

Inclusive Practice Policy

Policy Statement

Southern NSW Local Health District (SNSWLHD) is committed to fostering an inclusive, equitable, and culturally safe environment for all individuals, including patients, staff, and community members.

We acknowledge and respect the diverse backgrounds, experiences, and identities of those we employ and those we serve, ensuring that everyone has access to high-quality, person-centred healthcare without fear of discrimination, stigma, or exclusion.

This policy reaffirms our dedication to embedding inclusive practices across all aspects of our organisation and our health services.

SNSWLHD's commitment to inclusivity is further strengthened through the Elevate program, which aligns with the NSW Health CORE values; Collaboration, Openness, Respect, and Empowerment.

Elevate fosters a supportive and inclusive workplace culture that enhances the quality of care while ensuring all staff and patients feel valued, respected, and empowered.

At SNSWLHD our people are at the heart of everything we do. Supporting staff wellbeing and nurturing psychological safety is fundamental to building a workplace where everyone feels they belong and can thrive.

When individuals feel safe to speak up, share ideas, and be themselves, we create stronger, more compassionate teams that reflect the communities we serve.

We are committed to fostering a culture where kindness, care, and respect are not just aspirations, but everyday experiences, enabling our workforce to deliver excellence in care.



Acknowledgement of Country

Southern NSW Local Health District acknowledges the Gundungurra, Ngarigo, Ngunnawal, Ngambri and Yuin Nations as the Traditional Custodians of the land covered by the district. We pay our respects to Elders, community members and Local Health District Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff for their ongoing contribution to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Artwork by Alison Simpson

1. Purpose

The purpose of this Inclusive Practice Policy is to promote a culture of inclusion across the Southern NSW Local Health District (SNSWLHD). This policy aligns with a range of legislative requirements, strategic accountabilities and supporting documentation that guide inclusive practice across NSW Health and the broader public sector.

This includes, but is not limited to:

- NSW Health Future Health Strategy 2022–2032
- NSW Regional Health Strategic Plan 2022–2032
- NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy 2022–2027
- Rainbow Tick Accreditation Standards
- NSW Health Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031
- NSW Disability Inclusion Act 2014
- Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)
- Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)
- Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)
- NSW Public Sector Employment and Management Regulation 2009
- NSW Public Service Commission – Disability Inclusion Resources

The policy also reflects local organisational priorities including:

- SNSWLHD Strategy 2026
- SNSWLHD People Strategy 2024–2026
- Pride in Southern Promise
- The Elevate Program
- NSW Health CORE Values
- SNSWLHD Care and Kindness Charter

SNSWLHD acknowledges that inclusive practice is not only a matter of values and aspiration but also a legal and ethical obligation. Embedding inclusive frameworks across our services provides for a stronger focus on and more effective assurances that we meet our responsibilities to consumers, staff, and communities under anti-discrimination and human rights legislation.

2. Scope

This policy applies to all workers (staff, contractors, and volunteers) within the SNSWLHD district and covers interactions with all patients, families, and communities served by the district.

3. Principles

Inclusion: We aim to create a welcoming place where everyone; staff, patients, volunteers, or visitors feel respected, supported, and safe. We want everyone to be able to take part fully without fear of discrimination or exclusion.

Equity: We are committed to establishing and maintaining a work environment where all workers have fair access to workplace opportunity and supports. We work to remove barriers so that all workers can grow and succeed in our organisation. We are also committed to ensuring fair access to healthcare services are available to all, especially people from minoritised groups, so that they are provided with the care they need.

Diversity: We value the many different backgrounds, identities, and experiences of the people in our workforce and the communities we serve. We believe that having a diverse range of voices and perspectives makes us stronger, smarter, and better able to deliver high-quality care for all.

Belonging: We want everyone at SNSWLHD to feel they truly belong. For our staff, this means feeling safe and supported to be themselves at work. For patients and community members, it means receiving care that respects who they are and what they need.

4. Key Focus Areas

4.1 Workforce Diversity

- Enhance recruitment practices to further promote diversity.
- Recognise and support new and existing staff with lived experiences of being minoritised.
- Provide more comprehensive cultural competence and disability awareness training for staff as part of professional development and onboarding.
- Further embed the principles of the Elevate program to create a workplace culture that supports inclusivity and psychological safety.
- Ensure reasonable adjustments and inclusive onboarding practices are in place and well communicated.

