

CLOSING THE REGISTRATION GAP

A CROSS-AGENCY STRATEGY TO INCREASE THE BIRTH REGISTRATION RATE FOR
ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER QUEENSLANDERS



Strategy Plan 2021 – 24



Queensland
Government

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional custodians of this country and recognise their continuing cultural and spiritual connection to land, sea and community.

We respectfully acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as two unique peoples, with their own rich and distinct cultures, resilience and strengths.

We pay our respects to Elders past and present as well as the emerging leaders.

We commit to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the spirit of reconciliation through valuing, respecting and celebrating unique cultures, histories and ongoing contributions to Australian communities.



Contents

What we will achieve	5
What we know	6
What are our goals?	8
We all have a role	9
Working with Communities.....	10
Key touch points with government services	12
How we will get it done.....	13
How does this strategy support other reforms?.....	14
How will we know we have got there?	15

Brooke Sutton (b. 2004)

Birthing Tree - Artii Nganthi, 2020

Brooke Sutton is a contemporary Aboriginal artist and a proud Kalkadoon woman from the emu foot province, around the Mount Isa area in North West Queensland. Brooke is the younger sister of renowned artist Chern'ee Sutton.

In 2019, Brooke was selected from among 30 submissions by Indigenous Australian artists to produce a unique, emblematic piece of art, commissioned by the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages for the Closing the Registration Gap Strategy.

Brooke was fifteen years old when she created this beautiful artwork, which now takes pride of place in the foyer at the Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages.

Artist's description

This is my interpretation of "Artii Nganthi" which means in the Kalkadoon language "Birthing Tree".

In this painting the birthing tree is in centre of the artwork as it is the main focus of the piece. The leaves of the tree represent the generations that have come before us and the roots of the tree is a strong foundation which helps to build and grow a better future for our kids, because we count and our kids count.

The dots in the background represent the generations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been registered at birth, making it easier to complete tasks which are so much harder without a birth certificate such as enrolling in school, applying for a tax file number to obtain a job or applying for a licence or passport, all of which need a birth certificate, which is everybody's business. The handprints represent family and the strong connection and bond between the parents and their children, with the footprints representing their journey through life from birth to adulthood when they are ready to start a family of their own. The large aqua circles around the tree and the white dotted lines connecting the painting together are the spirit trails which represents everyone working together and moving forward as well as our connection to one another.

The pink dotted circles connected by the pink lines represent the children's growth, which is where the children's story starts under the sun and moon. The brown and pink mountains and the blue and green waves around the outside of the piece represents Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to the land, sea and to country.

You can explore more of Brooke's work via Chern'ee Sutton's website: <https://www.cherneesutton.com.au/collections/brooke-sutton-paintings> and on Facebook at: <https://www.facebook.com/BrookeSuttonArt/>

What we will achieve



Close the registration gap

- » Increase rates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth registrations to be comparable to non-Indigenous Queenslanders.
- » By **2024, 80 per cent** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's births will be **registered within 60 days** of birth.
- » By **2024, 90 per cent** of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's births will be **registered within 1 year** of birth.

Deliver better services

- » Create culturally safe services, removing operational barriers to birth registrations and the systemic issues that create those barriers.
- » Build awareness and understanding of the differences between birth registration and accessing birth certificates.
- » Improve the quality of data when collecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth registrations.



What we know

The Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) has made several changes to its service delivery in recent years to make it easier for people to register their baby's birth, including introducing online birth registration services:

- » In 2018, a total of 4,054 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander children were born in Queensland, and 3,262 of those children were registered. 71 per cent (2,317) of these birth registrations were completed online and 28 per cent (945) were registered using paper forms.
- » In 2018, 89 per cent of non-Indigenous births were registered within the first 60 days, and 96 per cent within the first year of the child's birth. However, there was a much lower rate of birth registration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, with only 58 per cent registered in 60 days, and 77 per cent being registered within the first year.
- » In 2019, 89.7 per cent of non-Indigenous births were registered within 60 days of the child's birth, but only 62.1 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were registered within the same period.

In June 2018, the Queensland Ombudsman published *The Indigenous birth registration report: An Investigation into the under-registration of Indigenous births in Queensland (June 2018)*.

The report made nine recommendations to address the disparity between birth registration rates, which include developing a comprehensive, cross-agency strategy to increase the rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander birth registrations.

