



WITNESS STATEMENT OF TANYA HOSCH

I, Tanya Hosch, AFL General Manager of Inclusion and Social Policy, of AFL House, 140 Harbour Esplanade, Docklands Victoria, say as follows:

Background

- 1 My full name is Tanya Louise Hosch.
- I am the General Manager of Inclusion and Social Policy at the AFL and also a member of the AFL Executive. I was appointed to this role in 2016 and was the first Indigenous person and second woman appointed to the AFL Executive.
- 3 I am a Torres Strait Islander.
- 4 I am also:
 - (a) a member of Chief Executive Women, the NAB Indigenous Advisory Group and the boards of Circus Oz and the Australian Film Television and Radio School;
 and
 - (b) a Goodwill Ambassador for the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at the United Nations Association of Australia.
- I previously sat on the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council and have a background in governance in the community health and hospital sectors. I was also the Joint Campaign Director of the Recognise Campaign established by Reconciliation Australia and the Chair of Price Waterhouse Coopers Indigenous Consulting.
- 6 Attached and marked 'TH-1' is a copy of my Curriculum Vitae.
- As my job title suggests, my role is to lead the AFL's inclusion and social policy agenda. This includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues and also matters of multiculturalism, gender, sexuality, transgender identity and disability. I am giving evidence to the Royal Commission on behalf of the AFL and am authorised to do so.
- 8 My interest in mental health is based not only on my current role at the AFL, but also my experience in the community health sector and my own lived experience of mental health. I am happy to disclose that about 15 years ago I was diagnosed with depression and continue to receive treatment for it.

Please note that the information presented in this witness statement responds to matters requested by the Royal Commission.

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Mental health in the AFL industry

- There are numerous layers of pressure that impact the mental health of elite players and coaches. These exist across many professional sporting codes and the AFL is not immune.
- Enormous pressure is placed on elite players to perform and win. This pressure can come from a player's club. If a club spends a number of years at the bottom of the ladder there is an inevitable decline in membership, fan attendance, ticket sales and income from sponsors. There is often a corresponding decline in the club's ability to attract great new talent, so it might be, as the commentators say, "in the wilderness" for a period of seven or eight years. You can see how disheartening it must be for players whose clubs are in this position. It is very difficult to maintain the confidence required to win when your club hasn't won a game for some time.
- We also know that players at successful clubs feel similar pressure to perform, both in respect of how their club is faring and how they are playing personally.
- The pressures that I have referred to are understood within the AFL industry because of research undertaken internally a 2017 survey by the AFL Players' Association found that mental health was the single most significant concern of current AFL players.
- Pressure to perform is compounded by the significant public scrutiny applied to coaches and players. The sports media is ruthless in the way that it critiques the performance of clubs, coaches and players. I have read many articles that ask whether coaches and players are "worth" their salaries based on their own and their club's performance. This type of public commentary can obviously have a negative impact on their mental health.
- Public scrutiny of players has only increased due the expectation that players must have a public social media presence. This has become a de facto requirement by fans, clubs and sponsors. This has certainly led to many positives for clubs and individual players, but it has unfortunately also been accompanied by widespread trolling of players. This trolling is more often than not directed at Aboriginal players, players of colour and Muslim players who are attacked in large numbers because of their faith and/or race, and in derogatory terms. In particular, Bachar Houli, a very well-known Muslim player has been subject to a significant amount of abuse online. This can clearly have an impact on the mental health and wellbeing of these players, however it is very difficult for the AFL to take steps to reduce trolling, especially when the source of the abuse is often fake social media profiles. At the end of the day, the AFL is a sporting code with a limited ability to control how people act online.

