



Transforming care through
connection and culture



Statement of Acknowledgement

Cancer Australia acknowledges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia. We pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

We celebrate the ongoing connections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country, culture, community, family and tradition and recognise these as integral to health, healing and wellbeing.

Cancer Australia acknowledges great diversity among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and the contribution of the many voices, knowledge systems and experiences that guide all efforts to create a culturally safe and responsive cancer system that is equitable to all.



Transforming care through connection and culture

Clinicians from the Australian Comprehensive Cancer Network (ACCN) recently reflected on their visit to the Northern Territory, sharing how cultural immersion and meeting with local service providers left a lasting impact on their practice and understanding of Indigenous culture.

In August 2025, Cancer Australia supported a delegation of six clinicians from the ACCN and Cancer Australia Advisory Council to visit health services across Darwin and attend Garma 2025.

The experience highlighted the importance of building strong connections and reinforced the group's commitment to advancing culturally safe cancer care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

The delegation was further supported by Cancer Australia's Advisor on Aboriginal and Torres Strait

Islander Cancer Control and the Chair, Leadership Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cancer Control.

While in Darwin, the delegation met with health services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including both cancer care providers and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations.

Clinicians gained firsthand insights into the challenges of delivering culturally safe cancer care in regional, rural and remote areas of the Northern Territory and saw the vital role that Aboriginal community-controlled services play in delivering this care. They also identified practical strategies that could be adapted to improve cancer care for Indigenous communities across Australia.

"From a practice perspective, the visit to Danila Dilba [Health Service] was particularly useful, as was hearing about their models of care coordination. We have a project implementing care coordinators in our culturally safe care grants program and this confirmed for me that this is a model we should use more broadly in the community, rather than just within the cancer centre."

The Garma Festival

Garma Festival is Australia's largest annual Indigenous cultural gathering, held each August over four days in northeast Arnhem Land, Northern Territory.

Hosted by the Yothu Yindi Foundation, the festival celebrates the rich cultural traditions of the Yolŋu people and provides a national platform for dialogue on Indigenous affairs.

Garma offers a unique opportunity for cultural immersion, featuring traditional Yolŋu dance (bunggul), song (manikay), art (miny'tji), and storytelling. The event brings together Yolŋu clans, families, and more than 2,500 visitors from across Australia.

It also serves as a national forum, uniting political, corporate, philanthropic, academic, and First Nations leaders for meaningful conversation and reflection on key issues.

Attending Garma gave delegates the flexibility to take part in activities that reflected their interests, whether through cultural experiences, educational sessions or national policy discussions.

The power of Garma lies in learning on Country, creating space for vulnerability, courage, and shared reflection, and inspiring a renewed commitment to reconciliation and cultural safety.

"The thing I was most appreciative at Garma was the time it gave us to sit and think and reflect. To hear challenging conversations without rushing off to the next meeting was invaluable. It reminded me how important it is to give people space in a safe way to see and feel the impact of colonisation."





"I now understand more deeply what connection to land means for Aboriginal people. That has changed the way I engage with Aboriginal patients, and the way my team approaches care. Our entire approach needs to be better aligned with local Aboriginal communities."

"The power I felt emerges from the benefit of isolation, remoteness, and local connection to land and story."

The Northern Territory experience highlighted the importance of collaboration and knowledge-sharing across regions. Delegates saw firsthand how building strong professional networks can help address the unique challenges faced by Indigenous patients, their families, and communities.

"Through the ACCN, we're working to keep regional networking at the forefront and to grow through hands-on learning. Garma was a powerful group experience—it gave us space to connect, share our



experiences, and learn together in a way that can shape better care for the future."

The visit reinforced the ACCN's commitment to improving cancer outcomes and ensuring that culturally safe care is accessible to all Australians, no matter where they live.

"Since returning, I've been reflecting on why the experience was so profound. I keep coming back to the power of the people and the power that has emerged from the festival over the past 25 years. If you could bottle it, you would, for all the obvious benefits to the whole country."

For more information on the Australian Cancer Plan, visit <https://www.australiancancerplan.gov.au/welcome>

Acknowledgement

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Photo: Yothu Yindi Foundation



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