4.2 Access to Services

- Ensure language support services for both non-English speaking and English as a second language patients, family members and visitors.
- Enhance accessibility for people with disability, including physical access, communication supports, and inclusive digital environments.
- Identify and remove barriers such as stigma and discrimination that prevent minoritised groups from accessing services.
- Incorporate feedback from disability consumer representatives to improve patient experiences and service accessibility.
- Leverage Elevate's framework to improve patient-centred care and inclusive health service delivery.

4.3 Cultural Safety

- Integrate culturally appropriate and inclusive practices in care delivery.
- Engage and include local communities to better understand their needs and barriers.
- Promote staff learning and reflection so that cultural safety becomes a core component of everyday work life, not just patient care.
- Ensure disability cultural safety is recognised as part of inclusive practice.
- Understanding systemic ableism and the right to self-identify without judgement.

4.4 Community and Stakeholder Engagement

- Enhance already established partnerships with community organisations and advocacy groups, including disability advocacy networks such that more meaningful engagement occurs.
- Conduct regular consultations with minoritised communities to identify emerging healthcare needs.
- Enhance and implement community-driven approaches to ensure healthcare services are responsive to diverse community perspectives.
- Engage people with lived experience of disability in codesign of services and feedback processes.

4.5 Recognition and Celebration of Diversity

- Actively promote and celebrate cultural, religious, and identity-based awareness events within SNSWLHD.
- Enhance the recognition and support of days of significance such as NAIDOC Week, Harmony Day, Pride Month, International Day of People with Disabilities, and other events important to CALD and disability communities.
- Encourage staff participation in diversity and inclusion initiatives to foster a sense of belonging.
- Highlight stories and achievements of diverse staff and community members through internal and external communications, ensuring representation from disability, LGBTIQ+, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, and CALD communities.

5. Implementation and Responsibilities

To ensure the effective implementation of this policy, the following responsibilities are established:

5.1 Leadership and Management:

Responsible for embedding inclusive practices within their teams, supporting cultural safety, and ensuring compliance with the policy.

5.2 Education:

Staff will receive ongoing training on cultural competence, disability awareness, unconscious bias, and inclusive service delivery.

5.3 Operational Integration:

Inclusion principles will be incorporated into workplace policies, clinical procedures, and patient care strategies.

5.4 Individual

Embed inclusion and equity principles into clinical and non-clinical work practices.

5.5 Reporting Systems

SNSWLHD will explore and develop reporting mechanisms for staff experiencing discrimination, exclusion, or bias. These systems will prioritise psychological safety, procedural fairness, and systemic learning, ensuring that the focus remains on the behaviour or incident and not the individual's personal health or resilience. This may include the future establishment of designated Equity or Inclusive Practice contact points.

6. Accountability

Executives and senior leadership are responsible for implementing and monitoring this policy. The Elevate program will support continuous improvement in inclusivity.

Performance indicators will include:

6.1 Disability Inclusion Metrics

Workforce representation, provision of workplace adjustments, consumer feedback, and physical/digital accessibility benchmarks.

6.2 Workforce Diversity Metrics

Proportion of staff from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, CALD, LGBTIQ+, and disability communities.

6.3 Inclusion and Belonging

Employee engagement and cultural safety survey results.

6.4 Training Completion Rates

Completion rates for mandatory training on cultural competence, disability awareness, and LGBTIQ+ inclusivity.

6.5 Patient Experience

Feedback from minoritised groups via surveys and engagement mechanisms.

6.6 Service Accessibility

Use of interpreting services, accessible communication tools, and culturally appropriate care requests.

6.7 Incident Reporting Trends

Trends in reports related to discrimination or stigma.

6.8 Community Engagement Evidence

Records of outreach, codesign, and consultation with diverse communities.

7. Reporting and Complaint Resolution

SNSWLHD is committed to addressing concerns related to discrimination, exclusion, or bias in a timely, transparent, and just manner. This includes creating safe avenues for both staff and community members to report incidents, raise concerns, and seek resolution without fear of reprisal.