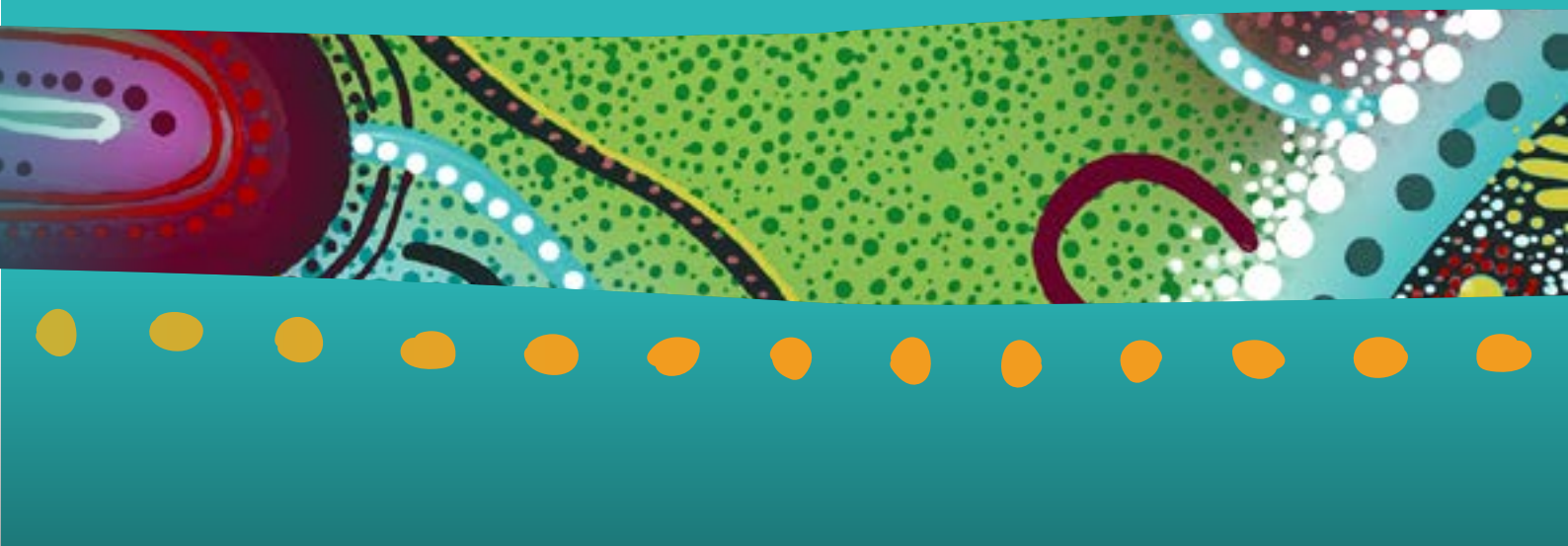
The Department of Justice and Attorney-General agreed to implement all recommendations.

The Ombudsman identified several related factors that may contribute to lower registration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, including:

- » limited access to online and paper registration services in regional or remote communities
- » fees and penalties, financial obstacles, and conflating registration with certification processes
- » language barriers and a lack of culturally appropriate services
- » limited awareness of the importance of registration for children, and inconsistent information about registration.

In response to the recommendations in the Ombudsman's report the Queensland Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages (RBDM) has led the development of a three-year cross-agency Strategy and Action Plan (2021-2024). This strategy will aim to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders' access to the birth registration framework and increase the birth registration rate.

An effective under-registration strategy must focus on identifying and reducing the operational barriers to registration created by systemic issues with service delivery. It is the government, not the public or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, who is responsible for addressing these barriers and ensuring that every child born in Queensland is registered.



Impact on the individual

A child's birth registration provides the first official recognition of an individual and establishes their legal identity, and their birth certificate (available only after registration) provides proof of that identity.

A birth certificate helps a person access a range of essential services and participate in the community.

A birth certificate is a critical piece of personal identification and without it a person may be unable to establish their identity rendering them "legally invisible", and this can worsen discriminatory barriers in public life that already impact many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Impact on the community

Under-registration and incomplete birth data make it difficult for state and local governments to provide adequate planning, funding and monitoring of health and community services in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, many of which may already face significant social, community health and economic disadvantages.

Accurate birth registration information has community value for statistical, research and planning purposes, and information collected as part of the birth registration process is regarded as essential information for key health and demographic statistics, used for:

- » determining birth rates and national population projections
- » community planning and determining requirements for key services such as education
- » informing government health policies, including maternal health.




What are our goals?




Close the registration gap

The overarching goal of this strategy is to ensure that all Queensland children have their births registered. Central to this goal is increasing the rate of registrations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children.




Support the human rights of children

The Government is committed to ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are counted and have access to their birth certificate, to reduce barriers to accessing the essential services and community activities that give them the best start in life. Birth registration is a human right enshrined in Queensland's *Human Rights Act 2019*. Section 26(3) of the Act states that: *“Every person born in Queensland has the right to a name and to be registered.”*



Ensure recognition and equitable participation

A foundational objective of this strategy is to build capacity across government to recognise the needs of all Queenslanders, with a specific focus on the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service users. Key to achieving this is understanding barriers to access and providing equitable and culturally safe service options.





We all have a role

Cross-agency collaboration

Since early 2019, RBDM has worked in partnership with agencies across government to develop and implement a culturally appropriate strategy and action plan to increase the birth registration rates for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. This work will require cross-agency collaboration and a commitment to building cultural safety within government agencies, staff and service providers.

The following departments, agencies and organisations were responsible for developing the cross-agency strategy:

- » Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, Department of Justice and Attorney-General.
- » Community Justice Services, Department of Justice and Attorney-General.
- » Department of Seniors, Disability Services and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships.
- » Department of the Premier and Cabinet.
- » Department of Transport and Main Roads.
- » Department of Education.
- » Department of Communities, Housing and Digital Economy.
- » Queensland Corrective Services.
- » Queensland Government Statistician's Office, Queensland Treasury.
- » Department of Children, Youth Justice and Multicultural Affairs.
- » Australian Bureau of Statistics.
- » Queensland Health.



