

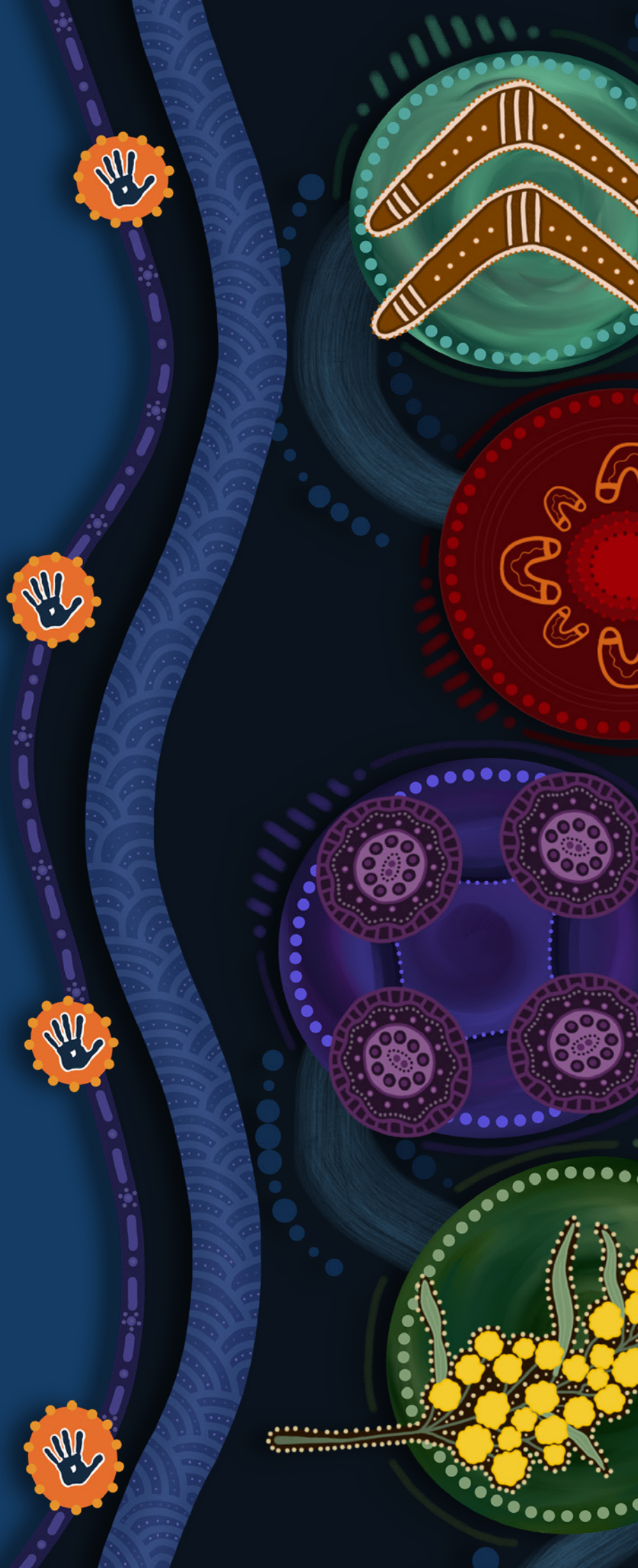


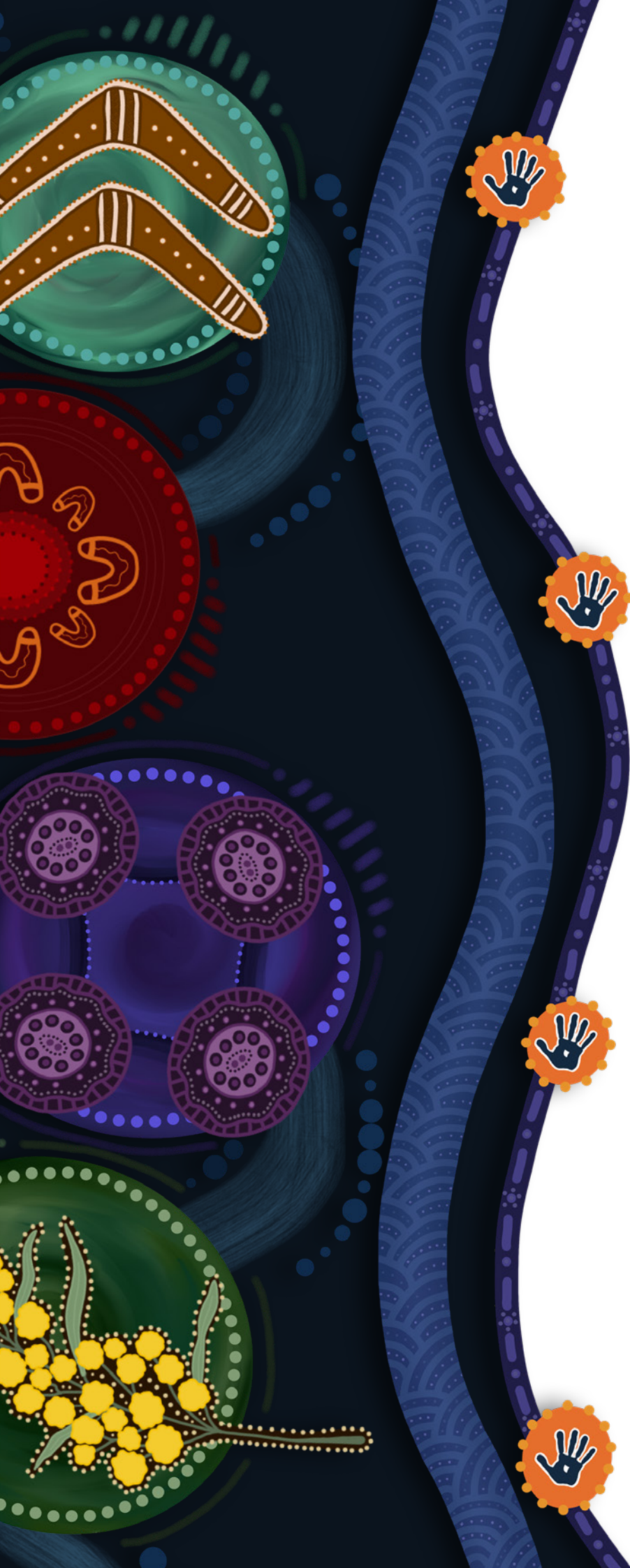
Australian
Human Rights
Commission

First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework

2026 – 2030

humanrights.gov.au





Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters on which this work was undertaken and recognise First Peoples of Australia as the oldest continuing cultures in the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have lived on these lands for thousands of generations. They are the First Peoples. They established hundreds of sovereign nations and lived sustainably on their traditional Country with sophisticated culture, law, language and knowledge.

We recognise that the work of the Australian Human Rights Commission (the Commission) spans many Countries and Nations. We honour the diversity of First Peoples' cultures, languages and histories, and acknowledge that sovereignty was never ceded and continues to co-exist alongside Australian sovereignty.

This First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework has been informed by the lived experience, knowledge and generosity of First Peoples, alongside the reflections and insights of non-Indigenous staff across the Commission.

We acknowledge that cultural knowledge is shared with care and carries responsibility.

We must work with First Peoples to create a different story for future generations. By addressing injustice, we can come together as a nation with a brighter, shared future.

This framework sets out how the Commission will support culturally safe, respectful, and practical ways of working across the organisation and in its day-to-day functions.

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This framework reflects a collaborative effort involving staff across the Commission, guided by the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce.

Co-Authors



Editing



Graphic Design



The artwork

Cultural Safety is Everyone's Responsibility

The artwork, Cultural Safety is Everyone's Responsibility, represents the shared commitment required to create culturally safe environments where First Peoples are respected, valued and supported. The artwork brings together the 4 pillars of the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework, illustrating that cultural safety is not the responsibility of one person, team or initiative, but a collective responsibility embedded across leadership, workplaces, systems and everyday actions.

Each symbol within the artwork reflects a key pillar of the Framework. Together, they demonstrate how strong leadership, safe and inclusive workplaces, equitable systems, and ongoing learning work in partnership to create meaningful and lasting change. The interconnected design highlights that progress in one area strengthens the others, reinforcing a whole-of-organisation approach to cultural safety.

