



Reconciliation Action Plan

July 2023 – July 2025



Royal Australasian
**College
of Surgeons**



RECONCILIATION
ACTION PLAN
INNOVATE



Message from Reconciliation Australia

Reconciliation Australia commends the Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) on the formal endorsement of its inaugural Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP).

Commencing an Innovate RAP is a crucial and rewarding period in an organisation's reconciliation journey. It is a time to build strong foundations and relationships, ensuring sustainable, thoughtful, and impactful RAP outcomes into the future.

Since 2006, RAPs have provided a framework for organisations to leverage their structures and diverse spheres of influence to support the national reconciliation movement.

This Innovate RAP is both an opportunity and an invitation for RACS to expand its understanding of its core strengths and deepen its relationship with its community, staff, and stakeholders.

By investigating and understanding the integral role it plays across its sphere of influence, RACS will create dynamic reconciliation outcomes, supported by and aligned with its business objectives.

An Innovate RAP is the time to strengthen and develop the connections that form the lifeblood of all RAP commitments. The RAP program's framework of relationships, respect, and opportunities emphasises not only the importance of fostering consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, but also empowering and enabling staff to contribute to this process, as well.

With over 2.3 million people now either working or studying in an organisation with a RAP, the program's potential for impact is greater than ever. RACS is part of a strong network of more than 1,100 corporate, government, and not-for-profit organisations that have taken goodwill and intention, and transformed it into action.

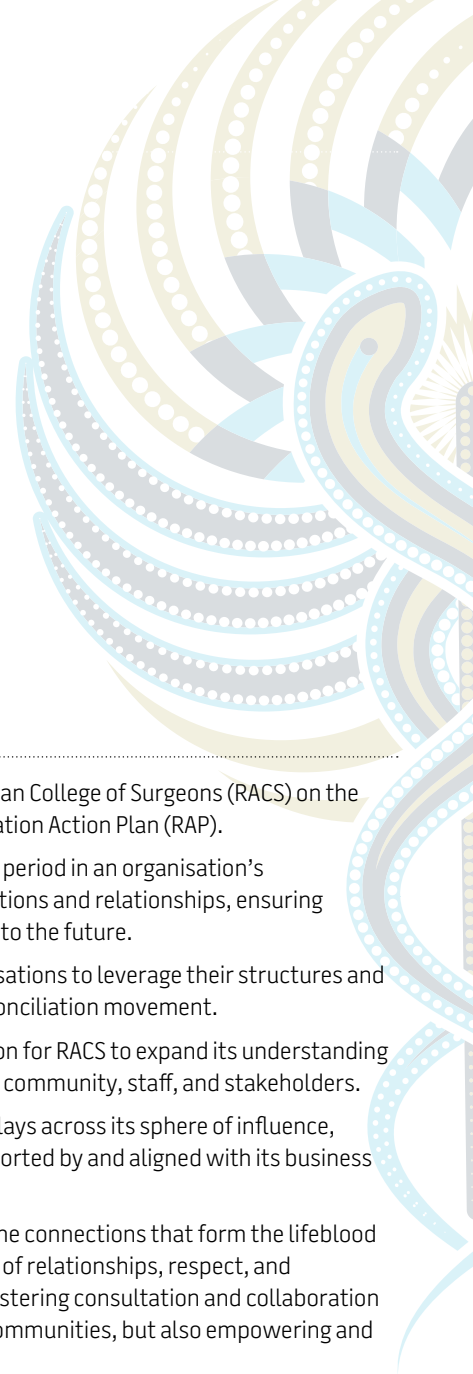
Implementing an Innovate RAP signals RACS' readiness to develop and strengthen relationships, engage staff and stakeholders in reconciliation, and pilot innovative strategies to ensure effective outcomes.

Getting these steps right will ensure the sustainability of future RAPs and reconciliation initiatives and provide meaningful impact toward Australia's reconciliation journey.

Congratulations RACS on your Innovate RAP and I look forward to following your ongoing reconciliation journey.



Karen Mundine
Chief Executive Officer
Reconciliation Australia



President's Message

RACS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and respects their continuing connection to culture, land, waterways, community and family.

RACS is proud to be part of the reconciliation journey and embraces our obligation as a peak national health organisation to make meaningful ongoing commitments to Reconciliation. Our core mission is to lead and advocate for surgical standards, performance, education and professionalism to improve patient care in Australia and New Zealand.

RACS also seeks to address the inequities faced by First Nations people. Cultural safety is at the heart of our mission and is reflected in this Reconciliation Action Plan. To achieve effective relationships and collaboration, our College also recognises the need to support initiatives, raise awareness and understanding of issues affecting First Nations people in remote, urban and regional centres.

Significant gains toward addressing Indigenous health have been made. The Indigenous Health Committee (IHC) now reports directly to RACS Council, and Indigenous Health is now a standing item on Council agenda. The IHC is chaired by a Councillor, and the 'Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety Competency' as part of RACS' Surgical Competence and Performance standards.

We are a long way from achieving health equity and understand that to effect significant change, we need to acknowledge and address the legacy of colonisation processes and the resultant racism and privilege at curricular and institutional levels.

