



Commitment to Aboriginal Children and Families

2020 - 2023



In this document, we have used the term Aboriginal to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document may contain images or names of people who have since passed away.



Telethon Kids Institute acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waters of Australia. We also acknowledge the Nyoongar Wadjuk, Yawuru, Kariyarra and Kaurna Elders, their people and their land upon which the Institute is located and seek their wisdom in our work to improve the health and development of all children.

Telethon Kids Institute's **Commitment to Aboriginal Children and Families** can be found at telethonkids.org.au/aboriginalcommitment



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Executive Summary

In 2012, the Institute began its first strategic planning process resulting in the launch of **Working Together Strategic Plan 2013-2017**. As part of that process, a parallel strategic process was undertaken to ensure that the needs of Aboriginal families were considered.

This resulted in the development of the Commitment to Aboriginal Children & Families 2013-2017 (the Commitment) which outlined seven priorities to fully integrate the needs of Aboriginal children and families into all relevant areas of the Institute’s work to embody our values. The Kulunga Aboriginal Research Development Unit (Kulunga) was established to support the implementation of the Commitment.

For the Institute, the Commitment has been more than a series of actions but a commitment in the very real sense of the word. To our external partners, the Commitment document represents a visible and concrete foundation for building strong relationships. It signals our firm intent to make a sustainable difference to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and families in WA and has been a critical promotion piece.

Internally, it has meant so much more. Since the Commitment was written, the Aboriginal Health Research Focus Area (RFA) has become an overarching or cross-cutting RFA, meaning that as far as the Institute is concerned, the health of Aboriginal people has become “everyone’s business” and is relevant to all research teams. Kulunga has been there to support research teams and work with systems and services across the Institute to

“In particular, we will prioritise partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities across Western Australia and beyond to improve the health and development of their children. We will not ignore, nor accept, the continued disparity in outcomes for Aboriginal kids compared with other Australian children.”

Up for the Challenge Strategic Plan 2019-2023

advocate for change, offer training, advice and support. Through the establishment of Telethon Kids Kimberley, we have established an ongoing presence for culturally appropriate and relevant research that brings positive change to the lives of children in the Kimberley and most importantly, enabled the Institute to truly build strong, enduring local relationships with Aboriginal communities and organisations.

Further testimony to the Institute’s commitment at a leadership level and through research teams was recognised by the 2018 International Scientific Review Panel of independent world-leading researchers. As the Chair of the Panel, Professor Stephen Holgate noted, “Aboriginal health is on everyone’s lips”. The Panel identified the Institute’s focus on research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues and commitment to community engagement as strengths that should continue to be prioritised and resourced. Further, the panel recommended that Aboriginal health become one of three Institute-wide Grand Challenges.

The Institute’s new **Up for the Challenge** Strategic Plan 2019-2023 has lifted the advice of the International Scientific Review Panel and

incorporated the spirit of the Commitment through making closing the gap for Aboriginal kids a clearly articulated goal for the next four years.

The Commitment is being refreshed and revised for another four years with a view to going deeper into each of the seven priorities previously identified, embedding them more deeply into the fibre of the Institute.

Given what has been achieved through the first Commitment, the Institute will build from a high base and with it, confidence to achieve more over the next four-years. This refresh will build on the groundwork laid by the first Commitment to ensure the Institute is truly up for the challenge it has set itself in its new strategic plan.

The next logical steps are to build a strong supportive environment and infrastructure for our research to make a measurable difference to the health of Aboriginal children and families, and to set up the Aboriginal Health Grand Challenge for success.

Hon Julie Bishop
Chair



Professor Jonathan Carapetis AM
Executive Director



Mr Glenn Pearson
Deputy Director, Aboriginal Health



Aboriginal Health at Telethon Kids

Aboriginal health is everyone's business. That's why at Telethon Kids Institute we have made a conscious decision to integrate it across all our Research Focus Areas, rather than creating a separate silo of teams.

The Aboriginal Health Research Focus Area has special status in that it is an umbrella structure, embracing the entire organisation, rather than housing specific teams. Under the oversight of the Deputy Director (Aboriginal Health) and guided by the Aboriginal Leadership Group and RFA Steering Committee, the Aboriginal Health Research Focus Area provides advice, technical and cultural support across the Institute to all programs of research and ensures that specific cultural, social and economic contexts are recognised and responded to in close collaboration with Aboriginal families and communities.

Research projects are expected to consider the needs of Aboriginal children and families in all the work they do. Projects that specifically address issues identified by community are embedded within the Brain and Behaviour, Chronic and Severe Diseases or Early Environment Research Focus Areas, so that they may embrace the expertise within the Institute's entire research capacity.



“It is through a relationship of trust, working as partners toward agreed objectives, that we will pave the way forward. We commit to translating our research into positive sustainable change in the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children.

We will prioritise our partnerships with Aboriginal families and communities across Western Australia and beyond to improve the health and development of their children.

We will not ignore, nor accept, the continued disparity in outcomes for Aboriginal kids compared with other Australians.”