The vibrant colours throughout the artwork represent diversity, connection, growth and shared responsibility. The pathways connecting the symbols reflect the ongoing journey of learning, listening, truth-telling and continuous improvement required to foster culturally safe environments for First Peoples.



Leadership, Accountability and Governance

Symbol: Two Boomerangs

Strong, accountable leadership that embeds cultural safety in decision-making and governance.

Two boomerangs represent leadership and governance because a boomerang symbolises guidance, direction and responsibility. Like a boomerang that returns to its starting point, effective leaders are accountable for their decisions and actions.

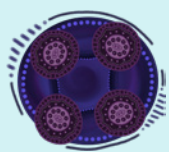


Safe Workplaces and Anti-Racism

Symbol: Meeting Circle

We stand against racism and create inclusive, respectful and safe workplaces where everyone belongs and thrives.

The meeting place symbol represents people coming together to share knowledge, ideas and experiences. The bright red centre signifies the importance and strength of connection, collaboration and belonging. It reflects how meaningful conversations and relationships sit at the heart of strong communities and successful organisations.



Organisational Systems and Cultural Expertise and Responsibility

Symbol: 4 Connected Circles

Our systems, policies and processes support equitable access, opportunities and pathways for First Peoples.

The four purple circles represent the interconnected nature of people and systems. Each circle symbolises a different individual, group or process, while their placement together highlights how people and systems rely on one another to function effectively. This reflects the importance of collaboration, relationships and well-structured systems in achieving shared goals.



Learning, Capability and Continuous Improvement

Symbol: Golden Wattle

We grow knowledge, understanding and cultural capability through continuous learning, truth-telling and shared wisdom.

The golden wattle represents learning and capability because it is a native Australian plant that grows and flourishes in a variety of environments. Just as the wattle develops and strengthens over time, learning allows individuals and organisations to continually grow their knowledge, skills and confidence.



About the artist

Nioka Marlowe is a proud Wiradjuri woman, deeply connected to her Country in Tumut, NSW, where she was born and raised. This strong connection to Country continues to shape her identity and artistic practice.