Our second Innovate RAP builds on the experiences of our previous RAPs. We have gained exposure and knowledge to better guide and organise ourselves to continue our journey.

We have come too far not to go further, and we have done too much not to do more.



Associate Professor Kerin Fielding
President

Message from the Chair, Mina Advisory Group

RACS acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and respects their continuing connection to culture, land, waterways, community and family.

We believe it is through the shared experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that we understand the complexity of issues affecting their health.

Combining our expert community, medical specialty knowledge and experiences, with the Indigenous Health Committee, the Mina Advisory Group and its members provide support, guidance and advice to the surgical community on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

In further acknowledgement of the intergenerational harm caused by colonisation and institutionalised racism to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, the Mina Advisory Group applauds RACS for committing Reconciliation with our second Innovate RAP.

We note the newfound emphasis on cultural safety, which forms the core of our Reconciliation commitment 2023 - 2025. We look forward to growing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgical workforce, reflecting on the success of the Indigenous Health section of the Annual Scientific Congress in 2023 – the largest gathering of Indigenous surgeons to date

The good-will and intent demonstrated by RACS Council, with significant gains in critical strategic operational areas of the organisation, is highly commendable.

The Mina Advisory Group continues to support RACS as it continues the path of transformational change focused on health equity. We are also thankful for the support provided by Reconciliation Australia with our second Innovate RAP and our continuing Reconciliation journey.



Professor Kelvin Kong
Chair
Mina Advisory Group



RACS and reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation

Our vision for reconciliation is an Australia where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience equal health outcomes and opportunities as non-Indigenous Australians. As Australasia's surgical college, RACS is uniquely placed to champion the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with the provision of world class surgical training for the benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

With our vision for reconciliation realised, we expect the following to be reflected between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians:

- Rates of infant mortality should not differ
- No significant discrepancy in life expectancy
- Overall rates of disease and sickness should not differ significantly
- Rates of injury should not differ significantly
- Equity of access to medical and allied health services, including primary care, surgical and other hospital care, as well as after hospital care
- Proportionate representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons compared with the general population
- Improvements in the social determinants of health to enable equity in health outcomes

To embed RACS commitment to improving the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, RACS has introduced the 10th competency, the "Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety Competency", the Surgical Competence Guide, developing an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Surgical Pathway program, and making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health a standing item at Council meetings.

Our business

RACS was formed in 1927 and is the leading advocate for surgical standards, professionalism and surgical education in Australia and Aotearoa New Zealand. We are a not-for-profit organisation that represents more than 7,000 surgeons and 1,300 surgical trainees, with 295 administrative and support staff in both countries. We are also one of several colleges who specialise in specialist medical training. We have 5 First Nations surgeons and 3 trainees.

RACS supports healthcare and surgical education in the Asia-Pacific region and provides extensive funding for surgical research. RACS trains 9 surgical specialties: Cardiothoracic Surgery; General Surgery; Neurosurgery; Orthopaedic Surgery; Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery; Paediatric Surgery; Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery; Urology and Vascular Surgery.

RACS is committed to the ensuring the highest standard of safe and comprehensive surgical care for the community by achieving excellence in surgical education, training, professional development and support.

Image: RACS ASC scholarship winners (from L-R): Selwyn Te Paa, Samuel Lloyd, Hinewairoa McCleery, Sara Lai, Emily Mason, Nasya Thompson, Emma Espiner, Christina Gordon, Sarah Bormann



The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander motif

The motif design was created to symbolise RACS' commitment to help Close the Gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health across Australia. With dual concepts in mind, it features two snakes winding around the winged staff symbolising medicine and can also be seen as Rainbow Serpents entwined together carving out the land, creating our rivers and mountains. The white dotted pathways descend from the mountains, flow through the rivers and ascend back to the skies reforming as rainbows, the spirit of the Serpent. Symbolic of medicine, the two snakes winding around the winged staff also symbolise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people coming together. The heights of the rainbow also symbolise greater professional equity as well as improved health, social and economic wellbeing for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities across Australia. The motif was developed by Marcus Lee. Born and raised in Darwin, he is a descendant of the Karajarri people and is proud of his Aboriginal heritage.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan

History of community advocacy

The Royal Australasian College of Surgeons (RACS) has a proud history of community advocacy. The College has been influential with policy makers and legislators and was a major contributor in the 1960s and 1970s towards milestone health initiatives, including mandatory seatbelt wearing, drink driving countermeasures and the compulsory wearing of helmets by cyclists.

Embracing diversity and inclusion through reconciliation

The RACS Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) reflects RACS diversity values and of it being an all-inclusive service provider and workforce. The College recognises that the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia is a serious public health concern.

The College acknowledges the historical inequalities in social and economic status experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, which due to colonisation, significantly contribute to poorer health outcomes, particularly to decreased life expectancy. The College recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are over-represented in every way in the determinants of poor health.