- If an elite player or coach is experiencing poor mental health, their club doctor or club psychologist can screen and facilitate access to a mental health professional. Each club also has one or two Personal Development Managers (PDMs) whose job it is to look after the general welfare of the players. The PDMs can link players to services or support that they think might assist them. This isn't limited to mental health services; they might also link players with education providers or services that prepare them for a life after football. The PDMs are another outlet that a player might turn to if they have any concerns about their mental health. The Players Association and the AFL engage a network of private psychologists and psychiatrists and have a preferred provider for tertiary mental healthcare. The Players Association also provide a number of education services targeted at the mental health and wellbeing of players, their partners and families as well as club staff. The AFL also has a comprehensive Employee Assistance Provider for all AFL and AFL Club staff nationally that is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.
- The nature and extent of the challenge posed to the industry by poor mental health has changed in recent years. When I commenced my role in 2016, the mental health of the AFL community was not a top-of-mind issue. This has definitely changed. Ever since mental health was identified by players as their primary concern in the 2017 survey, the entire industry has increased its focus on mental health and wellbeing. Since then, the AFL has taken the following major steps:
 - establishing the Industry Governance Committee in 2018, which has a mandate to examine the management of mental health across the industry;
 - (a) commissioning a Mental Health Industry Review, to ascertain how the AFL industry could best approach the mental health of players, staff, and umpires by developing a best-practice framework and assessing the industry's current status and priority focus areas for action. The research involved 253 participants across a sample drawn from 6 AFL clubs and staff from the AFL, the Players Association, the AFL Coaches Association and the AFL Umpires Association. A qualitative interview methodology was used to obtain diverse views from different industry stakeholders. The results of the review showed that the industry had high levels of engagement and motivation to improve mental health outcomes, but didn't consistently have the governance, policies, programs, resources, and capability in place to do so effectively; and
 - (b) appointing in 2019 of clinical psychologist Dr Kate Hall as the League's Head of Mental Health and Wellbeing and Dr Ranjit Menon as its chief psychiatrist.
- A key focus of Dr Kate Hall has been the implementation of an AFL-wide approach to mental health policies, processes and activities within the AFL, its state entities and the wider industry. An important component of the policy reform has been the establishment

of an Industry Clinical Governance Framework, to ensure the industry provides safe and effective mental health care. This is important, as pressure to succeed has sometimes meant that clubs have relied on inappropriate or unqualified services to try and gain an edge in improving the mental health and resilience of their playing group. Reliance on these services has caused damage to players in the past. With Kate's leadership, the AFL is now working to assess mental health programs used in the football environment, establish credentials for certain providers and inform clubs on evidence-based professional service standards for clubs. The goal is to ensure that it won't be as easy for clubs to let anyone through the door who is not qualified to provide the service they say they can provide.

Dr Hall is driving the implementation of the AFL industry mental health strategy with the support of a steering committee chaired by Professor Helen Milroy. The steering committee includes representatives from the Players Association, AFL and AFLW past and current players, our GM of Football Steve Hocking, GM of People Sarah Fair, Club President Peggy O'Neil, the AFL's Chief Psychiatrist, a senior coach Luke Beveridge, umpires, and the President of the AFL Doctors Association.

Building player resilience

- Building resilience in players is clearly very important for clubs. Players need to be resilient to perform at the highest level in front of millions of spectators. The AFL is working to build resilience in players in a number of ways. The AFL assisted by the focus of Dr Kate Hall has a comprehensive mental health strategy that addresses mental health and wellbeing across the continuum of mental health and across people's lifespans. Examples of initiatives aimed at building resilience include:
 - (a) a youth mental health partnership with headspace to establish a prevention curriculum for mental health and wellbeing for all 16 to 18 year old players in AFL Talent pathways;
 - (b) a rapid evidence guide of mental health programs in sporting clubs to determine what works for mental health in team sports, commissioned by the AFL from Orygen Youth Health Foundation;
 - (c) an industry Phd study with Deakin University examining risk and protective factors for mental health and wellbeing; and
 - (d) developing a mental health and wellbeing component in accreditation process for community coaches.