As a multi-disciplinary artist and modern storyteller, Nioka shares rich narratives through a range of mediums. These include hand-painted and hand-drawn digital works across canvas, furniture and pottery. Her work is grounded in the influence of family, the landscapes of Country and the stories and cultural knowledge shared by her Elders, each adding depth and meaning to her practice.

Nioka's art is a powerful vehicle for education and connection. Her pieces invite people to engage with and celebrate the richness of Aboriginal culture, creating opportunities for learning, reflection and community cohesion.

Through deep listening and a thoughtful approach, Nioka creates distinct works that enhance everyday spaces while fostering meaningful conversations and connections.

Message from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner

As Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner and Co-Chair of the Commission's Organisational Development and Culture Governance Committee, I am pleased to present the Commission's First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework (the Framework). This Framework represents an important step in strengthening how we create a workplace where First Peoples feel respected, valued, supported and safe. The framework is supported by a separate Implementation Plan.

Cultural safety requires honesty and reflection. It asks us to consider how our systems, decisions and everyday interactions shape people's experiences at work. It also requires sustained effort in responding to issues while building a culture that prevents harm and supports inclusion.

Cultural safety supports not only First Peoples, but people from other communities impacted by racism. The National Anti-Racism Framework notes the importance of community-centric approaches to tackling racism. While the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework is focused on the distinct experiences and needs of First Peoples, it is expected to have positive flow-on effects for the Commission's broader anti-racism practice, systems and culture.

This Framework aligns with the Commission's responsibilities under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap and reinforces our leadership in anti-racism. More importantly, it demonstrates our commitment to building an internal culture that upholds fundamental human rights principles both

within the Commission and externally. Consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) and broader human rights standards, it also reflects the advocacy required to embed these principles into our everyday policies, practices and actions.

I thank the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce and all staff who contributed to this work. Cultural safety is everybody's business, and I encourage all staff to engage with this Framework thoughtfully and in good faith as we continue this work together.

Katie Kiss

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner



Message from the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce

From the outset, the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce has been unwavering in its belief that cultural safety is everybody's business. Driven by this commitment, the taskforce has spent the past year and a half working in close partnership with Ngurra Advisory to shape a comprehensive and meaningful First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework and Implementation Plan.

This Framework reflects a shared understanding that cultural safety grows through everyday practice, reflection and collective responsibility. It sets out clear focus areas to support consistent ways of working, decision-making and accountability across the Commission.

This Framework provides a foundation for practical action and improvement. It will require commitment from all work areas and staff to be effective. While the Framework addresses cultural safety for First Peoples, it lays a foundation for cultural safety with flow-on effects for all people from communities who experience racism.

The taskforce recognises that meaningful progress requires sustained leadership and operational commitment. We welcome the Chief Executive's commitment to embedding this Framework into governance, systems and day-to-day practice across the organisation.

We thank the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce committee members: Tara Apps, Lauren Brown, Isobella Rafty, Noah Riseman and Karina Scott; the Anti-Racism Working Group, especially Shyamika Peeligama; and other Commission staff who have contributed their time, experience and perspectives to this work.

Message from the Chief Executive

The First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework and Implementation Plan provide the Commission with a clear and practical roadmap for action to make our workplace safer for all.

As Chief Executive, I recognise that delivering on this Framework requires sustained leadership, commitment and accountability. Cultural safety must be reflected not only in our intentions but in our governance, policies, systems and everyday work practices.

The separate Implementation Plan sets out tangible actions across leadership, workplace culture, people processes and capability development. It makes clear what needs to be done, who is responsible and how progress will be monitored. We will integrate implementation into existing work programs and governance arrangements to ensure cultural safety is embedded, not treated as an add-on.

We have invested with intention and commitment to developing this Framework. I am committed to ensuring the Commission allocates the time, resources and attention required to support its delivery. Ongoing review and learning will be essential as we strengthen our internal culture and continue to build an organisation that reflects our human rights values – participation, accountability, non-discrimination and equality, empowerment and legality.

I thank the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce and colleagues who have guided this work and look forward to leading its continued implementation across the Commission.

Co-chairs Leah Pitt and Suzi Chinnery

**First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce
Australian Human Rights Commission**

Leanne Smith

**Chief Executive
Australian Human Rights Commission**

Introduction: Cultural safety is everybody's business

Cultural safety is a right of First Peoples, as set out in the UNDRIP. While cultural safety within organisations and institutions is everybody's business, it must be developed from a First Peoples perspective.

First Peoples have an innate sense of care and responsibility to ensure the safety and wellbeing of those who live and work on their Country. This should be reciprocated in the workplace. In this context, this Framework prioritises the cultural safety of First Peoples. In doing so, it also promotes cultural safety for all who engage within and with the Commission.



Understanding cultural safety

Cultural safety is the goal on a continuum where organisations and individuals actively reflect on their own practices, beliefs and systems. A culturally safe workplace is one where everyone feels respected and safe from racism, discrimination and cultural harm.

A culturally safe workplace recognises First Peoples' perspectives, knowledge systems and ways of working as valuable and integral to how the organisation operates. This means workplaces must:

- remove barriers that limit cultural understanding
- promote empowerment and respect.