For these reasons, to advocate and support the improvement in health inequities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, RACS has become a leading specialist medical college that places cultural safety at the core of its activities, and support change in the medical profession in accordance with our remit and purpose, the second RACS Innovate RAP has been developed.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health a RACS Council standing item

Part of the process of prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health includes the decision for the Indigenous Health Committee to directly report to the RACS Council, which oversees all areas on RACS policy, programs and initiatives. Making Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health a standing item is a significant milestone in the history of the College.

Cultural safety

Demonstrate competence and performance in critical areas is a requirement to be a surgeon. RACS Council approved the 10th competency: "Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety Competency" – a milestone for RACS' commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Cultural safety training has now been conducted for each of the 9 surgical boards to ensure knowledge across specialist surgical areas. This continues to be developed for cultural safety principles to be applied in accordance with the core STB competency themes: professionalism, communication, health advocacy, management and leadership; collaboration and teamwork.

Our Reconciliation Action Plan (cont)

Reconciliation Action Plan development

The RACS Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was developed in consultation with the RACS Indigenous Health Committee, Mina Advisory Group, Reconciliation Working Group and in reference to the RACS position paper on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health. The current plan is the second Innovate RAP which follows the original Reflect RAP.

RACS position paper on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

The position paper explains the framework in which RACS proposes the development of productive and culturally appropriate approaches to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health. As a professional medical college, RACS is uniquely placed to champion health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. RACS focuses on both prevention and treatment of surgical conditions and recognises that improvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health requires collaborative and cross-disciplinary effort.

Indigenous Health Committee

The Indigenous Health Committee (IHC) oversees the implementation of the RACS position statement and strategic commitments in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Māori health. It drives the review and implementation of the Indigenous Health portfolio, its programs and initiatives, to ensure RACS improves the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander people and Māori in partnership with their communities. RACS organises an annual Hui in Aotearoa New Zealand to discuss the respective nations' commitment and activity in Indigenous Health.

Mina Advisory Group

The Mina Advisory Group includes First Nations surgeons and provides advice on the development and implementation on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander health initiatives, projects and content in RACS position statements and policies. It functions under the oversight of the IHC.

Reconciliation Action Plan Working Group

The RWG was formed in early 2015 with representation from RACS departments, to develop ideas and engage with staff across the organisation.

The RWG meets on a quarterly basis and builds relationships, provides input into activities and raises awareness with staff to ensure shared understanding and ownership of reconciliation, and tracks the progress of initiatives and projects implemented by the RWG. Currently the RWG includes one representative of the Mina Advisory Group who identifies as First Nations.

RAP Champions

Comprise representatives from the respective governance structures that guide the implementation of the RAP, to facilitate internal engagement and awareness. This consists of a representative of the RACS Council, the Chairs of the Indigenous Health Committee and the Mina Advisory Group, Manager of Fellowship Services and Senior Project Officer – Indigenous Health.

How RACS incorporates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community representation and perspectives

RACS is dedicated to engaging respectfully and constructively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It supports equal engagement with the community and recognises that this is achieved through representation and by responding to the perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is incorporated utilising the following methods:

1. The RACS RWG is chaired by the IHC Senior Project Officer, an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identified position. This ensures the RWG receives input, guidance and advice by an Aboriginal employee within the organisation and the IHC.
2. The Mina Advisory Group includes First Nations surgeons and has a representative on the RWG.
3. RACS Cultural Awareness and Safety eLearning course was developed by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultant specialising in cultural safety. The insight provided by the consultant contributes to incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons contribute directly to providing feedback and perspective to initiatives and programs.

5. RACS partners with the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) as part of its commitment to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health outcomes. Through AIDA, RACS is informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

RAP Working Group members

Katherine Walsh
Fellowship Services Manager

Daniel Kisliakov
Indigenous Health – Senior Project Officer

Associate Professor Caroline Dowling
Representative, Mina Advisory Group

Tess Green
Foundation for Surgery Manager

Bronwyn Emerson
Human Resources Business Partner

Jessele Vinluan
Senior Project Officer, Victorian Audit of Surgical Mortality

Caroline Muliaga
Program Administrator, Australian and New Zealand Surgical Skills Education Training (ASSET)

Joanna Duncan
Manager Scholarships and Research

Amrohit Amputch
Finance Systems Accountant

Karishma Ray
Communications Specialist

RAP Champions

Dr. Ben Cribb,
Chair, IHC

Professor Kelvin Kong
Chair, Mina Advisory Group

Dr Maxine Ronald
RACS Councillor

Katherine Walsh
Manager, Fellowship Services

Daniel Kisliakov
Senior Project Officer, Indigenous Health

RACS reconciliation journey

RACS' reconciliation journey reflects our commitment to reconciliation in Australia and to be a leader specialist medical college in this field. We are committed to addressing the health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and placing cultural safety at the core of our activities. Since our 2009 RACS position paper, The RACS Indigenous Health Committee (IHC) and RACS Reconciliation Working Group have been formed since the 2009 RACS position paper, and Senior Project Officer position for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was created. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health is a permanent RACS Council Agenda item, and our strategic plan has consistently identified First Nations health as a priority.