The leadership role of the AFL in relation to mental health

- The AFL has a huge footprint not only in Victoria, but the entire country. About one in every 24 Australians is a paid-up member of an AFL club we have a huge reach and an ability to promote community awareness of a wide range of issues. As such a major focal point for Australians, we are conscious that we have a leadership role in relation to mental health in the community.
- The industry has already taken significant steps to promote mental health issues in the community. Since 2018, AFL Victoria has partnered with Beyond Blue to host the Beyond Blue Round, which aims to educate the football community on mental health and wellbeing. The Hawthorn Football Club has been supporting Beyond Blue since 2016 and in late 2019, the AFL announced a major charity partnership with Lifeline Australia. Many clubs have mental health and wellbeing partnerships and the AFL has formal mental health partnerships with Epworth HealthCare; headspace, and Lifeline.
- We try to ensure that we are sending the right message at the community football level right through to the elite system. This includes our talent development programs, which target Indigenous and Muslim communities.
- I think that our leadership role is going to grow, especially as there is an increasing number of players (mostly past players) who are outspoken about mental health issues and want to work with the AFL and clubs. Having these players speak authentically about their own mental health experiences is the most effective way of educating the community. At the same time, we need to ensure that our players and past players are properly supported in talking about their mental health issues publicly.
- It is important that the AFL has its own house in order before seeking to lead in the mental health space. This is part of the reason why the AFL is implementing the program driven by Dr Kate Hall we need to be beyond reproach, as any criticism of us could easily be detrimental to the cause. This is as true for mental health as it is for other social issues, like racism. When I began to develop an anti-racism campaign targeting crowd behaviour, I realised that there were still things that the AFL wasn't doing as well as it could.

Mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander players

Many clubs would say that because they have had Aboriginal players for a long time, they are well equipped to offer pastoral care to Aboriginal men. Around 10-11% of elite players in the men's game are Indigenous and there is only one club that doesn't have any Indigenous players. Each club also has an Indigenous staff member allocation of at least one person. Typically people in these roles will seek to improve cultural

competency within the club and ensure that the club maintains a relationship the local Aboriginal community. However, there is still a lot of work to be done.

- When I first started at the AFL, I was surprised at how many Aboriginal players (or their partners) would call me to tell me that they were struggling in the playing environment. This indicates to me that a number of elite players, despite the supports that exist in their clubs, are reluctant to seek help. I continue to be approached by players, as well as Aboriginal club staff who have similar concerns.
- I think this happens because Aboriginal men aren't traditionally good at seeking help, but also because these men are concerned that what they say to a club doctor or psychologist might get back to the coach and negatively impact their playing career. I suspect that this reluctance to seek help in the club environment may also be common in our wider playing cohort.
- In order to address this issue, I have been working with Dr Hall to involve the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA) as a service provider in the new AFL-wide approach to mental health services. AIPA have also generously consulted with the AFL to incorporate their culturally appropriate model of social and emotional wellbeing in our mental health strategy. However, this isn't the only solution. Because our community is so small, concerns about confidentiality can prevent Aboriginal players from seeking help from another Blackfella. We all feel like we are related and connected in some way and this can be a barrier to seeking help.
- For these reasons the industry also needs to increase the cultural competency of club staff and get better at communicating with our Indigenous playing cohort in a culturally adept manner.
- A recent example of this is how clubs have informed players about how they can protect themselves against COVID-19. I received feedback from Aboriginal players and staff that material initially being distributed by clubs wasn't being understood by some Aboriginal players. I helped develop a resource for Indigenous players based on material published by the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation.
- Many of our Indigenous players are unwilling to ask questions in front of their teammates, coaches and club staff. These players might later ask their senior Indigenous teammates to clarify what was said, for example, by their coach to the whole team. I often hear from these senior players that they prefer not to answer these questions as they don't want to be responsible for giving the wrong information. This is something that clubs need to deliberately cater for.

- The AFL is also currently working to increase the number of Indigenous coaches in the elite system. There are approximately 180 coaches in the elite system at the moment (each club will have one senior coach and eight or nine assistant coaches) but only four of those coaches are Aboriginal. Increasing this number would greatly assist the Aboriginal playing cohort.
- There are two other key areas for the industry to improve the support it gives its Indigenous players. The first is how we support female Indigenous players. About 5% of elite AFLW players are Indigenous. We know that clubs will need to implement gender-specific services for these players as there are large differences in the pastoral-care requirements of Aboriginal men and women.
- We also need to better support Aboriginal past players. When I started in my role, the lack of Indigenous past players working in football, the media and the Players Association became apparent. I learnt that many Indigenous players are aggrieved about the way in which they left the AFL system and were not provided with ongoing support by their clubs. Of all the services offered to past players by the Players Association, they are most likely to access the financial hardship fund. There is a significant disconnect between Indigenous players' success in the game and where they land afterwards. This needs to be addressed.
- The recent establishment of an independent Indigenous Players Alliance has been an important step towards improving the cultural safety of the industry. This is a group of prominent past players who are seeking to bring an Aboriginal voice into the industry that can speak for itself. As long as the Alliance remains independent of the AFL and the Players Association, it can ask the hard questions of Gill McLachlan or Paul Marsh (the CEOs of the League and the Players Association) without the fear of a backlash from clubs and fans. The Alliance could be a real game changer for the reason that it does not have much to lose because it is a group of past rather than current players.