The First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework also recognises that First Peoples staff may experience intersecting forms of discrimination based on gender, sexuality, disability, age, class and other factors. True cultural safety is only possible when everyone is free from all forms of discrimination in their work.

Cultural safety creates an environment where there is no assault, challenge or denial of someone's identity, who they are and what they need. When cultural safety is embedded in an organisation, learning moves beyond awareness to meaningful practice.

As staff feel safe, respected and valued, they are more willing to contribute their perspectives, challenge inequity and participate in continuous learning. This empowers all staff, strengthens collaboration and trust, and supports a workplace that delivers better outcomes for employees and the communities we serve.

Cultural safety principles



Defined by First Peoples

First Peoples determine what is culturally safe – not the organisation’s intention, nor those who deliver services or policies. Other cultures and communities similarly define cultural safety by their own experiences and contexts.

Recognises culture and identity as protective factors

Culture and identity are protective factors for First Peoples. They support social and emotional wellbeing, resilience and a strong sense of belonging. Connection to culture, Country, family, kin and community strengthens identity and buffers against the impacts of racism and trauma.

Recognises history and lived experience

Cultural safety acknowledges the ongoing impacts of colonisation and racism. This includes how historical, contemporary and embedded policies, systems and exclusion continue to shape experiences and access to opportunities today. Cultural safety takes these realities into account in the design, delivery and review of work.

Requires anti-racism

Cultural awareness and competence are important foundations for cultural safety, but they alone do not guarantee cultural safety. Non-racism is passive, whereas anti-racism requires action and accountability.

Embedded in systems and everyday practice

Cultural safety is reflected in governance, leadership, decision-making, policies, people processes and workplace culture. It is not treated as an isolated initiative. Where decisions may impact on First Peoples, processes should be guided by free, prior and informed consent.

What cultural safety looks like in practice

In culturally safe environments, everyone understands that colonial perspectives have dominated relationships between First Peoples and the Australian community. Those colonial perspectives disregarded and denied the knowledges, contributions, inputs and lived experience of First Peoples.

First Peoples have the longest continuing culture in the world. Culture has protected, nurtured and sustained First Peoples since time immemorial. While colonisation sought to eliminate and marginalise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, they have remained strong.

Everyday interactions, decisions, processes and policies shape cultural safety and security in a sustained way. One-off training or good intentions alone do not achieve cultural safety. It requires ongoing attention to how workplace practices and the behaviours of all staff affect people's experience of safety, inclusion and belonging.

Cultural safety also extends to work-related interactions beyond the office. This includes engagement with First Peoples communities, stakeholders, partners and members of the public. Expectations of culturally safe conduct apply wherever staff represent the Commission or carry out its functions.

Cultural conflict

An important dimension that affects cultural safety and security is that First Peoples may experience cultural conflict – also referred to as 'walking in 2 worlds'. First Peoples staff often navigate systems and structures that were not designed with their perspectives, knowledge systems or ways of working in mind. This is especially the case within government institutions.

Cultural conflict may arise where organisational processes do not align with the rights of First Peoples to participate in decisions or to uphold

cultural responsibilities, as recognised in the UNDRIP. First Peoples may have values and worldviews that differ from their organisation and non-Indigenous colleagues.

This can create tension between:

- organisational objectives and approaches that are culturally appropriate and in the best interests of Country and community
- the expectations placed on First Peoples staff to represent, serve and be accountable to the best interests of their communities.

Example:

A First Peoples staff member is involved in developing a program, which has implications for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The program has already been largely designed based on internal priorities and funding requirements, with limited input from community. The staff member feels uncomfortable progressing something that may not reflect community needs or aspirations, but also feels pressure to deliver within tight timeframes. They are placed in a position where they are expected to endorse or lead work that does not fully align with their cultural responsibility to ensure community voice and benefit are central.

Cultural conflict can occur in the workplace, but it can also affect First Peoples staff and volunteers in their own communities, families or within themselves. This can cause harm or trigger trauma, which can manifest as disengagement or withdrawal in the workplace. The staff member may feel marginalised, unappreciated, undervalued and disrespected. More broadly, it can compromise First Peoples' standing within their workplaces, families and communities. They may face difficult questions about their personal, cultural and professional integrity.

Where cultural conflict occurs within organisations, it is often those most deeply affected who are the subjects of exclusionary or negative behaviours. They may leave the organisation if the cultural conflict is not appropriately addressed.

First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework

Framework overview

Cultural safety is everybody's responsibility. As such, the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework applies to all Commission Officials regardless of role, location or level of seniority, and across all Commission activities.

The Framework translates the Commission's commitment to cultural safety into 4 pillars guiding leadership, decision-making, workplace practices and accountability. The pillars are interconnected and mutually reinforcing, where progress in one area strengthens progress in others.

This Framework supports the Commission's role in modelling culturally safe practice and aligns the organisation's internal culture with key national priorities and commitments (see Appendix 1), including:

- the [National Agreement on Closing the Gap](#)
- the [National Anti-Racism Framework](#)
- the [rights and principles reflected in the UNDRIP](#).

Each pillar translates specific UNDRIP rights and obligations into organisational practice.