RACS has embraced a number of Indigenous Health initiatives, including scholarships and awards, a First Nations Australians Surgical Pathway, the Indigenous Trainee Liaison Lead role, participating in RACS' Anti-Racism and Managing Bias Working Parties, and the Rural Health Equity Strategy.

Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association

In 2019 and 2022, RACS was a major sponsor of the Australian Indigenous Doctors Association (AIDA) and ran surgical skills workshops at its conferences. There is a permanent seat on the RACS IHC for an AIDA representative. By participating in AIDA initiatives such as Growing our Fellows, RACS recognises AIDA's role in Indigenous Health and fosters a relationship as part of our commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons.

Scholarships and Awards

Since 2016, RACS has offered annual scholarships to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, medical students and young doctors as part of RACS strategy to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons. The highlight is the Johnson & Johnson MedTech SET scholarship, which assists Indigenous trainees complete surgical training and progress to fellowship.

The College and the Foundation for Surgery also fund scholarships and awards for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students, junior doctors, SET trainees and Fellows. This includes: Career Enhancement Scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and junior doctors; the Foundation for Surgery Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ASC Award; scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors with interest in surgery to attend the College's Annual Scientific Surgery; Surgical Education and Training Scholarships for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Trainees; and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Medal – an award to acknowledge significant contributions by Fellows to Indigenous Health advocacy and health outcomes in Australia.

First Nations Australians Surgical Pathway

Cultural safety is a priority in the surgical profession. With the benefit of a suite of initiatives, our objective is the development of a culturally safe surgical training pathway for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgical Trainees to progress to Fellowship. As surgical training is onerous among medical specialties, this is needed



Image: RACS ASC attendees Professor Kelvin Kong with scholarship winners Emily Mason and Hinewairoa McCleery

to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons to population parity.

Indigenous Trainee Liaison Lead

To assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees with Surgical Education and Training, RACS has established a position of the Indigenous Trainee Liaison Lead. The position supports First Nations surgical Trainees, and contributes to the development of Indigenous surgical recruitment initiatives, and provides specialist knowledge and experience to guide and support progression to Fellowship.

Anti-Racism Working Party

RACS has assembled an anti-racism working party to define racism in all its forms, understand how it affects surgery, and is committed to implementing action to ensure its eradication in the surgical profession. The involvement of Indigenous Health in the Anti-Racism Working Party reflects the fact of being experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Managing Bias Working Party

Recognising how bias manifests, a working party is dedicated to the management of bias in all its forms – how it affects surgery, and implementing action dedicated to its amelioration. Much of this work relates to racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Rural Health Equity Strategy

The RHES aims to improve health equity for remote, rural and regional/provincial people in Australia and New Zealand. RACS acknowledges its social responsibility to address health inequity by selecting, training, retaining and collaborating for rural surgical services and communities. Indigenous Health is an important part of the strategy, to deliver services for First Nations people in rural locations.

Previous RAPs

Our inaugural Reflect Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) was launched during Reconciliation Action Week in June 2016, with actions across its four pillars: relationships, respect, opportunities, tracking progress and reporting. The plan achieved 54 out of 59 deliverables. We have been supported by Fellows, Trainees, International Medical Graduates and staff. Reconciliation is part of College business, leading to a second Innovate RAP. The original RAP provided an opportunity to reflect on Reconciliation in the context of the College and the surgical profession, and charting a course to facilitate a reconciliation journey.

RACS' second RAP was launched in 2019. It extended the initiatives of the inaugural RAP based on its insights capitalised on the relationships formed and opportunities that advance Reconciliation. Most of the deliverables were achieved despite the setbacks of COVID, resulting in the expansion of the strides made in the original plan. The success of the second RAP sets the scene for furthering reconciliation with the launch of the next RAP.

There were critical learnings to come out of the first two RAPs. One is cultural safety, which is now valued in our organisation and in the surgical profession. The implementation of the 10th competency as a mandatory requirement of Surgical Education and Training (SET) demonstrates our commitment to this need across the surgical profession. Cultural safety equips RACS with understanding to meet the challenges of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and provide surgical training in accordance with its principles. Staff are also encouraged to undertake cultural safety training.

We have also developed our knowledge and understanding of racism, how it impacts the College and the surgical profession. To this end, the Indigenous Health Committee and the Mina Advisory Group have contributed to the development of RACS' definition and guidance on dealing with racism.

As with other specialist medical colleges, RACS is a binational organisation that includes Australia and in Aotearoa New Zealand. We benefit from the learnings of Māori health and work in accordance with the unique attributes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture.

While we have confronted the challenges of cultural safety, more work is needed: further embedding cultural safety at all levels of the College and in Surgical Training Boards, establishing an environment that is safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have also learned that these objectives are best met with the benefit of strong relationships with like-minded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, inside the medical profession and outside it. Our challenge is to embed cultural safety into Australian surgical practice.

RACS reconciliation journey (cont.)

