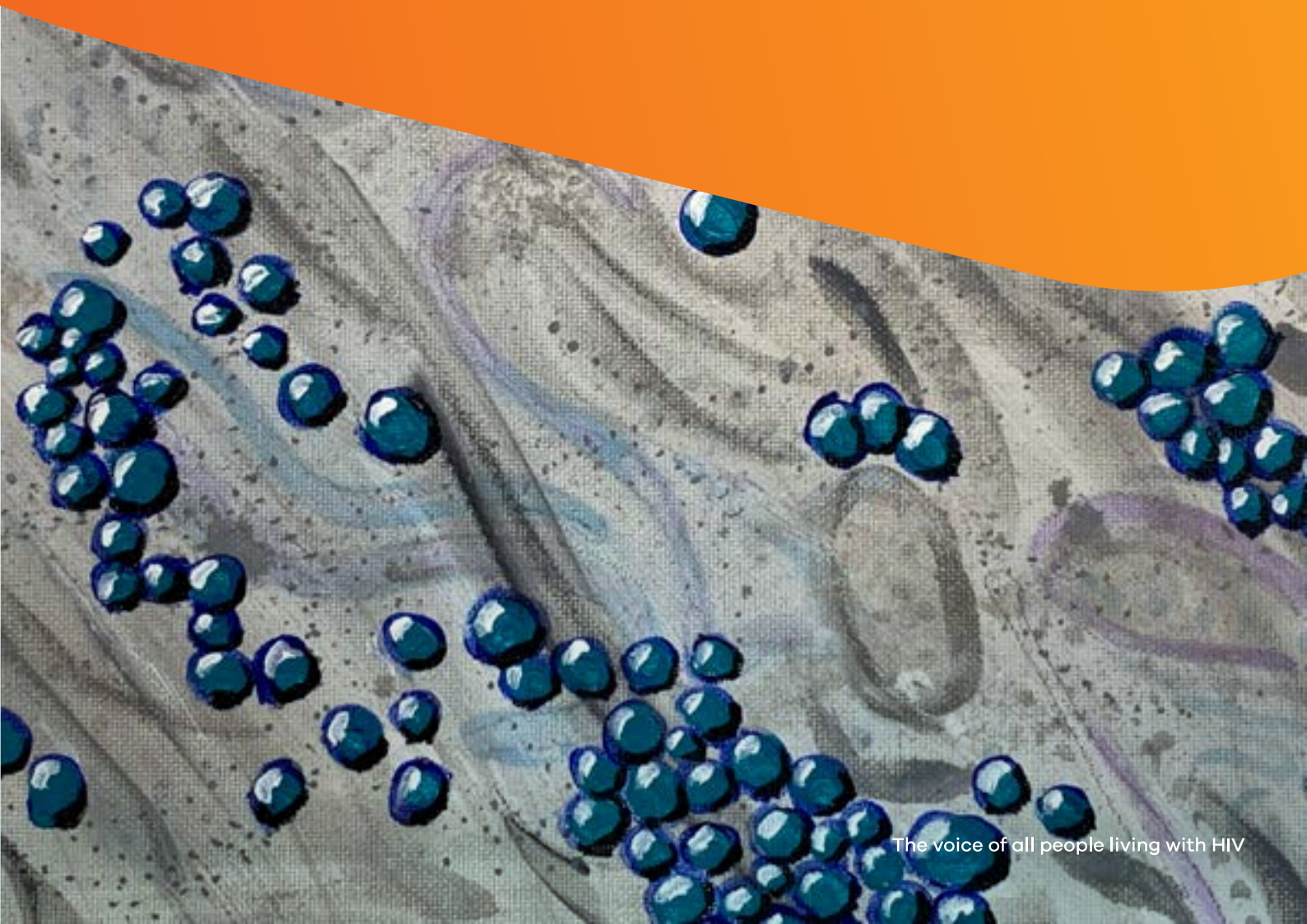


# Framework for working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people



## Artwork by Gavin Ivey

Gavin is from the Bundjalung Nation of the coastal far northern region and he is a proud gay Aboriginal South Sea Islander man.