The 4 Pillars

Pillar 1

Leadership, accountability and governance

Pillar 2

Safe workplaces and anti-racism

Pillar 3

Organisational systems and cultural expertise and responsibility

Pillar 4

Learning, capability and continuous improvement

Actions under each pillar are practical, achievable and designed for implementation.

Pillar 1: Leadership, accountability and governance

Purpose

To ensure all levels of leadership – including the President, Commissioners and the Senior Leadership Team – lead, model and uphold cultural safety through strong governance and accountability. There needs to be cultural safety among the leadership and opportunities cultivated for First Peoples to hold leadership roles within the organisation.

What this means

Leaders at all levels play a critical role in creating and sustaining a culturally safe organisation. Cultural safety must be visible in governance arrangements, decision-making processes, leadership expectations and actions. It also recognises the need to cultivate cultural safety among the leadership. That includes the intentional and ongoing appointment of First Peoples to leadership and decision-making positions across the organisation.

Goals of Pillar 1:

- Leadership provides resources and prioritises cultural safety, including supporting and enabling First Peoples to enter and remain in leadership roles.
- Accountability for cultural safety is expected, clear and shared.
- Governance structures support transparent decision-making about cultural safety. First Peoples representation and decision-making authority is consistent with the right to self-determination embedded within those structures at senior and strategic levels.

Pillar 1 in practice:

- Cultural safety is embedded into leadership responsibilities, expectations and performance mechanisms.¹ This includes expectations regarding the recruitment, retention and support of First Peoples in leadership positions.
- Oversight, reporting and review mechanisms are in place.
- Leaders are supported to model culturally safe ways of working.

¹ Demonstrated capability on communicating effectively with First Peoples and demonstrated understanding of historical and contemporary issues affecting First Peoples.

Pillar 2: Safe workplaces and anti-racism



Purpose

To create workplaces that are actively anti-racist and free from all forms of discrimination and racism. Staff and stakeholders can raise concerns safely, and the organisation addresses them appropriately.

What this means

Cultural safety for First Peoples provides a critical foundation for anti-racism across the organisation. By embedding culturally safe practices for those most impacted by systemic racism, the organisation strengthens its ability to identify, prevent and respond to racism in all its forms.

Cultural safety requires active anti-racism. It cannot exist in organisations which ignore, excuse or fail to challenge racism. Anti-racism is more than just good organisational practice: it is a human rights obligation under the UNDRIP.

First Peoples often uphold enduring cultural responsibilities, reflecting deep connections to community, family, Country and culture. These responsibilities do not pause during work hours and are an integral and valued part of their identity and lived experience.

Without the right support, First Peoples staff may experience cultural conflict with their:

- colleagues
- family
- community
- responsibilities to Country.

Policies and systems should offer appropriate, effective action and support for First Peoples and the organisation to navigate and respond to conflicts when they arise. First Peoples should not bear the responsibility for educating others or leading change.

This pillar aligns with and reinforces the National Anti-Racism Framework, ensuring consistency in expectations and responses.

Goals of Pillar 2:

- Clear expectations for respectful and anti-racist conduct.
- Safe and accessible pathways to raise concerns.
- Consistent and fair responses to racism, cultural harm and inappropriate behaviour towards First Peoples.
- Attention to workplace culture, systems and structures, as well as individual conduct.

Pillar 2 in practice:

- Anti-racist standards are embedded into codes of conduct and performance expectations which explicitly address cultural safety for First Peoples.
- Staff can raise concerns without fear of harm or retaliation.
- Racism, cultural harm and inappropriate behaviour towards First Peoples are responded to in a timely and transparent way.
- Workplace culture is monitored, and patterns of behaviour are addressed.
- The organisation addresses how formal and informal power influence behaviour, decision-making and people's ability to speak up.

Pillar 3: Organisational systems and cultural expertise and responsibility

Purpose

To ensure organisational systems and workload practices recognise cultural responsibility and uphold rights to maintain, control and protect cultural knowledge. These systems should not place disproportionate expectations on First Peoples.

What this means

Cultural expertise and responsibility may include providing guidance, representation, advice or informal support. When the organisation and staff assume or repeatedly place these expectations on First Peoples without recognition, they can create additional and often unacknowledged unpaid work and colonial load.

When people in the workplace act in culturally unsafe ways, First Peoples staff and stakeholders often bear responsibility for addressing harm, rebuilding relationships, or restoring credibility. This only adds to their existing colonial load and contributes to further harm.

Cultural safety requires systems that recognise cultural expertise and responsibilities. Systems must respect professional boundaries and ensure that expectations are clearly discussed, agreed on and distributed fairly. Organisations must genuinely value and embed the cultural expertise of First Peoples staff in their policies, processes and practices. This is opposed to just seeking or 'considering' their advice without taking meaningful action.

Goals of Pillar 3:

- The organisation bears responsibility for ensuring cultural safety, rather than it being First Peoples' responsibility.
- Systems and workload expectations are fair, transparent and inclusive.
- The organisation supports First Peoples to fulfil their cultural responsibilities to community.
- Systems, processes and protocols reduce the colonial load for First Peoples staff.
- Organisational practices reflect cultural safety in both internal processes and external engagement.