Building relationships

- RACS' relationship with AIDA continues to grow. AIDA is formally represented on the IHC. RACS has been a gold sponsor and RACS President has attended AIDA's annual scientific meeting for tin 2019 and 2022. The organisations collaborate on leading initiatives in support of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander pathways into specialty medicine and in advocacy for key health issues.
- RACS supports the AIDA Specialist Trainee Support Program Cross-College Project Group as one of twelve specialist medical colleges that are involved.
- The relationship with Leaders in Indigenous Medical Education (LIME) has been strengthened
- Strengthened ties with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) by involvement with the Ear Health for Life Project.
- Professor Martin Nakata was appointed as an Education Advisor to provide strategic advice relevant to RACS Indigenous health programs. Professor Nakata addressed Council and the Board for Surgical Education and Training, presented as part of the 2018 Annual Scientific Congress program and is an active contributor through RACS Indigenous Health Committee.
- The development of anti-racism strategy in conjunction with other groups, including a definition of racism, in advance of the development of a comprehensive anti-racism policy for the College.

Building respect

- The College formally introduced 'Cultural Competence and Cultural Safety Competency' as the 10th Surgical Competence and Performance standard which guides surgical training and the ongoing professional development of surgeons.
- The Acknowledgement of Country Protocols are established and implemented at key meetings.
- Every year, a Traditional Owner is invited to RACS' Annual Scientific Congress.
- RACS' Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander motifs have increased the visibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander motif banners distributed to all state and territory offices and in Aotearoa New Zealand for conferences and events.
- In 2018, RACS partnered with the Koorie Heritage Trust to deliver cultural competency training for staff, offered to all Melbourne-based staff.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural competence eLearning courses are promoted to Fellows through the CPD program.

- In partnership with Australian Society of Otolaryngology Head and Neck Surgery (ASOHNS), the College led a three-year Ear Health for Life campaign in support of reducing the burden of ear disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Partners included ear health researchers, allied health providers and peak bodies including NACCHO and the Australian Medical Association. A research road map was presented to the Australian Medical Research Advisory Board for investment in the Medical Research Future Fund at a Roundtable that set priorities for Indigenous health. Wins included a new \$30 million investment for hearing assessments, Federal Government support for the \$7.9 million program on Otitis Media in the Northern Territory, a Hearing Health Sector Committee led by Minister Ken Wyatt and the development of national KPIs as part of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) process and the announcement of \$160 million for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.
- In 2018, RACS secured a two and a half year, \$460,000 grant from the Australian Department of Health to review nine surgical specialties in terms of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and cultural safety. Cultural Safety training has been provided to eight surgical training boards.

Opportunities

- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Surgical Trainee Selection Initiative operates in eight of nine training boards. The first trainee selected as part of the initiative started training in 2019.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Network launched to connect Fellows interested in supporting Indigenous Health initiatives.
- A list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers is available to RACS staff for purchases.
- Indigenous health reporting items in Fax Mentis, Surgical News and other RACS publications.
- The value of RACS scholarships to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical students and doctors has increased from \$15,000 in 2016 to \$77,500 in 2020, which are funded by RACS, the Foundation for Surgery, as well as support from industry.
- Collaboration with the Rural Health Equity Scheme has facilitated opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander junior doctors to begin Surgical Education and Training (SET).
- Extension of Johnson & Johnson SET scholarship for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees to cover educational costs to progress on to fellowship.
- Development of a First Nations Australians Surgical Pathway (FNASP) to provide a culturally safe space for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander trainees to progress to fellowship, and the appointment of an Indigenous Trainee Liaison Lead.
- Over the course of our Reconciliation journey, the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons has increased.



Image: Family attending a surgical visit to the Fitzroy Crossing in 2017.

Building relationships

The strength of our relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people sits at the core of RACS business. RACS is a leader of specialist health education, and benefits from partnerships that help the surgical profession and facilitate positive outcomes for the health of First Nations people. Through the strength of its partnerships, RACS is committed to building awareness and eliminating racism in its sphere of influence. It is also a leader in culturally safe practice in the medical profession by its collaboration with other medical colleges. By harnessing the benefits of its partnerships, RACS achieves an integrated approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Promote Reconciliation through our sphere of influence	Develop and implement a staff engagement strategy to raise awareness of reconciliation across our workforce.	Dec 2023	RWG Chair
	Communicate commitment to Reconciliation at public occasions.	June 2025	RWG Chair
	Collaborate with RAP organisations and other like-minded organisations to develop innovative approaches to advance reconciliation.	June 2025	RWG Chair
	Explore opportunities to positively influence external stakeholders, partner and sector organisations to drive reconciliation.	June 2025	Indigenous Health Committee Senior Project Officer
	Develop relationships with 9 surgical training boards to drive reconciliation outcomes.	June 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Attend the annual conferences of the Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) and Leaders in Medical Education (LIME), and others, to positively influence external stakeholders and identify opportunities to drive reconciliation outcomes.	Nov 2023; June 2024	FS Manager
	Foster relationships with RACS business units with the delivery of RAP and Strategic Plan objectives through the whole organisation.	June 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Collaborate with similar organisations (e.g. medical colleges) through AIDA consortia to identify points of collaboration and advance reconciliation.	June 2025	RWG Chair