Professor Jonathan Carapetis, Executive Director



To this end, by the end of 2023 we will have:

Completed the full integration of Aboriginal Health as a core business of the Telethon Kids Institute

Implemented the 'Walking Softly on Country' Policy giving the Institute permission from traditional owners to undertake research on their country where the Institute is located or undertakes research

A whole-of-Institute Aboriginal Child and Family Health Research Program co-designed in partnership with Aboriginal Elders, families and researchers

A fully operationalised Kulunga Aboriginal Unit that can anticipate and respond to the diverse range of needs of research teams undertaking Aboriginal health research

An overarching communication and community engagement strategy to support research teams to engage better with Aboriginal organisations, communities and families

A fully implemented Aboriginal Health Grand Challenge with established community led governance in the Newman, Hedland and Perth metropolitan research sites

The Manda Alal Nyin Koornt (The Manda) Group to replace ACCARE and will work to the Executive Director to provide input on critical issues facing Aboriginal families from across the State

Research leaders and teams that can meet and exceed the Institute's Standards of Research Practice in Aboriginal Communities

Set the foundation to become the global leader in Indigenous child health research

An Aboriginal staff and student recruitment pathway that can meet the staffing demands of research teams including the engagement of four Aboriginal post-doctorate researchers, four Aboriginal doctoral research students and 25 Aboriginal community researchers

Recommendations - How will we get there?

The following recommendations underpin the Commitment and outline the seven areas of action that we will concentrate our effort over the next four years.



1

Commitment to Reconciliation

Equity, transparency
and accountability

That over the life of this Commitment, the Institute develops an Elevate Reconciliation Plan aligned with the Reconciliation Australia Reconciliation Action Plan Framework.



2

Aboriginal governance

to ensure a clear
Aboriginal voice and
influence in the Institute

Ensure an Aboriginal voice in all areas of the Institute, and in the work we do. This includes: exploring and implementing the Walking Softly on Country Policy to seek permission from Traditional Owners to work on those traditional countries where the Institute is located or undertakes research; supporting the implementation of the Aboriginal Health Grand Challenge with established community led governance in the Newman, Port Hedland and Perth metropolitan research sites; and continue with and explore international, national and state strategic partnerships and opportunities.

3

Setting research priorities that enable Aboriginal families determine their own futures

Developing a whole-of-Institute Aboriginal Child and Family Health Science Program co-designed in partnership with Aboriginal Elders, families, communities and researchers. Fully implement the Aboriginal Health Grand Challenge with established community-led governance in the Newman, Port Hedland and Perth metropolitan research sites to identify priorities for Aboriginal health research in these sites.

4

Setting the foundation to grow up the next generation of Aboriginal health researchers

Develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive training and development program that includes mandatory cultural security training, training for managers of Aboriginal staff and research-focused modules to support the implementation of the Institute's Standards of Research Practice in Aboriginal Health. Our Kulunga team will work with research teams in a case management approach, and we will develop a funding strategy to support priority Aboriginal research as well as meet recruitment targets set for the Aboriginal Employment Career Development Strategy.

5

Ensuring we have cutting edge skills to meet complex needs Aboriginal employment and career development

Evaluate and implement the Institute's Aboriginal Employment and Career Development Strategy including establishment of Aboriginal staff and student recruitment pathways to meet employment targets set by the Institute Leadership Team of Aboriginal employment of 5.5% across the total Institute staff and represented across all levels. We will develop and implement strategies to better support regional researchers and staff to access Perth-based support services and implement the Cultural Security Policy.

6

Staying connected to families by joining the dots Communication and community engagement strategy

Develop, implement and evaluate a comprehensive communication and community engagement plan to support this Commitment including employment of an Aboriginal Research Communications Officer and annual community forums in Newman, Port Hedland and Perth as part of the Aboriginal Health Grand Challenge.



7

What is valued gets measured Evaluation and reporting

Convert these recommendations into key performance indicators and report regularly to key stakeholders including the Institute Leadership Team, Institute Board and the broader Aboriginal community.





Kulunga Aboriginal Unit

The Kulunga Aboriginal Unit is a professional business unit within Telethon Kids that provides specific expertise, guidance and capacity to support the organisation to deliver on the bold goals outlined in the Institute's Strategic Plan, and the Commitment to Aboriginal Children & Families (2020-2023).

To ensure that cultural security is practiced within Telethon Kids Institute and the Aboriginal voice is heard, Kulunga will be proactive in the delivery of Aboriginal cultural awareness training, governance and standards for conducting research with Aboriginal communities. The training will help to build awareness within the organisation of the commitment and responsibilities of Telethon Kids to support high quality research with our rural, remote, and metropolitan communities. This will give a greater opportunity to further build relationships, understanding and trust. It's crucial to transfer the important information that will bridge the divide between Aboriginal culture and the researcher's science which can help with the translation of complex scientific terminology into plain language and action on the ground.

Kulunga is developing and incorporating Aboriginal culture and protocols throughout Telethon Kids Institute to help current and future projects meet their objectives. The goal is to strengthen the collaboration of Kulunga and researchers to harness the collective passion for greater health and wellbeing outcomes for our children and families.

Specific deliverables include:

- Providing support, advice, and guidance to facilitate beneficial connections to our communities.
- Ensuring research meets the standards for conducting Aboriginal Health Research.
- Delivering cultural awareness training and oversight of cultural governance.
- Provide training and capacity building support for all Aboriginal people working at Telethon Kids.
- Build awareness and understanding of Telethon Kids research in Aboriginal communities.
- Support translation of results with the broader Aboriginal community to make a meaningful benefit/ impact to the lives of Aboriginal children and families.





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