Considerations for vaccination programs and introducing new vaccine program

Vaccination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Ms Katrina Clark

Day 2: Describe strategies that support equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

NCIRS: Australian Vaccinology Course

October 2026

Why Equity Matters

National Immunisation Strategy 2025-2030

Vision	**A healthier Australia through immunisation**
Mission	**To reduce the impact of vaccine-preventable diseases through high uptake of safe, effective and equitable immunisation across the lifespan**

Priority Areas	1. Improve access to immunisation, with a focus on equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other priority populations	2. Build trust, understanding and acceptance of immunisation in communities	3. Use data more effectively to target immunisation strategies and monitor performance	4. Strengthen the immunisation workforce	5. Harness new technologies to respond to the evolving communicable disease and vaccine landscape	6. Implement sustainable reform in vaccine program governance, program delivery and accountability
Strategic Goals	Partner with communities to understand barriers to access and co-design strategies to improve vaccine access.	Engage with communities to build trust and understanding in the value of immunisation, and to combat misinformation.	Improve the completeness, timeliness and transparency of Australian Immunisation Register (AIR) data, ensuring optimal quality and utility for all stakeholders.	Embed immunisation in preventive healthcare across the lifespan.	Strengthen government immunisation program preparedness for new vaccine rollouts, including by leveraging new technologies.	Strengthen collaborative ways of working between the Australian Government and state and territory governments to deliver vaccines under the NIP and emergency programs.
	Use innovative service delivery models to increase equitable access to immunisation across the lifespan.	Strengthen community partnerships for design, delivery and evaluation of tailored immunisation strategies.	Work towards creation of a whole of life, interactive, real-time dashboard of coverage data for all Australian Government-funded vaccines.	Enable immunisation providers to safely work to their full scope of practice and harmonise relevant workforce policies, training, and accreditation across all states and territories.	Systematise horizon scanning for emerging and newly vaccine-preventable diseases and the vaccine pipeline.	Support policies that improve confidence in vaccine safety and accountability, such as exploring the feasibility of a no-fault vaccine compensation scheme.
	Ensure vaccine access and uptake to reach agreed national targets and maintain elimination status of measles, rubella and polio.	Track community sentiment, including for priority groups.	Expand data linkage capacity, analysis and reporting for better monitoring of vaccine program coverage, effectiveness, safety and impact.	Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce development to contribute to immunisation.	Champion vaccine research and development, and support pathways to commercialisation for Australian researchers and biotechnology industries.	Standardise monitoring and evaluation of national, and state and territory vaccine programs to improve outcomes.
	Consider additional evidence-informed targets.	Strengthen knowledge, confidence, and skills of immunisation providers to support informed vaccination choices.	Integrate and report timely surveillance data on diseases, vaccine coverage, safety, and social and behavioural insights.	Strengthen preparedness for immunisation workforce surge capacity in future health emergencies.	Maintain onshore vaccine manufacturing capacity for increased resilience against pandemics and supply chain threats.	Strengthen Australia's contribution to supporting regional and global immunisation efforts.
			Strengthen vaccine safety surveillance, including for new vaccines, to improve detection of rare or delayed onset adverse events.	Build expertise across the immunisation and vaccine-preventable disease workforce in all areas, including data analytics, disease surveillance and communications.		

Source: National Immunisation Strategy for Australia 2025-2030 (Australian Centre for Disease Control, 2025).

EQUITY MATTER

Key Equity Drivers

Trust Relationship

- Families are more likely to engage with services they trust
- Positive interactions with health staff encourage future vaccination

Communities Connections, Not Just Individuals

- Aunties, Grandparents and respected community members influence decisions

Improve Access, Not Just Acceptance

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff play a crucial role in building rapport and supporting families through the health system.

Support Informed Decisions Through Conversations

- Families value the opportunity to discuss vaccine concerns and ask questions

Strengthen the Workforce

- Skilled, culturally safe staff improve trust and vaccine confidence.
- Investing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce capacity is critical.

https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.5694/mja2.70233

A Practical Framework for Equity: Tailored Immunisation Programmes (TIP)

Developed by the World Health Organization

- ✓ Uses data to identify pockets of low vaccine coverage e.g. Australian Immunisation Register
- ✓ Uses yarning to understand barriers to vaccination and what strategies are likely to be effective
- ✓ Involves co-design of tailored approaches with service providers and community partners
- ✓ TIP has been implemented in over 30 countries, primarily in the WHO European Region but also increasingly beyond.
- ✓ In Australia, HNELHD is the **first site to implement TIP in the Western Pacific Region** with a particular, but not exclusive, focus on Aboriginal infants.