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Promote positive race relations through anti-discrimination strategies	Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, trainees and fellows, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors to develop anti-discrimination policy.	Sep 2024	HR Business Partner
	Engage with Anti-Racism Working Party to come to definition of, how to recognise and respond to racism, as experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at the College and in the surgical profession.	Sep 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Educate senior leaders on the effects of racism.	Sep 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Embed within RACS understanding of the history of racism and unconscious bias towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the consequences of a lack of cultural safety through staff induction and surgical training,	Dec 2024	HR Business Partner
	Develop, implement, and communicate an anti-discrimination policy for our organisation.	Sep 2024	HR Business Partner
	Review HR policies and anti-discrimination provisions and anticipate future needs.	Jun 2024	HR Business Partner
Celebrate and participate in National Reconciliation Week (NRW)	Organise annual internal College event at which all offices acknowledge and celebrate NRW.	27 May - 3 June, 2024, 2025	RWG Chair
	Circulate Reconciliation Australia's online NRW resources and reconciliation materials to all staff.	April 2024, April 2025	Comms Coordinator
	RAP Working Group to participate in external NRW event.	27 May- 3 June, 2024, 2025	RWG Chair
	Register events via Reconciliation Australia's NRW website.	May 2024, 2025	RWG Chair
	Promote external NRW events among Fellows, Trainees, International Medical Graduates (IMG) and staff, and encourage participation.	27 May- 3 June, 2024, 2025	Comms Coordinator
Develop and maintain mutually beneficial relationships with key local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, organisations and stakeholders which align with our business.	Develop engagement plan to foster relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and organisations.	Dec 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Strengthen relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander medical organisations by seeking out First Nations health initiatives in the surgical community related to Indigenous Health.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Participate in initiatives led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations for Indigenous Health outcomes, such as AIDA consortia, in collaboration with other medical colleges and to enhance collaboration and build relationships.	Jun 2025	FS Manager
	Identify and facilitate collaborative partnerships on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health projects with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health organisations,	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Meet Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Stakeholders and organisations to develop principles for future engagement.	Dec 2023	RWG Chair

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Develop collaborative relationships with stakeholders focused on optimizing health outcomes and treatment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people	Participate in conference initiatives (eg. AIDA, LIME, RACS Annual Scientific Congress) to support the development and implementation of medical treatment, with emphasis on servicing First Nations community needs.	May 2024 and 2025; Nov 2024 and 2025	FS Manager
	Foster collaborative relationships focused on First Nations health outcomes by sharing initiatives, identifying synergies and seeking advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Leaders in Medical Education (LIME) • Australian Indigenous Doctors Association • Medical schools with Indigenous programs. 	Jun 2025	FS Manager
	Strengthen relationship with Māori Health at RACS to promote Reconciliation within RACS' binational Indigenous Health framework and strengthen partnerships that benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health.	June 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Attend the annual RACS Hui to benefit relationship with Māori Health and strengthen partnerships between stakeholders that benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health	May 2024; May 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Develop and maintain relationships with local rural organisations focused on improving health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through the Rural Health Equity Scheme.	Dec 2023	FS Manager
	Identify and facilitate collaborative partnerships on First Nations health projects with primary healthcare workers, government stakeholders and other medical colleges.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Health Officer
	Investigate opportunities and ways to support research opportunities for collaboration on Indigenous Health projects, through support in kind, advocacy or fund raising	Jun 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Identify and support like-minded bodies in Indigenous health to continue advocating for improvements in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health with a surgical focus, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improved health access • Disease and injury prevention • Improved availability of services • Improved access to services 	Dec 2023	Policy and Advocacy Manager

Respect

RACS is committed to addressing the need to acknowledge and demonstrate respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, communities, and histories, to foster a culturally safe environment that delivers Indigenous Health outcomes. Respect through consultation, recognition and celebration contributes to supportive relationships that reflect community values.

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Demonstrate respect to Australia's First Nations People by observing cultural protocols	Promote Cultural Protocols document within the organisation, including a Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, ensuring it is observed at all levels of RACS practice.	Nov 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Strengthen staff understanding of the significance cultural protocols, when and how they should be used.	Nov 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Include an Acknowledgement of Country or appropriate protocols at commencement of important meetings.	Jun 2025	FS Manager
	Invite a Traditional Owner or Custodian to provide a Welcome to Country at the Annual Scientific Congress, Annual Scientific Meetings and other significant RACS events	May 2024; May 2025	RWG Chair
Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence and profile of people and cultures within college.	Fly Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags at College offices on NRW and NAIDOC week or find suitable alternatives (eg. desk flags).	May and Jul 2024; May and Jul 2025	RWG Chair
	Supply Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags for College offices or alternatives.	Dec 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Display Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artwork and posters throughout RACS buildings and offices.	May 2024	RWG Offices
	Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait cultures by commissioning work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists to complement RACS Indigenous Health designs.	July 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Refresh RACS Indigenous Health merchandise to promote RACS' commitment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures, the contributions of First Nations staff and surgical fellows to the College and to surgery, and build respect for First Nations cultures in the College.	Nov 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Organise an Indigenous Health section each year at the RACS Annual Scientific Congress, including presentations from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgeons, to promote the contribution made by First Nations Fellows to the surgical profession.	May 2024 and 2025	Comms Coordinator
	Promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health at RACS and its profile by awarding an Indigenous Health Medal each year to distinguished contributors.	May 2024 and 2025	RWG Chair
	Implement the Indigenous Health Communications Plan to promote the profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures at RACS, reflecting the contributions of First Nations staff and surgical fellows to the College.	Nov 2023	Comms Coordinator