Working with Communities

To address the under-registration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we will engage with communities, regional towns and urban centres to understand their needs and recognise how services could be more inclusive and effective.

Seeking opportunities to engage, collaborate and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is at the forefront of the Under-Registration Strategy.

Valuing community perspectives

Community engagement is fundamental to achieving the aims of the strategy. Community members have been able to contribute meaningfully in developing initiatives to encourage greater birth registration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. RBDM conducted focus groups and community visits to gain insights into the needs, challenges and opportunities facing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders. Some of the communities visited include Mount Isa, Cairns, Logan, and the Torres Strait. The perspectives gathered during these visits have been essential in the development of this Strategy.

Seeking opportunities to engage, collaborate and learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is a cornerstone of the Under-Registration Strategy.

Working with Communities



Visiting communities

RBDM's Community Engagement Officer visits communities to deliver culturally appropriate registration services and gather feedback about barriers to access and engagement.

Communities that have been visited since 2018 include:

- » Kowanyama
- » Aurukun
- » Cairns
- » Doomadgee
- » Hope Vale
- » Yarrabah
- » Palm Island
- » Innisfail
- » Woorabinda
- » Cherbourg
- » Inala
- » Logan
- » Toowoomba

Listening to communities

“There are too many hurdles that all stack up. It gets too much, so we don't do it.”

“It's tedious... not many new mums want to fill out the paperwork... don't like going to Centrelink let alone BDM.”

“Navigating the system and obtaining birth certificates was one of the hardest things I've ever had to do.”

Key touch points with government services



Pregnancy

- » Care for mum's during pregnancy
- » Visits with midwives



Birth

- » Hospital visits for birth
- » Registering with Centrelink
- » Registering with Medicare



Postnatal Care

- » Medical check-ups for bub
- » Immunisations in first six months



5 Years

- » Starting school
- » Signing up for sport



14-16 Years

- » *Acquiring driver licence*
- » *Registering for Tax File Number*

How we will get it done



Communication

- » Building birth registration services that are culturally safe and actively delivered to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- » Addressing language barriers and issues of trust and confidence that prevent registration.

Access

- » Addressing geographical barriers to accessing birth registration services.
- » Addressing financial barriers to accessing birth registration services and a birth certificate.
- » Ensuring that the move towards online services does not create technological barriers to accessing services.

Awareness

- » Building awareness of the process and benefits of birth registration and the distinctions between registration and certification.
- » Building cultural safety among government employees and service providers by providing education on the importance of registration and the systemic problems surrounding under-registration.

Collaboration

- » Agencies collaborating and engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- » Establishing and sustaining connections with communities to identify ways to take an active role in birth registration services.
- » Adding value to participation by linking birth registration to other services.

How does this strategy support other reforms?

In his report, the Ombudsman noted that closing the registration gap will contribute to achieving the targets and priorities of other government strategies focused on improving outcomes for Indigenous people.

Closing the Gap is a nation-wide framework with key targets relating to improving health and education outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. Registration and birth certification are both essential to meeting these goals.

Our Future State – Advancing Queensland's Priorities is a Queensland government strategy aiming to address challenges that affect all Queenslanders. Birth registration and access to a birth certificate is key to meeting one of the essential goals of Giving All Our Children A Great Start.

Supporting Families, changing futures is a Queensland government strategy aiming to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents establish a cultural identity and a sense of belonging for their children. The right to birth registration is a precursor for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children to ensure they have full access to their human rights to a cultural identity as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.

Local Thriving Communities is a Queensland government strategy that aims to significantly change and improve the way government works with communities by giving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a greater voice in shaping policies and building on community strengths.

Our Way: A generational strategy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families is a Queensland government strategy aimed at building support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families, and establishing a legal identity plays a big role in this approach. Birth registration and access to a birth certificate is essential to creating a legal identity which enables full participation in society.

Moving Ahead is a Queensland government strategy that aims to dissolve barriers that prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders from fully participating in the economy, accessing housing, and obtaining a driver licence. Increasing birth registrations and improving access to birth certificates will help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders access the documentation necessary to establish economic independence, financial autonomy, and housing.

UNDER-REGISTRATION STRATEGY

Closing the Gap

Our Future State

Supporting Families Changing Futures

Local Thriving Communities

Our way

Moving Ahead



How will we know we have got there?

Evaluation is an essential part of our strategy; it's how we know we have made progress and positive change. We evaluate using three key methods: **Data Analysis**, **Reporting** and **Discussion**.



Data Analysis

Ongoing analysis of data shared across agencies to monitor and measure changes in rates of registration.



Reporting

Communicating with the public and other government agencies through reporting on actions to ensure ongoing commitment and highlight achievements and successes of the strategy.



Discussion

Ongoing engagements with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to discuss the effects of the strategy and ways to keep improving.