Study Settings – areas of low coverage identified from Australian Immunisation Register data

- Wonnarua Country - Maitland – a rural city, 166 kms North of Sydney
- Kamilaroi Country - Tamworth - a rural town, 420 kilometres north of Sydney
- Awabakal Country- Lake Macquarie – a large coastal city, 150 kilometres north of Sydney

Yarning Results

Maitland	Tamworth	Lake Macquarie
Stakeholder interviews and focus groups (n=59)	*Two focus groups (n= 6, n=15)*	*Two focus groups (n= 15, n=pending)*
Limited engagement with health services - unless need is urgent	Cultural safety in Immunisation services	Address service access issues
Multi-dimensional access barriers	Removing physical and cost barriers	Remove cost barriers
Need for supportive family centred, primary health care approach	Positive Immunisation stories needed	Re address misinformation
Data support and sharing	Data support and sharing	Data support and sharing

Maitland TIP

Who?
1 yr old not fully immunised.

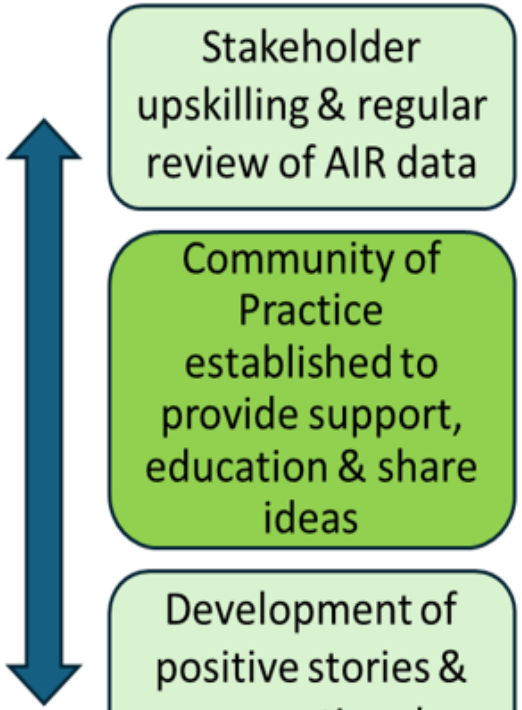


Rates for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children increased from 57.7% in 2013
➡ 92.6% in 2025 .....

NSW GOVERNMENT Health
Hunter New England Local Health District

Tamworth TIP

Who? Aboriginal children <5yr old not fully immunised.



Rates for Aboriginal children increased from 63.9% in 2016
➡ 98.4% in 2025 .....

Lake Macquarie TIP

Expediated approach

Who?
12-15mth old not fully immunised.



Rates in December 2024:
Aboriginal children = 91.3%
non-Aboriginal children = 92.1%
.....not yet evaluated.

What Does the Evidence Tell Us?

Systematic Review of First Nations Immunisation Programs: 14 studies across Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States

Most promising approaches

- Reminder and recall systems
- Strengthened service infrastructure
- Outreach and support services
- Community-informed approaches
- Culturally grounded programs

White, J., Wilson, B., **Clark, K.,** King, C., Bolsewicz, K. T., Kaufman, J., Mohamed, Y., Danchin, M., & Durrheim, D. N. (2026). A systematic review of approaches to achieving equitable childhood immunization (0-5 years) among First Nations populations in high income OECD countries. Journal of Health Equity https://doi.org/10.1080/29944694.2026.2631478

Discussion

- Which consideration do you think is most frequently overlooked when introducing new vaccination programs?
- Can anyone think of a vaccine program that was scientifically strong but experienced implementation challenges?
- At what point should communities be involved in vaccine policy decisions?

In NSW, these Aboriginal health workers already know how to close the gap

A quiet revolution has been taking place in NSW. And if we pay attention, it could help us close the Indigenous health gap.

By **Amy Corderoy**

November 6, 2015 – 12.23pm



It started with the number eight.