7.1 Staff Reporting

While the IMS reporting system may be used in some cases, it has known limitations when used by staff to report experiences of discrimination, exclusion, or bias. These include processes that may inadvertently place the burden of proof or harm on the individual affected, rather than focusing on the discriminatory incident itself.

To support a psychologically safe and fair approach to reporting:

SNSWLHD commits to exploring alternative reporting pathways that do not require staff to justify or medically validate their experience of discrimination in order for it to be recognised or actioned.

Staff should be encouraged to raise concerns with their manager, HR business partner, or through a future designated Equity or Inclusion contact person/team.

Investigations into incidents involving discrimination must prioritise respectful engagement, confidentiality, procedural fairness, and, where appropriate, systemic review and action.

Staff should be made aware of their rights under NSW Anti-Discrimination legislation and supported to seek independent advocacy or advice if needed.

All reports will be tracked (without medicalisation unless necessary) to enable systemic learning, identify patterns, and support continuous improvement in workplace equity.

7.2 Consumer and Community Feedback

Consumers can provide feedback through snswlhd-consumerfeedback@health.nsw.gov.au.

Independent complaints can be made via the NSW Health Care Complaints Commission.

7.3 Whistleblower Protections

All individuals who report in good faith are protected under whistleblower and anti-victimisation laws.

SNSWLHD prohibits any form of retaliation and is committed to supporting those who raise issues in alignment with our inclusive values.

8. Review

This policy will be reviewed every four years or as required by legislative changes.

9. Implementation Resources

9.1 Inclusive Practice – General Resources

- NSW Health Inclusive Language Guide
- NSW Health Equity Statement
- NSW Health LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy Toolkit

9.2 Disability Inclusion – Workforce and Service Delivery

- NSW Health Disability Inclusion Action Plan
- Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031
- NSW Public Service Commission Disability Employment Resources
- Australian Network on Disability – Managers' Disability Guide
- Accessible Health Care for People with Disability: A Resource for Health Professionals (NSW)

9.3 Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) Communities

- NSW Health Multicultural Health Communication Service
- NSW Health Cultural Diversity Health Strategy

- NSW Health Language Services Policy
- Working with Multicultural Communities – A Guide for Health Professionals (NSW)
- NSW Health Translated Health Fact Sheets
- Australian Institute of Interpreters and Translators (AUSIT) – Code of Ethics

9.4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Cultural Safety

- NSW Health Aboriginal Cultural Respect Framework
- Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care – Cultural Safety Toolkit

9.5 LGBTIQ+ Inclusion

- NSW LGBTIQ+ Health Strategy Toolkit
- Rainbow Tick Accreditation Standards

Definitions

Staff

Clinical and non-clinical personnel, locums, employees on secondment.

Patients

Inpatients, outpatients, individuals seeking medical care.

Non-patients

Chosen families and families of origin, carers, visitors and volunteers.

Minoritised groups

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, culturally and linguistically diverse people including refugees and asylum seekers, people with disability and LGBTIQ+ people.

Culture

Refers to workplace culture aligning with protocols and standards met by NSW healthcare organisations.

Cultural Safety

Creating a space where people feel respected, understood, and safe to be themselves, without fear of discrimination or judgement, going beyond just being aware of cultural differences. This policy is about listening, learning, and taking action to address power imbalances, racism, discrimination, and bias. Cultural safety is defined by the person receiving care or support, not by the service provider.

Inclusion

Means creating a culture where all people feel respected, valued, supported, and able to fully participate regardless of their identity, background, or circumstances. It involves removing barriers to access and opportunity, challenging discrimination and bias, and actively fostering a sense of belonging for everyone. Inclusion isn't just about being present, it's about being heard, seen, and empowered in meaningful ways.

Diversity

Refers to the many ways in which people differ from one another. This includes visible and invisible differences such as age, race, ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, intersex status, gender identity, gender expression, language, faith, spirituality, socio-economic background, education, disability, neurodivergence, lived experience, relationship status, parental status, occupation, and more. Diversity also acknowledges that each person brings unique perspectives, skills, knowledge, and experiences that enrich our workplace, communities, and services. Valuing diversity means recognising and respecting these differences as strengths, not barriers.