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Build respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories by celebrating NAIDOC week	Members of the RAP Working Group to participate in external NAIDOC week event.	July 2024; June 2025	RWG Chair
	Review policies and procedures to remove barriers to staff participation in NAIDOC Week events.	June 2023, 2024, 2025	HR Business Partner
	Promote staff participation in external NAIDOC events.	July 2024 and 2025	FS Manager
	Organise internal College event to acknowledge and celebrate NAIDOC week.	July 2024 and 2025	RWG Chair
	Circulate NAIDOC resources and materials to all staff.	June 2024 and 2025	Comms Coordinator
	Encourage Fellows, Trainees, International Medical Graduates and staff to participate in an external event to celebrate NAIDOC week.	July 2024 and 2025	RWG Chair
Raise organization understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, histories, knowledge, and rights through cultural learning	Develop, implement and communicate a cultural learning strategy document for our staff	Jun 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Promote Reconciliation Australia's "Share our Pride" online tool and resources to all staff (www.shareourpride.org.au).	Sep 2023	Comms Coordinator
	Recognise and communicate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dates of significance to staff.	Sep 2023	FS Manager
	Review cultural learning needs within organisation.	Nov 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Consult Traditional Owners or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisors on staff cultural learning strategy.	Nov 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Provide opportunities for RAP Working Group members, HR members and leadership staff to participate in structured cultural learning.	Jun 2025	FS Manager
Increase cultural safety within RACS for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and surgical trainees	Review Cultural Safety training programs, update and make available to staff. Ensure concept and approach aligns with the approach employed by key stakeholders: Australian Medical Council, AIDA, other medical colleges etc.	Sep 2023	HR Business Partner
	Review cultural safety needs within RACS with First Nations consultants	Sep 2023	RWG Chair
	Expand opportunities to increase cultural safety in Surgical Training Boards (STBs) that run surgical training by facilitating dedicated training sessions.	Sep 2023	RWG Chair
	Run information sessions for staff and surgical mentors on the poverty cycle in an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, as well as other compounding issues impacting Indigenous Health, in order to facilitate cultural safety training session within surgical training.	Jun 2024	IHC Chair
	Review Cultural Safety approach at RACS with the standards review undertaken by the Australian Medical Council and other medical standards bodies, and implement changes to ensure alignment with accrediting medical stakeholders.	Dec 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Develop and implement suite of initiatives to increase the cultural safety capacity of surgeons in rural and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including through:	Dec 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • First Nations Australians Surgical Pathway • MoU with Northern Territory Department of Health • Increase First Nations surgical workforce to work with First Nations communities. • Rural Health Equity Scheme – development of rural facing curriculum • Outreach initiatives in rural and remote areas • Partnerships with colleges to facilitate training of First Nations doctors and surgeons. • Mentoring Workshops and other opportunities. 		

Opportunities

Addressing all forms disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, in light of the trauma associated with colonisation, the Stolen Generations, racism, discrimination and cultural dislocation, is central to RACS business. This includes involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Indigenous Health at RACS, increasing staff, engaging First Nations businesses through procurement, and increasing the number of Aboriginal and Torres and Strait Islander surgeons to achieve population parity over the medium to long term. Our cultural safety approach operations ensures engagement with First Nations people to facilitate opportunities.

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Improve employment outcomes by increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention, and professional development	- Support the onboarding of RACS RAP objectives and aims with new employees with information session about RACS RAP.	Jun 2025	Human Resources Business Partner
	Include information about the RAP and our reconciliation commitment within interview and recruitment processes	Dec 2023	HR Business Partner
	Establish and embed identification process for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, Trainees and Fellows consistent with AIDA and other medical colleges.	Jul 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Develop and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment, retention and professional development strategy.	Dec 2023	HR Business Partner
	Engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and consult on employment strategies, including professional development.	Sep 2023	HR Business Partner
	Advertise job vacancies to reach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.	Jun 2025	HR Business Partner
	Review recruitment procedures and policies to remove barriers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in our workplace.	Sep 2023	HR Business Partner
	Increase the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff employed in our workplace.	Jun 2025	HR Business Partner
	Advertise identified positions to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment dedicated roles.	Jun 2025	HR Business Partner
Increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people supplier diversity within RACS business operations.	Develop Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander procurement strategy and incorporate into RACS Procurement Policy and Strategic Plan.	Jun 2024	Finance Manager
	Action Supply Nation membership as a non-for-profit organisation if appropriate	Dec 2023	Finance Manager
	Update procurement practices to remove barriers for staff to procuring goods and services from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander businesses.	Dec 2023	Finance Manager
	Communicate procurement opportunities from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suppliers to RACS business units and staff, utilising multiple communication platforms.	Sep 2023	Comms Coordinator
	Increase procurement from First Nations suppliers.	Dec 2023	Finance Manager
	Increase formal and informal commercial relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander businesses.	Jun 2025	Finance Manager