That number might seem small, but if you're a mum with a baby it could be the difference between life and death.

Cashman *et al. BMC Public Health* (2016) 16:514
DOI 10.1186/s12889-016-3086-x

BMC Public Health

RESEARCH ARTICLE Open Access

Closing the gap in Australian Aboriginal infant immunisation rates – the development and review of a pre-call strategy

Patrick M. Cashman[1*], Natalie A. Allan[1], Katrina K. Clark[1], Michelle T. Butler[1], Peter D. Massey[1,2] and David N. Durrheim[1,2,3]

NSW Aboriginal Immunisation Healthcare Worker Program

Putting Policy into Practice:

Program Components

- Employment of Aboriginal health workers
- Engagement with Aboriginal families
- Culturally responsive communication
- Follow-up and recall strategies
- Supporting timely vaccination and improved coverage

Source: AIHW analysis of NNDSS data on 16 January 2025.

What do Successful Programs have in Common?

Successful programs are:

- Community-led
- Culturally safe
- Accessible
- Flexible
- Responsive to local needs
- Built on partnerships

Discussion

- What is the difference between a community-targeted program and a community-led program

- What examples have you seen where Indigenous leadership strengthened vaccination outcomes

- If ATAGI recommended a new vaccine tomorrow, what do you think would be the greatest challenge to achieving equitable uptake

Key takeaways

- Vaccine availability alone is insufficient
- Access barriers contribute to vaccination inequities
- Equitable access is the goal
- Community –led, culturally safe approaches improve vaccination outcomes
- Indigenous leadership strengthens vaccination program design, delivery and outcomes

Final Message

Improving immunisation outcomes isn't about finding a single magic solution.

It's about consistently doing the things we know make a difference.

Katrina Clark NCIRS AVC October 2026



Thank you

References:

- Dey, A., Tashani, M., **Clark,** K., Hendry, A., Beard, F., & McIntyre, P. (2018). Evaluation of the influenza immunisation program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 6 months to <5 years: Process evaluation & coverage report (Final, 6 February 2018). National Centre for Immunisation Research and Surveillance (NCIRS)
- White, J., Wilson, B., **Clark, K.,** King, C., Bolsewicz, K. T., Kaufman, J., Mohamed, Y., Danchin, M., & Durrheim, D. N. (2026). A systematic review of approaches to achieving equitable childhood immunization (0-5 years) among First Nations populations in high income OECD countries. Journal of Health Equity, 3(1), 2631478. https://doi.org/10.1080/29944694.2026.2631478
- Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) analysis of National Notifiable Diseases Surveillance System (NNDSS) data, 16 January 2025.
- Middleton, B. F., Crooks, K., Taylor, K., Harwood, E., **Clark, K. K.,** Kent, C., McCrory, K., Hefler, M., Kaufman, J., & Durrheim, D. N., et al. (2026). Drivers of vaccine uptake for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to inform tailored strategies: A qualitative study exploring health service provider perspective. Medical Journal of Australia, 224(7), e70233. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.70233
- **Clark, K.,** Crooks, K., Jeyanathan, B., Ahmed, F., Kataquapit, G., Sutherland, C., Tsuji, L. J. S., Moriarity, R. J., Spence, N. D., Sekercioglu, F., Liberda, E. N., & Charania, N. A. (2024). Highlighting models of Indigenous leadership and self-governance for COVID-19 vaccination programmes. AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples, 20(1), 250-258. https://doi.org/10.1177/11771801241235418
- Australian Centre for Disease Control. (2025). National Immunisation Strategy for Australia 2025-2030. Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care. https://www.cdc.gov.au/resources/publications/national-immunisation-strategy-australia-2025-2030
- Whitley, M., **Clark, K.,** Butler, M., Murray, P., Briggs, H., Saxby, S., & Durrheim, D. N. (2026). Timeliness and equity: An analysis of measles herd immunity in a regional area of Australia. Medical Journal of Australia. https://doi.org/10.5694/mja2.70297
- Thomas, S., Cashman, P., Islam, F., Baker, L., **Clark, K.,** Leask, J., Butler, R., & Durrheim, D. N. (2018). Tailoring immunisation service delivery in a disadvantaged community in Australia: Views of health providers and parents. Vaccine, 36(19), 2596-2603. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2018.03.038