The original concept for this artwork came from images of HIV in microscopy, and combined with the theme from the Positive Life NSW NAIDOC Art Workshop of *Always Was, Always Will Be*.

*'My body as my land... my body as my landscape... my Homeland instructing my DNA, and HIV being a part of My Land, My Landscape... as I inhabit my body. So too it is my place. It Always Was and Always Will Be...'*

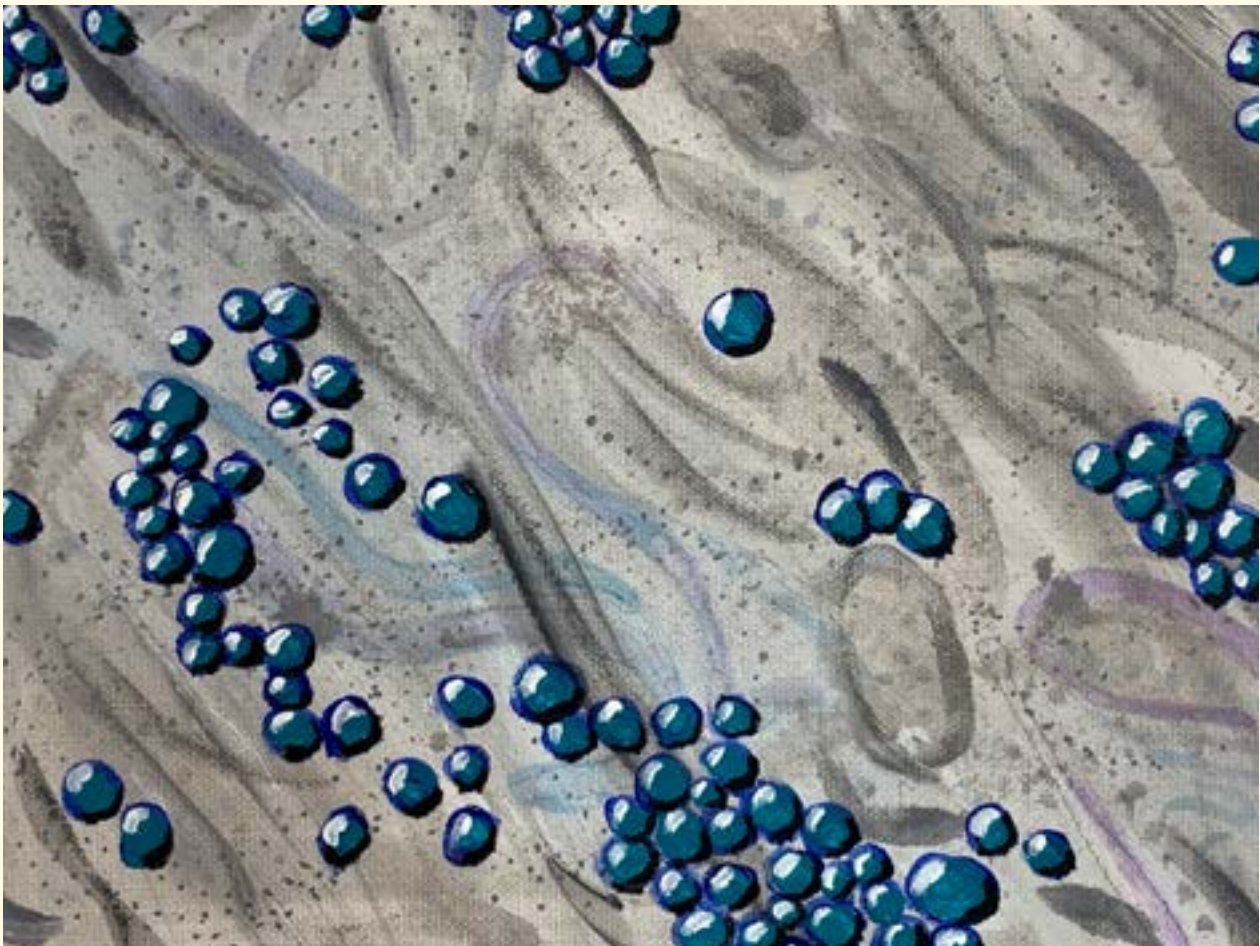
The painting then became a childhood memory of spending a lot of time on the Brunswick River, both high and low tides. At high tide the water is blue and green and clear as crystal, come low tide it turns brown from the upstream tea trees and bush.