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Increase staff awareness and understanding around the importance of Closing the Gap in First Nations health outcomes	Promote information on Closing the Gap, via a staff information session and an annual update in <i>Surgical News</i> .	Mar 2024; Mar 2025	Comms Coordinator
	Utilise various channels to promote information on Closing the Gap health initiatives at RACS through <i>Surgical News</i> , Fax Mentis, social media, organisation-wide Teams channel and staff meetings.	Jun 2025	Comms Coordinator
Develop strategies to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander surgical workforce.	Develop a suite of initiatives to foster points of connection between new First Nations trainees and other First Nations trainees and fellows, including a “welcome letter”.	Jun 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Develop and implement the First Nations Australians Surgical Pathways (FNASP) program to support First Nations trainees complete SET programs, in accordance with cultural safety principles, incorporating the following initiatives: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indigenous Trainee Liaison Officer • Mentor the Mentor program • Cultural Safety training for STBs • SET Trainee Engagement • “Focus hubs” for culturally safe SET training • Other initiatives that form part of FNASP 	Dec 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Publish First Nations Australians Surgical Pathway Implementation Guide for surgical departments, hospitals and health services to guide the implementation of culturally safe practice in Surgical Education and Training (SET) placements across Australia to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander over the medium-long term.	Mar 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Award First Nations scholarships to medical students, doctors and SET trainees to support educational costs, trainee retention and increase the First Nations surgical workforce.	Jun 2025	Learning and Development
	Implement collaborative strategies with other bodies (eg. AIDA, LIME and medical colleges) to increase the number of First Nations Trainees, facilitate retention and progress pathways to Fellowship.	June 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer

Governance

Action items	Deliverables	Timeline	Responsibility
Provide appropriate support for effective implementation of RAP commitments	Define resource needs for RAP implementation	Jul 2023	RWG Chair
	Ensure meeting of the IHC and Mina Advisory Group to advise on RAP implementation	June, September, December 2023, 2024 March 2024, 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Develop annual RAP Implementation Plan, divided on RACS business units, ensuring implementation across organisation.	Dec 2023; Dec 2024	RWG Chair
	Ensure staffing for successful implementation of RAP commitments.	Jun 2025	FS Manager
	Engage senior leaders and staff to participate in the delivery of RAP commitments	Sep 2023	RWG Chair
	Maintain systems to track, measure and report on RAP outcomes.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Maintain a minimum of five RAP Champions from senior management.	Jun 2025	RWG Chair
Establish and maintain an effective RAP working group (RAP) to drive the governance of the group	Ensure the RAP WG meets four times a year to drive RAP initiatives and monitor implementation.	June, September, December 2023, 2024 March 2024, 2025	RWG Chair
	Ensure representation from critical RACS Business units on the RAP WG.	Jul 2023	RWG Chair
	Maintain Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation in critical positions on the RWG.	Jun 2025	RWG Chair
Report RAP achievements, challenges and learnings internally and externally	Ensure RAP achievements, challenges and learnings are promoted on website.	Dec 2023	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Complete and submit annual RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	Sep annually	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Report on progress to staff and senior leaders on a quarterly basis.	Sep 2023; Dec 2023; Mar 2024; Jun 2024; Sep 2024; Dec 2024; Mar 2025; Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Report on RAP achievements, challenges and learnings across media available to RACS, including <i>Surgical News</i> , <i>Fax Mentis</i> , and social media channels: Twitter, Instagram and Facebook.	Dec 2023; Jun 2024; Dec 2024; Jun 2025	Comms Coordinator
	Report on RACS progress every quarter at RACS Council meetings	Sep 2023; Dec 2023; Mar 2024; Jun 2024; Sep 2024; Dec 2024; Mar 2025; Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Report progress on RAP in RACS Annual Report.	Nov 2023; Nov 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Investigate participating in Reconciliation Australia's biennial Workplace RAP Barometer.	May 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Submit traffic light report to Reconciliation Australia at the conclusion of this RAP.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to verify primary and secondary contact details are up to date, to ensure we do not miss out on important RAP correspondence.	June, annually	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Contact Reconciliation Australia to request unique link to access RAP Impact Measurement Questionnaire.	Aug 2023; Aug 2024	IHC Senior Project Officer
Continue our reconciliation journey by developing our next RAP.	In partnership with Reconciliation Australia, develop new RAP based on learnings, challenges and achievements from previous one.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer
	Register via Reconciliation Australia's website to begin developing our next RAP.	Jun 2025	IHC Senior Project Officer

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Royal Australasian College of Surgeons Reconciliation Action Plan 2023-2025.

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RACS recognises and acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of Australia and pays respect to their continuing connection to culture, land, sea, community and family.



Committed to Indigenous health

Service | Integrity | Respect | Compassion | Collaboration