"Balance" in the sport

Rather than using the word "diversity", I prefer to talk about balance. The concept of diversity has been overused; and is an odd way to talk about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people anyway. We were here first and this is our home. It's not us that's the diverse lot; it's the people that are here from somewhere else. I feel the same around gender equality issues. There's nothing diverse about having a vagina; half the world has one. So why is that considered diversity? Rather than talking about diversity, we need to talk about equality and fairness and ensure that our game balances up with the society that we are part of.

- Trying to ensure that our game reflects the Australian population is important for growth and for commercial reasons. It's also good for football and for the development of talent. The AFL has a number of talent programs targeting different populations, such as the Footy Means Business program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and the Bachar Houli Academy for young Muslim men.
- When it comes to equal representation and opportunities for participation, the AFL does a lot of good work. I was the first Indigenous person appointed to the AFL Executive in August 2016 and our first Aboriginal Commissioner was appointed in March 2019. It is not clear to me to what extent this work has penetrated the system as a whole. We don't currently have an Aboriginal captain of a club. We have had; but very rarely. There are no Aboriginal club CEOs. There are no Aboriginal head coaches. I'm doubtful that we'll ever see an Aboriginal CEO of the AFL probably not in my lifetime anyway.

Accountability and representation

- When I first started at the AFL, we had access to funds to assist every club put a Reconciliation Action Plan in place. That has now happened, and the AFL is approaching the end of our process for our second Reconciliation Action Plan. Each of these plans is a vehicle to help clubs focus their minds on the contributions they are making to reconciliation.
- Some clubs which have traditionally had strong Aboriginal leaders, like the Sydney Swans with players like Adam Goodes and Michael O'Loughlin, have created strong accountabilities for themselves that go beyond their Reconciliation Action Plans.
- A continued focus for me has been improving the industry's relationship with First Peoples, and particularly improving the our share of Indigenous staff. This includes having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in decision making roles. I didn't appreciate it enough at the time, but my appointment to the AFL Executive was a big deal. I'm not sure that I would have lasted in my role if I had not been a part of the Executive team. I think I would have found it too difficult.
- There are a whole range of conversations that will be had if there's an Aboriginal person at the table as opposed to if there isn't. It makes a fundamental difference an organisation might have all sorts of programs in place, but the rubber only hits the road when you see a Blackfella on the board. Representation at the board level is absolutely critical to accountability when embedding the right approach across the organisation.
- Indigenous board representation is also an important way for an organisation to acknowledge and combat racism. It's easy to talk about reconciliation, but racism is a conversation that typically our country has real trouble with. To have people in the

- leadership group who are comfortable using that word and terminology starts to change the conversation very quickly and to make it more impactful.
- When I started in my role, only one club had an Aboriginal person on their board. Now it is five clubs and I continue to push an agenda for increased representation at this level. There are plenty of qualified Indigenous people with great governance credentials that love football and have a big contribution to make. I remember when I first started raising the importance of board representation a number of people told me that "you won't get anywhere with that". Now we have Indigenous board members at the Gold Coast Suns, Fremantle Dockers, Port Adelaide, the Western Bulldogs and Collingwood.