Pillar 3 in practice:

- Recruitment, retention and progression policies and practices are culturally safe.
- The additional cultural responsibilities and contributions First Peoples routinely perform are recognised.
- There is clear guidance on when engagement with First Peoples is recommended or required, and how this engagement should occur. Approaches are guided by free, prior and informed consent, respectful participation in decision-making and culturally appropriate engagement practices.
- Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP) is protected.
- Cultural capability is built across the organisation so non-Indigenous staff take responsibility for their own learning and development.
- Workload and wellbeing systems support professional boundaries.

Pillar 4: Learning, capability and continuous improvement



Purpose

To build shared understanding, capability and confidence to support cultural safety across the organisation over time and to ensure this learning informs decision-making and practice.

What this means

Ongoing learning and reflection strengthen cultural safety. Capability building must go beyond awareness and support staff to apply learning in their roles, responsibilities and professional judgement.

Learning is not a one-off activity. It requires reflection, feedback and a willingness to adjust how staff carry out their work.

Goals of Pillar 4:

- Learning is role-appropriate, practical and linked to real responsibilities.
- Staff are supported to reflect on and improve their ways of working.
- Cultural safety informs decision-making and professional practice.
- Cultural safety is reviewed, sustained and strengthened over time.

Pillar 4 in practice:

- Learning and development are ongoing.
- Reflective practice and feedback mechanisms are in place.
- Staff understand the rights of First Peoples under the UNDRIP.
- Learnings are applied in policy development, engagement and service delivery.
- Progress is monitored and evaluated. Approaches are adjusted as needed.





Framework implementation approach

These values underpin how the Framework is implemented.

Engaged and open

Every staff member comes to this work with different experiences and levels of confidence regarding cultural safety. The Framework recognises this and supports staff in being engaged, asking questions and embarking on a learning journey.

Phased and prioritised

Actions will be sequenced over time to support realistic and sustainable change, rather than attempting to deliver all at once. The sequential approach also ensures that staff are equipped with foundational knowledge. They then apply that knowledge to undertake more advanced activities.

Integrated into existing work

Where possible, actions will be embedded into existing policies, governance structures, people practices and reporting processes.

Championed by all levels of leadership

Leaders play a key role in modelling expectations, supporting staff and ensuring this work is appropriately prioritised and resourced across the organisation.

