

A Response to the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery National Apology at
CATSINaM National Conference, Friday 19th August 2022
Gadigal Country, Hyatt Regent, Sydney.

Dr Lynore K. Geia on behalf of CATSINaM

Thank you to Prof Roianne West in affording me the privilege to represent CATSINaM in receiving and responding to the Apology offered by Prof Karen Strickland of Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery in Australia.

Firstly, as per protocol and indeed the 'proper way' before formally talking into and over country I acknowledge I am not from Gadigal country, but I am Lynore Geia from Bwgcolman country and I bring peace and stand in respect. I was taught by my father to stand and speak into the spirit of country that we are walking through.

We are all here in this physical space, but we also have a great spiritual witness looking at us and listening to our words today.

Therefore, I acknowledge you the Gadigal nation, and the peoples of the Eora nation, I speak peace, health, healing and prosperity over you, your people, and your country. I acknowledge the burdens you have carried since 1788 and still do carry, and I acknowledge your strength, survival, your sophistication of knowledge and skills of maintaining connection to your country and kinships as you walk in western constructs of society.

You were here first, and you will always be here, Always was Always will be !

I also acknowledge CATSINaM Elders, the Board and Executive Management, and CATSINaM members. I acknowledge the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery Australia and distinguished guests and other peak nursing, midwifery, and health care organisations here today. I also acknowledge my Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island brothers and sisters and what you carry in your heart for your people.

I am a Bwgcolman from Palm Island, Queensland, a registered nurse, and midwife of over 40 years, a mother, grandmother, and community woman. I work at James Cook University in Townsville and hold the position of Academic Lead of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in the College of Health Care Sciences. I am one of the CATSINaM Eldership members and member of the Muliyan Consortium.

Let me paint a picture of context for you to make way for my words. Hear the sound of country, the sound of a people.

It is no coincidence that we are here at this place where so much has transpired spiritually, cognitively, and physically over thousands of years for the Eora nation, and just over 200 years ago for descendants of Britain's First Fleet who settled in Australia.

History's voice echoes today in this place on Gadigal country where the past meets the present. Just 10 minutes away from here is Barangaroo, and further minutes' walk is Circular Quay where the First Fleet of 11 ships, commanded by Captain Arthur Phillip, set up a convict settlement at Sydney Cove in 1788.

This was the beginning of contact, clashes, convergence, and the colonisation of country. It was the beginning of profound change for Australia's First Peoples.

Interestingly, this is, also the place where the first 5 Nightingale trained nurses to the colony disembarked in 1838 – five Irish Sisters of Charity arrived in Sydney Cove.

Generations later, and more significantly for us at this conference, the place of Gadigal country is where CATSIN was born at the meeting of First Nations Nurses in 1997 in a street named Australia Street – how wonderfully paradoxical is this.

All these events leads to this moment in time where we gather again to mark and celebrate our First Nations Nursing and Midwifery history and profession, at this time we come together as CATSINaM inclusive of our First Nations midwifery colleagues.

We also gather here together with non-Indigenous nursing and midwifery allies, colleagues, and friends to also acknowledge an auspicious event that happened this morning, the Apology from the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery.

When an apology is offered it is always at a point of reflecting on the reasons and actions of why it is necessary – going back to the hurt to make a way for healing.

It is right and fitting that we are at the place of contact where the hurt from colonisation and settlement started, it is right and fitting this is the birthplace of CATSINaM.

We have heard many apologies from various government bodies to Australia's First People's; even now the dialogue of the Voice to Parliament is being spoken around the nation, the Victorian Govt has signed off to Treaty, the Queensland Government is talking of a bill to parliament for truth telling, and religious institutions are turning their attention to supporting justice and equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities.

We are hearing a new voice in our nation. Can you hear a different sound arising, can you sense the change in the atmosphere?

When long established institutions start to talk of change and make moves to action change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is a time to be awake and watchful ... there will

be tensions and transformations from these changes and many questions of how it fits with our lives and its influence on our professions.

Our Old People were watchers for change in the spiritual world and the natural world, it was the way of survival, to watch for the right season for food gathering, when to hunt, when to move camp to shelter to better meet the needs of the people and when to settle down on country, watching to mark the quickening of a pregnancy, the move of the new generation still unborn, forming and being informed by the epigenetic of culture and knowledge and living life.

So too in this place, there is a quickening, there is a movement of change, ready to be birthed in Australian Nursing and Midwifery.

Today we have heard another apology, some of you may be asking what or how is this apology different from the others where we've not seen significant outcomes.

I want to offer some points that marks this apology from that of others.