The impact of racism on mental health and wellbeing

- 45 Racism and all forms of discrimination have a huge part to play in mental health and wellbeing.
- As an Indigenous woman working on the AFL Executive I am often asking myself "did that just happen because I'm a woman or because I'm Black or because of both things?". This occupies so much head space for me and people in similar positions to me.
- There are still elements of racism in the AFL. Being generous, you might say that it is just cultural clumsiness or poor choices of words by people who still don't get it. While there is less and less of this type of racism occurring, it is still very difficult to talk about racism and its impacts. There is a complete and utter lack of recognition, conversation and leadership around the mental health impact of discrimination in the lives of people who experience it. This is deeply concerning.
- The rate of Aboriginal suicides is a very deep concern for me. While I am not an expert or a practitioner, I worry that not enough is being done about this critical problem and, in particular, we are not talking about the role of racism in this problem. It is impossible to address a problem that you're not allowed to talk about.
- One source of hope for me is how victims of child sexual abuse have gradually shifted the public conversation so that we can now openly talk about their horrifying experiences. This has been a deeply complex shift and has required people to carefully choose the time to speak where there is public appetite as well as supportive leadership. I hope that we are able to develop a similar platform to freely discuss the relationship between racism and Indigenous mental health.

Reflecting on my experiences in the arts

- With much personal disappointment, I don't really have any artistic ability. I have however been on the board of the Bangarra Dance Theatre and am currently on the boards of the Australian Film Television and Radio School and Circus Oz. I was also a consultant for the ABC television series "Total Control".
- The arts is another part of our world that has an enormous contribution to make in helping people engage with topics that they wouldn't typically deal with. Sometimes there is an unfair accusation levelled against artists and arts organisations that they are just preaching to the converted, i.e. privileged audiences who have the time and money to absorb art. There is some truth to this; many people never have the opportunity to go as a family to see Circus Oz. However, the arts has enormous potential if we can take the performances out of the lofty theatres and Spiegeltents that they're often in and get them out into communities.
- Circus Oz is very much on the fringe of the arts, but it has an enormous amount to add because of the levity, humour and larrikinism that is inherent to it. Many years ago when I was working at the Recognise campaign, we supported Circus Oz to take the circus out to remote Aboriginal communities to promote the need to change the Australian Constitution. I was at the Garma Festival when they performed, and I saw the way that young people so quickly engaged with what the performers were doing and I noticed the way that they held attention and built relationships. This was because the young people weren't just being talked at by the performers a different level of engagement was taking place.
- Art can be harnessed to promote wellbeing and resilience in the community. Circus Oz conducts skills workshops for kids to teach a number of the skills required to perform in a circus; you need strength, resilience, to know how to communicate, to have faith in yourself, to trust yourself and to trust other people. These are all attributes that are important to building community resilience. This is particularly so in disadvantaged communities where people have more reason to question whether they're part of the community or not.

The role of communities in promoting social connection, good overall health and wellbeing and preventing mental illness

Learnings from Aboriginal communities for the country

We're often asked what the broader Australian population can learn from Aboriginal communities in relation to social connection. I am frequently told "we've got so much to learn from your people" only to have that person turn their back and refuse to learn. It's a fascinating dynamic that's probably worth a Royal Commission itself.

- Connection to family and community and the culturally entrenched obligations to community are very strong and hardwired in Indigenous people. You can meet someone for the first time who almost automatically become like your mother or your father. If there's a bridge there it will be embraced freely; right from the start. On certain occasions I've observed non-Indigenous people visibly impacted by the sense of connection that Blackfellas have with one another, even if only by virtue of the recognition comes from being First Peoples. I feel that this is part of the disconnect that Australia as a nation has with its First Peoples.
- The resilience that First Peoples have shown through many trials is also very significant. We know what we have survived is remarkable and there are some deep and important learnings for the wider community about perspective that come from this. This is the message that Dr Mark Wenitong, an Aboriginal doctor from Cairns, recently conveyed on NITV regarding the COVID-19 crisis. He said

"We've been around for a hundred thousand years or so. We've faced bullets, poisonings, stolen land, stolen children, extremely bad policy as well over the last 200 years, and we're still here. As a matter of fact, we thrive. We've got doctors, nurses, lawyers, everything. So we're going to be around for a while in spite of this. For some of our communities, this just a blip. Seriously, lots of other people are worrying about luxury items. We never had them so it doesn't matter to us..."

Dr Wenitong's message also reminds me of why I am proud of who I am and where I come from. Although Blackfellas don't agree on everything, we do agree on our history and that is an incredibly powerful backbone for any community to have. I don't think that Australia as a whole has a similar consolidated and agreed identity. This is massively consequential.