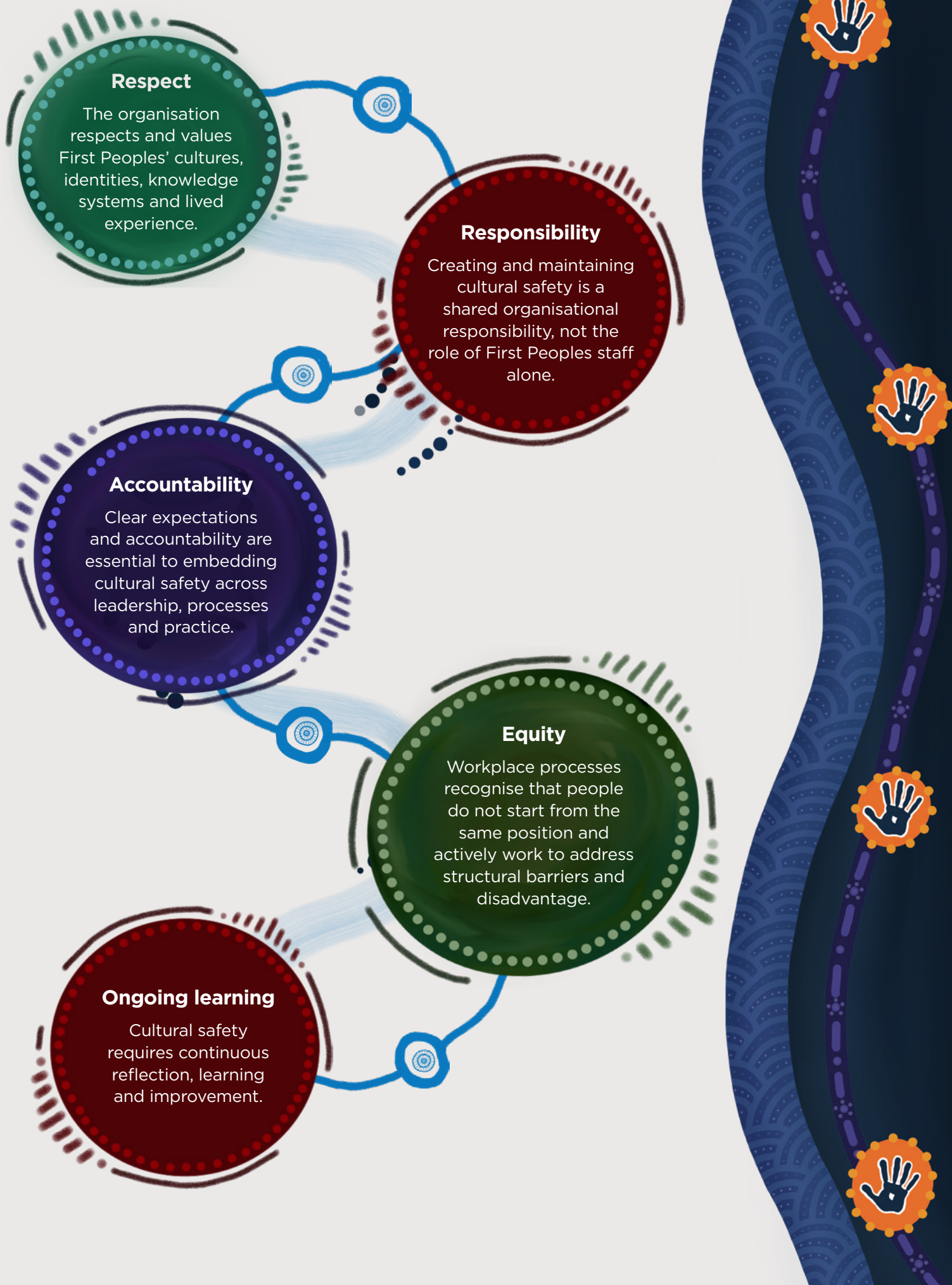
Informed by learning and feedback

Implementation will be reviewed regularly, with adjustments made based on what is working, emerging issues, and staff and stakeholder feedback (prioritising the views of First Peoples staff and stakeholders).

Focused on practical and sustained change

Priority will be given to actions that strengthen everyday ways of working and support long-term organisational change. Cultural safety cannot be achieved through isolated or one-off activities; it requires consistent effort and sustained attention over time.

Guiding principles



Appendix 1: Framework alignment

The First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework aligns with the Commission's broader workplace agenda and should not be implemented in isolation. The Framework especially aligns with 4 high-level, strategic documents designed to embed human rights, empower First Peoples and eliminate racial discrimination:

- Australian Human Rights Commission 2026–2030 Strategic Plan
- National Agreement on Closing the Gap
- National Anti-Racism Framework
- United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP)

Australian Human Rights Commission Strategic Plan 2026–2030

This Framework complements the Commission's Strategic Plan 2026–2030. Several areas of the strategic plan relate to the Framework.

The first guiding principle of the Strategic Plan is:

First Peoples Focus: We will consider the impact for First Peoples in everything we do, consider First Peoples' perspectives and work in partnership with them.

Goals:

- 1. Justice for First Peoples:** First Peoples' human rights are realised with a priority focus on rights to self-determination and equality, and progress on national truth-telling, representation, and treaty.
- 7. Build an effective human rights organisation:** The Australian Human Rights Commission is sustainable, integrated, efficient, innovative and accountable.

Under goal 7, the Framework supports outcome 10: *'Our people, resources and systems are healthy, sustainable, integrated, effective and efficient'*.

Actions under the Framework's Implementation Plan align with several strategic plan indicators. However, the following indicator crosses all actions:

10.2 Internal culture is enhanced through implementation of the Anti-racism and Cultural Safety Frameworks (PR3).

The Framework provides a cultural safety lens to apply these commitments across the organisation. It supports the Commission's values of empowerment, inclusion, integrity, collaboration and respect.

National Agreement on Closing the Gap

This Framework aligns directly with the 4 Priority Reform areas of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.



All priority reforms ensure that when First Peoples have a genuine say in the design and delivery of policies, programs and services that affect them, they achieve better life outcomes. The priority reforms also recognise the need for structural change in the way governments work with First Peoples.

Priority Reform Three focuses on transforming government organisations so that they are culturally safe, accountable and responsive to the rights and needs of First Peoples. It calls for systemic change within institutions. Organisations must:

- embed cultural safety
- address racism
- improve policies and processes
- ensure First Peoples' perspectives are represented in decision-making structures and service delivery.

As members of the Australian Public Service, it is every Commission Official's responsibility, as relevant to their work, to ensure the Commission's work aligns with the priority reform areas. Every staff member shapes organisational culture, systems and practice. Every role contributes to broader Australian Government objectives, whether their work directly engages with First Peoples communities or makes indirect contributions.

The Framework supports the priority reforms by strengthening:

Formal partnerships and shared decision-making

Through culturally safe governance, leadership and engagement practices.

Organisational capability and accountability

By embedding cultural safety into workplace processes, leadership expectations and ways of working internally and with external partners and stakeholders.

Informed decision-making

Through respect for lived experience, cultural knowledge and the responsible use of information.

Elimination of racism and institutional transformation

Through actively promoting anti-racism in the workplace.

National Anti-Racism Framework

Cultural safety and anti-racism are closely connected. The First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework aligns with the Commission's leadership in advancing and advocating for the implementation of the National Anti-Racism Framework.

The Commission's Race Discrimination and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioners have consistently called for coordinated and sustained action to address racism at structural, systemic and interpersonal levels. This cultural safety Framework strengthens the Commission's internal alignment with the principles of the National Anti-Racism Framework by:

- addressing racism as a workplace issue – not just an individual or external one – embedding organisational accountability for culturally safe practices
- supporting clear and safe pathways to identify, raise and respond to racism, cultural harm and culturally unsafe practices and processes
- providing a First Peoples community-centric approach to tackling racism
- ensuring leadership responsibility for preventing and responding to harm.

Embedding cultural safety internally reinforces the Commission's broader anti-racism work and demonstrates alignment between its external advocacy and internal practice.

United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples

The UNDRIP provides overarching guidance and minimum standards for delivering on commitments that uphold, respect and protect the rights of First Peoples.