The grey of the sand at low tide when the water has receded, the flow of the water when the tide comes back in. The circles represent soldier crabs that come out and make their little sand eggs at low tide.

As I spent a lot of time on the river as a kid, the HIV microscopy images and the theme of the workshop allowed me to reconnect to country, and also to myself.

Conversing, communicating, listening, hearing... the many and varied facets and tides of our lives. The ups and downs. The ins and outs. How my connection/disconnection affects my health (both the personal and intimate landscape). The painting allowed me to embrace the truth that HIV will always be a part of my intimate landscape (my body, mind and emotions) and how understanding and working with this knowledge allows me a greater understanding of the ebbs and flow of living positively with HIV.

It was such an amazing experience being able to be tutored by Arone Meeks in this journey. RIP.



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*Warning: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are advised that this document – Framework for Working Collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People – may contain images of deceased Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.*

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## Acknowledgements

Positive Life NSW (Positive Life) acknowledges that we operate and function on the lands of the Gadigal people of Sydney's First Nations People known today as 'the Eora Nation'.

We function throughout the colonial border of NSW, of which there are 120 Local Aboriginal Land Councils, each constituted over a specific area in NSW. Their boundaries may not align with cultural or traditional association with Country. The [Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council](#) is the contact point for enquiries as to the boundaries of Aboriginal land, best practice in cultural protocols, and Welcomes and Acknowledgements to Country.

We recognise the past atrocities against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of this land and that Australia was founded on the genocide and dispossession of its first inhabitants.

We pay our respect to these lands that provide for us.

We acknowledge and respect the ancestors of Aboriginal people who walked and co-existed with the land for many generations.

We acknowledge and pay our respects to Aboriginal Elders both past and present, and the young leaders who will be future Elders and knowledge holders.

We acknowledge and honour the memory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have gone before us and recognise their contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their communities and culture.

We acknowledge the Aboriginal identity of NSW – the Koori identity of NSW Aboriginal nations, clans, and language groups, and the kin and language connection that exists over the southern border with the Koori(e) people of Victoria. We acknowledge First People's connection to the unique landscape, river systems, and coastal waters of NSW, particularly the Murray-Darling Basin.

**Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.**

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## Foreword

Positive Life supports and actively works to manifest the vision of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–2023* that “the Australian health system is free of racism and inequality and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to health services that are effective, high quality, appropriate and affordable.”

We acknowledge the significant health disparities between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

We are dedicated to making a difference and to building meaningful, sustainable initiatives in partnership with Aboriginal communities to close this gap.

The *Framework for Working Collaboratively with Aboriginal People* outlines the first steps we will take to foster respect and understanding within our organisation. It outlines the training we will take part in about the needs of Aboriginal people, and guidance on how we can start working with Aboriginal people.

Implementing this Framework and achieving its vision will involve all parts of our organisation. Positive Life encourages everyone within the agency – its staff, Board, and community – to take this opportunity to increase their knowledge and understanding, and to gain confidence in working respectfully and effectively with Aboriginal people and communities.

We commend our staff for leading the development of this Framework, and to the Board for their contribution to its development.

Together we can build a strong culture and trusting and effective relationships that will lay the foundation for our future work to improve Aboriginal health and secure the well-being of generations to come.

Implementing this Framework and achieving its vision will involve all parts of our organisation.





This Framework outlines the first steps we will take to foster respect and understanding within our organisation.

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# Glossary

- ACCHS** Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services
- AH&MRC** Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council
- NAIDOC** National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee

The importance of cultural respect and cultural safety is outlined in Australian government documents such as the [Cultural Respect Framework 2016–26 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health](#), and the [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–23](#).

The Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Healthcare (ACSQHC) also included six Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific actions in the [National Safety and Quality Health Service Standards](#) to improve care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in mainstream health services:

1. The governing body ensures that the organisation's safety and quality priorities address the specific health needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
2. The health service organisation implements and monitors strategies to meet the organisation's safety and quality priorities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
3. The health service organisation has strategies to improve the cultural awareness and cultural competency of the workforce to meet the needs of its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients.
4. The health service organisation demonstrates a welcoming environment that the importance of the cultural beliefs and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
5. The health service organisation works in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to meet their healthcare needs.
6. The health service organisation has processes to routinely ask patients if they identify as being of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin, and to record this information in administrative and clinical information systems.

The Australian Government Department of Health has released the [Fifth National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Blood Borne Viruses and Sexually Transmissible Infections Strategy 2018–2022](#) to coordinate the specific response to BBVs and STIs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

In this document, references to Aboriginal people and First People respectfully includes both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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# Aim

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## Strategic Objective

*The Framework for Working Collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* (hereafter referred to as the 'Framework') is to be used as a tool to support Positive Life in achieving its strategic objective of developing a culture which exemplifies respect for the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people in all Positive Life projects and activities.

This Framework aims to support Positive Life staff to build upon their knowledge and skills base to work successfully with Aboriginal people and communities in achieving this goal.

The Board of Directors of Positive Life have endorsed this Framework and are committed to leading a genuine approach to achieve both positive and sustainable outcomes with Aboriginal people.

Positive Life has a NSW state-wide remit and acknowledges that we function throughout the 120 Local Aboriginal Land Councils, each constituted over a specific area in NSW. We acknowledge the many Aboriginal Nations, clans, and lands that are many and varied.

This Framework has been developed with the intention of providing an overarching model for working with Aboriginal people. However, it is acknowledged that each Aboriginal community will have its own process and protocols for engaging and working with Positive Life.

This Framework has been developed with the intention of providing an overarching model for working with Aboriginal people.





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## Key components

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1

### Commitment to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Positive Life staff and Board affirm their commitment to the [NSW Health Statement of Commitment \(2010\)](#). The Statement of Commitment acknowledges regret over past practices and policies which have impacted on the social and emotional well-being of Aboriginal people and reaffirms commitment to continue to deliver sustainable health outcomes and contribute to closing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

The Statement of Commitment has been amended to reflect its use as an affirmation of the original commitment, and key actions for implementation of the strategic objective at Positive Life.

We acknowledge that Positive Life's offices are located on the lands of the Gadigal people of the nation of Sydney's First People known today as 'the Eora'.

We recognise Aboriginal people as the original inhabitants of Australia and its traditional custodians. Aboriginal people have lived here continuously for over 60,000 years and are recognised as being the oldest continuous living culture of the world, with unique languages, cultures, and spiritual relationships with both the land and sea.

We are strongly committed to improving the physical, cultural, spiritual, health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV in NSW.

On behalf of Positive Life, we are sorry for the pain and loss placed on the lives of Aboriginal people who have been dislocated from their culture, displaced from their homelands, and subjected to having their children taken away or were taken away themselves.

We make the commitment to continue to:

- uphold and apply cultural protocols such as 'Welcome to Country' or 'Acknowledgment of Country';
- acknowledge and respect Aboriginal cultural identity, practices, and beliefs by working in partnership with Aboriginal people and their communities;
- use the [Aboriginal Health Impact Statement](#) and other agreed consultation protocols when developing, implementing, and reviewing programs as they relate to Aboriginal people;
- uphold the dignity and sovereignty of each Aboriginal person's health and wellbeing;
- celebrate the uniqueness of the world's oldest living cultures and advance reconciliation initiatives; and
- implement agreed actions that support delivery of services and programs to Aboriginal people in NSW. Examples of completed actions that have been undertaken as at 26 March 2021 include:

- Securing of funding for an Aboriginal Health Co-Design Project
- Aboriginal Health Program Officers hired to conduct the Aboriginal Health Co-Design Project
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV (PLHIV) [webpage](#) on the Positive Life website created
- Developed a Black Lives Matters Commitment Statement [media release](#) in consultation with the staff and Board.
- Staff Training: An Introduction to Aboriginal Cultural Awareness Workshop 2 April 2020 Facilitated by Felicity Ryan [www.felicityryan.com.au](http://www.felicityryan.com.au)
- Staff Training: Aboriginal People and Strengths-Based Practices Workshop 4 November 2020 Facilitated by Felicity Ryan [www.felicityryan.com.au](http://www.felicityryan.com.au)
- Staff Yarning Circles: 1 July 2020 and 18 November 2020.

For Positive Life, this Statement of Commitment means building respectful working relationships so as to deliver sustainable health outcomes and contribute to closing the health gap between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.

## 2

### Principles for working with Aboriginal people

This Framework has been developed and will be implemented in a way that is respectful to Aboriginal people.

Positive Life will adopt the following Principles that are based on those identified in the [NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013–2023](#).

Implementation of the Framework will support all Positive Life staff in their understanding of their practical application:

1. Trust and cultural respect;
2. Recognition of the cultural values and traditions of Aboriginal people;
3. Holistic approaches to the health of Aboriginal people;
4. The valuable and unique role that the [Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services \(ACCHS\)](#) provides and maintains;
5. The participation of Aboriginal people at all levels of health service delivery and management;
6. Partnerships with Aboriginal people through ACCHS and the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) of NSW;
7. Recognition of the contribution the health system can make to the social determinants of health.

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### 3

## Key strategies for working with Aboriginal people

### Leadership

The Board of Directors of Positive Life and in particular, its executive membership will lead the organisation to foster a culture which demonstrates respect for the needs and priorities of Aboriginal people in all Positive Life projects and activities.

Positive Life staff will:

- Actively demonstrate expected attitudes and behaviours;
- Acknowledge Australia's traditional custodians at official gatherings;
- Ensure the Positive Life environment is respectful and inviting for Aboriginal people; and
- Communicate the importance of culturally significant events, such as National Sorry Day when National Aborigines\* and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week and the Yabun Festival are held.

### Equity

Positive Life will develop a process for respectful and culturally appropriate consultation and engagement with Aboriginal people to ensure program and policy co-design and delivery meet the needs of Aboriginal people. Activities will include:

- Ensuring Positive Life structures and processes are appropriate in order to engage and consult with Aboriginal stakeholders in decisions relating to Aboriginal people;
- Developing appropriate program resources to meet the needs of Aboriginal people;
- Development of Aboriginal-specific projects in network activities; and
- Hold an annual forum where staff share their experiences across portfolios using tangible examples where they worked effectively with Aboriginal people.

### Capacity

All Positive Life staff will develop the capability to deliver culturally sensitive, respectful, and inclusive services to Aboriginal people by:

- Participating in Cultural Competency and Respect Training;
- Exploring opportunities to develop a greater understanding and appreciation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

### Relationships

Positive Life staff will work collaboratively with other agencies and sector organisations to achieve long-term effective change in partnership with Aboriginal people.

\* The word "Aborigines" is an outdated term that is considered offensive to many people and isn't to be used anymore unless in the context of an organisation name such as this.

## 4

### Resources and support for staff working with Aboriginal people

#### Preferred terminology to be used

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people” is Positive Life’s preferred terminology and should be printed in full, or alternatively “Aboriginal people” or “First People” used. Terms such as “ATSI” should not be used.

#### Welcome to Country Protocols Policy

Positive Life seeks to follow approved processes from appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, organisations, and/or community members when applying Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country protocols.

