

First Australians



Introduction

Australia's First Peoples (Indigenous Australians) are those of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin who identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. Baptcare recognises the impact of past history has led to multiple layers of disadvantage for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

As a provider of aged care and family and community services in Victoria and Tasmania, we are committed to a process of continuous improvement in inclusive service delivery to Indigenous clients across all ages on the life spectrum.

History and background

Two centuries of European colonisation were characterised by the loss of Indigenous land, violence and instances of genocide, long term and widespread discrimination, forced removal of children from family and country, loss of traditional livelihoods, malnutrition and disease, and suppression of language and culture. This resulted in ongoing physical, spiritual and psychological harm for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and high levels of intergenerational disadvantage.

Despite this, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culture survived and eventually saw resurgence. Over the last three decades, non-indigenous Australia has become increasingly aware of the impact of this past history on the lives of Indigenous communities and its contribution to deep and persistent disadvantage.

Baptcare is aware of the role that various church agencies played in the uprooting of Aboriginal Australians from their traditional lands and their removal to Missions, often purposely mixing different Aboriginal tribes and language groups and breaking their deep links to country. Churches were also active in the systematic denial of indigenous culture and language and the forcible removal of children which created the Stolen Generations.

We recognise that the suffering, grief and loss which occurred has led many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to identify faith-based organisations with discriminatory and racist policies. It was in this spirit that in 1998, the Baptist Union of Victoria issued an Apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

Current context and situation

The legacy of the past has left many Indigenous Australians, families and communities experiencing deep social exclusion and disadvantage. It is now recognised that efforts to close the gap between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians are undermined if government departments and community service providers do not understand or are not committed to approaches that are culturally appropriate. Despite political commitments and reconciliation efforts by many people and organisations across the country, the reality remains that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to experience discrimination and barriers to accessing community services.

Baptcare is committed to building links with Traditional Owners in the areas in which we work and particularly where we undertake new developments. Baptcare seeks to acknowledge Country, Elders and Traditional Owners in all the regions where we work. We seek to demonstrate this acknowledgement in ways that are acceptable to local Traditional Owners and which demonstrates respect.

Baptcare acknowledges that large scale developments in culturally sensitive landscapes can cause significant harm to sites of Aboriginal cultural heritage.

Baptcare is committed to valuing Aboriginal heritage and to ensuring that measures are taken to safeguard this heritage when Baptcare develops sites.

Mainstream non-indigenous agencies must take proactive, culturally appropriate steps to engage with Aboriginal communities. With an organisational commitment to equity of outcomes, Baptcare is committed to being a part of this process of engagement. Vulnerable aboriginal children as a group have poorer health, education and other life outcomes than the average Australian. As part of Baptcare's role in supporting vulnerable Aboriginal children, Baptcare is committed to working with the Aboriginal community sector to support children's connection to culture. Additionally, Baptcare is committed to supporting indigenous individuals and families in their caring roles through our community aged care services and kinship care within the out of home care system.

Due to the sensitivities within Indigenous communities, in order to respect older people, government and non-government organisations must ensure that their interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders and seniors are in line with the cultural protocols of the local community.



Baptcare's Mission & Christian Witness

Baptcare's Christian heritage assumes a theological framework in which every person is cherished as an individual made in God's image, we yearn for the day when "the gap" is closed and the life circumstances and choices of Indigenous Australians reflects this belief.

We are drawn to the margins as Jesus was, respecting and valuing people regardless of their gender, ethnicity or circumstances. Baptcare's aim is to bring light and hope among the shadows and, in the context of this policy, especially those shadows created by the colonisation of our land and the ongoing impact this has had for our first peoples.

Reconciliation is a profound biblical expectation embedded in the theology of the Gospel message. For Baptcare, embracing reconciliation with our indigenous brothers and sisters, is a natural outpouring of our Gospel of hope: "All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation; that is, God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself." (2Corinthians 5:18-19)

A better future / what needs to change

Social and cultural change comes about when attitudes and behaviours change across enough of the population to create a key shift in the weight of public opinion and provide impetus for sustained action.

Baptcare is undertaking a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) and is committed to making progress on the journey of reconciliation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, residents, clients and in the communities in which we operate. Initially our RAP aims to work at two levels:

- Basic awareness and cultural competency across all Baptcare sites
- A deeper engagement with Aboriginal people in areas where they are most populous.

Baptcare is committed to the promotion of respect and cultural understanding via our RAP process. Baptcare's policies include a commitment to diversity awareness, policies on social inclusion and equal opportunity, and the prohibition of discrimination, harassment and abuse on the basis of race.





Policy position

- 1** Baptcare recognises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders as the first Peoples of Australia. Baptcare recognises and respects the key role of Elders within Indigenous communities and the vital connection of First Peoples to Country.
- 2** Baptcare acknowledges that the violence, discrimination and trauma that many of Australia's First Peoples suffered is the foundation for many aspects of ongoing Indigenous disadvantage.
- 3** Baptcare endorses the Australian Baptist Ministries' Statement on reconciliation with Indigenous Australians and answers the call for all Baptist agencies to consider ways in which practical reconciliation might be modelled.
- 4** Baptcare is committed to increasing our links with local indigenous communities and Traditional owners in the regions in which we work.
- 5** Wherever possible, Baptcare will seek to form cooperative partnerships with relevant Aboriginal-led agencies in order to gain advice as to how best to serve their communities with culturally appropriate care and to make linkages that will improve access. Baptcare is committed to continuous improvement in inclusive service delivery to Indigenous clients.

Baptcare is a customer focused, faith centred and purpose driven organisation working across Victoria and Tasmania, providing residential and community care for older people and support to children, families, and people with disability, financially disadvantaged people and people seeking asylum.

MISSION

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