- This apology is from nursing and midwifery, a profession of caring where justice and equity has always been a central tenet of the professions.
- Taking a general view of the Apology, an apology is always based on the premise that there is a relationship, and we do have a relationship.
- An apology normally comes from the inner conviction of a moral sense of righting a wrong, of repairing a breach in a relationship that has been broken though harm.
- This apology recognises the importance of the relationship between CDNM and CATSINaM and demonstrates our ongoing value of relationship. The importance of connection and strengthening the relationship between CDNM and CATSINaM is crucial if we are to change the status quo so that the future of nursing and midwifery is freed from the constraints of oppressive practices in education, research, and clinical practice.
- Nursing and midwifery is not a cumbersome body of politics and policies like governments are (although sometimes it can look and feel that way).
- Nursing and midwifery frameworks are more functional, less complicated, and more efficient in enacting reforms where it is needed. Our nursing and midwifery history attest to the many effective changes from the development of theory to education, research and better nursing and midwifery care practice.

We are change makers, one professional body inclusive of different cultures and world views, knowledge, and skills, working to a unified code of practice and standards of care.

This apology makes way for building a new season in our relationship, where we agree and begin the work of closing old doors of outdated or harmful behaviour and practices, and together through partnership and collaboration new doors are opened to develop better practice through higher levels of operations of legislative changes.

We take the eagles view we can feel the wind of change and start to soar, a turning of the tide reflective of our cries for justice and equity being heard.

Justice in recognising the injustices that has happened and the intent or the intentionality of making those things that were done wrong to be made right

This apology opens the door for us to make a stand, positioning ourselves and aligning ourselves with the principles of justice and equity and making a commitment that those things that have been harmful in a relationship will be watched over, and processes are put in place so that those harmful practices become so diminished or eliminated altogether that they no longer have the power to do harm. And the toxicity no longer hold power over us.

Today, the Apology from the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery in Australia is welcomed and has been long awaited.

- We know about the roles that nurses and midwives undertook in the punitive government policies that saw the taking of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families and communities, in establishing and maintaining racial segregation within hospital and health services, and through oppressive ‘collegial behaviours’ towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nursing and midwifery students, intentionally hindering, and in some cases preventing students from becoming nurses and midwives, and fulfilling their desire to help our own people.
- This apology is based on the premise that we have a professional relationship, we all belong to the nursing and midwifery professions, and any form of discriminatory practice breaches that relationship and causes harm.
- This apology must go beyond acknowledging the harmful legacy that the nursing and midwifery professions have inherited to committing to do better through purposeful action to prevent such harms from being repeated in today nursing and midwifery.
- This apology must be demonstrated in purposeful action which includes working together in real partnership for reform, recognising the unique knowledge and skills that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island nurses and midwives bring to the professions in developing reforms for better education, research, and clinical practice outcomes.
- This apology means we formally commit to each other to repair the professional breach and to also maintain a formal process of accountability to each other for the work we need to do and will do.

Today I believe the spiritual and the natural worlds converge, and a new door opens and old doors close. In our context, this point of time is where we take a stand through responding to the CDNM apology to move from the past way of doing nursing and midwifery in relation to First Nations nursing and midwifery context to breaking out into a new space to work in a new way together.

We are in seasons change, and there will be a transition time, and transitions are always uncomfortable and painful – but we are birthing something new here in this place, and the pain is all worth the while at the arrival of the baby and the celebration of the birth.

On behalf of CATSINaM – I Thank you Professor Strickland for your gracious and courageous leadership in offering what has been a long awaited words of life to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nurses and midwives and to our people.

I echo your words to CATSINaM an accept your commitment

- As a National peak body Council, you will work with and through your members to collaborate with CATSINaM and with the other nursing and midwifery peak bodies as well as regulatory organisations such as ANMAC and NMBA, to take a stand towards reconciling the harms done.
- To build a strong foundation towards culturally and clinically safe nursing and midwifery practice.
- To uphold and action CATSINaM’s vision that “Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Nurses and Midwives play a pivotal and respected role in achieving health equity and equality across the Australian health system for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities.”
- CDNM commit to forming genuine partnership with CATSINaM to develop the new way forward to providing safe nursing and midwifery practice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This is a seminal day in time, never before have words spoken by nursing and midwifery leadership has happened, thank you and the members of the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery for your leadership

On the land of the Gadigal people of the Eora nation, I call to the past to those unseen here today and say be at peace, we carry you in our hearts for healing of the nation; and to us here present today I make a call to action again to unite as colleagues and leaders in our own rights in our professions to walk into the new season of change and work together to reform Nursing



Celebrating
25TH ANNIVERSARY GALA DINNER
GADIGAL COUNTRY, HYATT REGENCY, SYDNEY - SATURDAY 20TH AUGUST



and Midwifery Australia to realise the hopes and dreams of the founding members of CATSINaM and indeed the hopes and dreams of our people for justice and equity.

Professor Strickland on behalf of CATSINaM I accept your apology from the Council of Deans of Nursing and Midwifery Australia.

I ask you to join Professor Roianne West with me on the podium to receive a gift to mark this day and the many days ahead of us.