An example of an appropriate Acknowledgement of Country is:

*ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY: Positive Life NSW acknowledges the Traditional Owners of Country throughout NSW and recognises their continuing connection to land, waters and community. We pay our respects to Elders both past, present and emerging. We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation as the original custodians of the land on which our office sits. We would also like to acknowledge any Aboriginal people in the meeting today and to acknowledge and honour the memory of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have gone before us. Sovereignty was never ceded. Always was, always will be, Aboriginal land.*



## Recognition of Aboriginal people's unique position in the history and culture of NSW

- Positive Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Network (PATSIIN): is a national, NAPWHA-auspiced membership-based group for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living with HIV.
- Anwernekenhe National HIV Alliance (ANA): is a national AFAO member organisation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities affected by HIV.
- Reconciliation Australia: promotes and facilitates respect, trust and positive relationships between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies' (AIATSIS): is Australia's only national institution focused exclusively on the diverse history, cultures and heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia.
- BlaQ Aboriginal Corporation: is committed to empowering the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQ+ community through innovation, inclusion, understanding and advocacy.
- Black Rainbow: is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex, Queer, Sistergirl and Brotherboy (LGBTI+SB) organisation in the pursuit of positive health and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTI+SB.
- Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT: has been providing legal services to Aboriginal people since 1970.
- Wirringa Baiya: Provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and children in NSW with a gender-specific service sensitive to their culturally diverse needs; and to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women victims-survivors of violence with access to appropriate legal representation, advocacy, advice, and referral.
- National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO): the National authority on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander comprehensive primary health care.
- The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&MRC): assists Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) across NSW to ensure they have access to an adequately resourced and skilled workforce to provide high-quality health care services to Aboriginal communities.
- Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) Redfern: was established in 1971 as the first Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service in Australia.
- The Aboriginal Housing Office (AHO): is a statutory body established under the Aboriginal Housing Act 1998 (NSW) to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to affordable, quality housing.
- Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council (MLALC): is the contact point for enquiries as to the boundaries of Aboriginal land, best practice in cultural protocols, and Welcomes and Acknowledgements to Country.
- Closing the Gap: a partnership established where Australian governments are working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, their communities, organisations and businesses to implement the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap at the national, state and territory, and local levels.
- National Aborigines\* and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC): NAIDOC Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture, and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

\* The word "Aborigines" is an outdated term that is considered offensive to many people and isn't to be used anymore unless in the context of an organisation name such as this.

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## 5

### Implementation

Implementation of this Framework will be phased to ensure that its approach is consistent with the principles previously outlined.

#### Executive support

The Board of Directors of Positive Life has endorsed the Framework and is committed to supporting staff through its ongoing implementation.

#### Cultural leadership

Cultural leadership can be used by organisations to inform their practices and approaches to meeting the needs of Aboriginal people through core business, staff, procedures, and programs. Positive Life will continually explore options and opportunities for input from Aboriginal Elders and cultural leaders. Embedding cultural leadership in an organisation demonstrates a commitment to developing a respect for Aboriginal culture by acknowledging the role of their Elders and Leaders in Aboriginal communities and provides credibility in decision making processes. It applies the traditional concept of Aboriginal Elders as Leaders in their communities in a contemporary setting and allows Aboriginal people to provide leadership in relation to Aboriginal cultural protocols and processes.

#### Plan

The implementation of this Framework will be conducted through key performance indicators (KPIs) within Board Directors and staff member's job descriptions (JDs). JDs are reviewed annually during standard performance appraisal processes, where KPIs will be updated as appropriate.

The monitoring of the progress of these KPIs will be coordinated by the CEO and Deputy CEO as part of an ongoing compliance schedule.

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## 6

### Evaluation

Evaluation of the impact and outcomes of the Framework will be undertaken according to Positive Life's Evaluation Policy and Procedure.

It is anticipated that this would include the following:

- staff surveys;
- community surveys;
- other stakeholder surveys; and
- co-designed culturally appropriate methods of seeking feedback, such as but not limited to yarning circles, gatherings, one-on-one conversations, and other forms of expression.

We celebrate the uniqueness of the world's oldest living cultures and advance reconciliation initiatives.





**For more information phone 02 9206 2177 or 1800 245 677 (freecall)  
or visit [www.positivelife.org.au](http://www.positivelife.org.au)**

*Images used in this publication are sourced stock photography and are used for illustrative purposes.  
They do not imply any particular HIV status, sexuality, attitudes, or behaviours.*