UNDRIP right: Self-determination	
What it means in the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework	First Peoples influence decisions affecting them
Where it appears: Pillar 1	

UNDRIP right: Participation in decision-making	
What it means in the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework	Embedded representation and decision-making
Where it appears: Pillars 1 and 3	

UNDRIP right: Respect for and protection of culture	
What it means in the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP), recognising and reducing colonial load
Where it appears: Pillar 3	

UNDRIP right: Equality and non-discrimination	
What it means in the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework	Anti-racism systems and responses
Where it appears: Pillar 2	

Appendix 2: How the First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework was developed

The movement towards developing a First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework has been years in the making. In 2024, Goorlil Consulting facilitated a workshop where Commission staff discussed cultural safety. Key priorities raised in the workshop included:

- the need to platform racially marginalised voices (especially those of First Peoples staff)
- the importance of First Peoples staff contributions being valued but not assumed
- the need for targeted education.

Informed by the Goorlil Consulting Workshop Report and recommendations, the Organisational Development and Culture Governance Committee led the formation of the First Nations Cultural Safety Taskforce.

The taskforce engaged an Indigenous Business, Ngurra Advisory, to support the development of the Framework. Ngurra led a structured engagement program to build a shared understanding of current experiences, perceptions, challenges and opportunities related to First Peoples cultures and cultural safety across the Commission.

Engagement activities included:

- facilitated workshops and focus groups to explore lived experience, organisational systems and practical challenges
- an organisation-wide survey to capture broader perspectives and test emerging themes
- 2 validation sessions to share preliminary findings and confirm alignment with staff experiences.

Participation in the engagement activities was voluntary. Staff also had the option to request one-on-one sessions.

Stakeholder engagement was more limited, with one external stakeholder contributing to the process.

All feedback was de-identified and analysed thematically to identify recurring patterns, shared challenges and practical opportunities for improvement. These insights directly informed the design of the Framework, including its pillars, priorities and implementation approach.

Appendix 3: Definitions

These definitions apply for the purposes of this Framework.

Anti-racism

Anti-racism is an active process, unlike the passive stance of 'non-racism'. Anti-racism work requires consistent, committed and targeted action and ongoing efforts to identify, challenge and address racism at structural, systemic, interpersonal and individual levels.

Colonial Load

Colonial load refers to the additional cultural, emotional or representational responsibilities that may be placed on First Peoples staff. Colonial load includes expectations to educate others, represent community or provide cultural advice beyond a person's role. This is sometimes used interchangeably with the term 'cultural load'. 'Colonial load' is preferred because it more accurately reflects that the source of extra emotional and intellectual work is colonisation, rather than First Peoples' cultures.

Commission Official

An Official is a person in any of the following roles:

- Commission Statutory Officeholders
 - Commission employees – including ongoing and non-ongoing employees, the Chief Executive and other Senior Executive Service employees
 - persons seconded from other government organisations to do work for the Commission
 - any other person doing work for the Commission, including interns, volunteers, consultants, or secondees from private business.
-

Cultural awareness

Cultural awareness refers to a basic understanding that cultural differences exist and may shape people's experiences, perspectives and ways of interacting. It involves recognising that culture influences how individuals and communities see the world and engage with others.

Cultural competence

Cultural competence refers to the development of skills, knowledge and behaviours that enable individuals and organisations to work more effectively across cultural differences. It builds on cultural awareness by encouraging reflection on one's own assumptions and improving communication and understanding.

Cultural conflict

Cultural conflict refers to:

- the friction within organisations and staff
 - the tensions First Peoples may experience within their own communities, within themselves or between competing organisational and community expectations and priorities.
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Cultural harm

Actions, behaviours or practices that hurt a person's cultural identity, wellbeing or sense of safety, whether intentional or unintentional, can be forms of cultural harm.

Cultural responsibility

The cultural duties, knowledge and commitments that First Peoples may carry in both community and professional contexts. In the workplace, this can include providing cultural guidance, representation, or support. These contributions should be recognised and respected, not assumed.

Cultural safety

A culturally safe workplace is one where First Peoples feel respected and safe from racism, discrimination and cultural harm. Cultural safety is determined by the experience of First Peoples and is shaped by everyday interactions, processes and practices. Similar principles apply when defining cultural safety for other cultures and communities.

First Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the First Peoples of Australia. The term First Peoples recognises their status as the original custodians of this land and their continuing connection to Country, culture, community, law and lore.

Framework

The First Peoples Cultural Safety Framework set out in this document.

Racism

Prejudice, discrimination or disadvantage directed at a person or group because of their colour, ethnicity or national origin. This may be expressed through individual behaviour, workplace practices or broader organisational arrangements, systems and structures.

- **Interpersonal racism:** refers to racism that occurs in everyday interactions. This can be between individuals or groups and is what most people recognise as racism. It can take many forms, such as abusive language, harassment, exclusion or humiliation.
- **Institutional racism:** a form of systemic racism. It exists when racism is normalised within an organisation, institution or society. It includes the policies and practices that guide how organisations and institutions run.

Workplace

All settings in which staff undertake work on behalf of the Commission, including:

- physical workplaces
- remote or virtual environments
- work-related interactions outside the office.







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