Community level approaches to health service provision

- The Aboriginal community controlled health sector has been incredibly innovative over time and has led the way on primary health care service models. This is often forgotten. I'm not sure how well-equipped this sector is to support good mental health in communities, but they are definitely the right organisations to consult with.
- There are also many organisations, which at their core, are concerned with wellbeing. These organisations, like domestic violence services, childcare agencies and legal services, don't sit within the usual medical framework but can still support good mental health in the community. They have the opportunity and potential to reach people when they might be having a wellness issue. This is because when people already have a relationship with an agency there is a bit of rapport and some trust by virtue of the fact

that the agency is already trying to meet another need. This might go some way to helping people before things are at their very worse. In any case, it seems that if we are thinking about mental health holistically, people shouldn't necessarily need to go to a health service to get assistance for their mental health.

The effect of physical environment and social activities on mental health

- In dealing with my own depression, one of the things that has been really successful for me is walking. Many years ago when I was at Recognise, we decided that we were going to walk around Australia until the government called a referendum. The walk was a relay and I walked for two days through the Adelaide Hills. Other than having really sore feet at the end of it, I did realise that something had shifted in me and I felt a lot better.
- l've tried to maintain walking regularly ever since and now I see it as a really important part of my mental health management. It doesn't matter if it's cold, wet, hot, whatever the temperature is; I will try and get out for a walk every day. This is has particularly important for in recent weeks as the AFL has dealt with the impact of COVID-19. It has been a very traumatic period and the only reason that I'm coping so well has been my ability to get out and have a walk.
- Getting away from technology for periods of time and reconnecting with people in a more realistic context is also really important. I don't know if we are all prioritising relationships and family as much as we say we are or as much as we say we want to. Blackfellas will typically prioritise family over work when push comes to shove. This isn't the case for everyone; and I am at times a workaholic; but strong personal relationships are an enabler of good mental health.

Mentally healthy workplaces

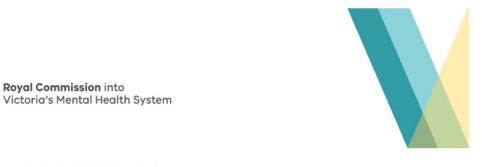
- People working in football administration also experience the mental strain I have described in relation to players and coaches. League and club administrators are evaluated on a wide range of performance measures.
- The AFL takes its obligation to provide a mentally healthy workplace to its employees seriously. The League has an annual mental health month where its staff are encouraged to participate in activities that support good mental health. This has included massage, meditation, yoga, healthy eating sessions and sessions around sleep quality. This has run for the past few years and is an initiative of our people and culture team. The League also has an employee assistance program and runs frequent social events for the whole workplace to come together and celebrate.

- I believe that most workplaces know that it makes economic sense to ensure good mental health among employees, whether it is by providing leave for stress or running events and programs similar to the AFL.
- I am not opposed to a legislative model which rewards businesses, whether through tax or other incentives, to take mental health more seriously. Some intervention may be required to ensure providing a mentally healthy workplace becomes common practice. An example I like to cite when delivering anti-racism training is that previously we only put seatbelts on because of the risk of being fined, but now we know it is the sane thing to do. I believe that this example is just as applicable to achieving the necessary cultural change required to ensure mentally healthy workplaces.

sign here ▶	Tanya	Hosch	

print name Tanya Hosch

date 7 July 2020



ATTACHMENT TH-1

This is the attachment marked 'TH-1' referred to in the witness statement of Tanya Hosch dated 7 July 2020.

CURRICULUM VITAE

Name: Tanya Hosch

Present position: General Manager, Inclusion and Social Policy, AFL

Educational and professional qualifications:

Completed Year 12

Relevant experience:

Advisory Grp

2016-Present: National Australia Bank Indigenous

2016-Present: Member, Chief Executive Women

2018-Present: Boardlinks Champion, Australian

Government

2012-2014: Deputy Campaign Director, Recognise

2014-2016: Joint Campaign Director, Recognise

2009-2012: Council Member, University of South

Australia

Current Board Memberships:

2018 - : Australian Film Television & Radio School

2017 - : Circus Oz

Former Board Memberships:

2015-2019: Indigenous Land and Sea Corporation

2014–2018: Chair, Price Waterhouse Coopers

Indigenous Consulting

2012-2015: National Board, Australian Red Cross

2011-2015: Bangarra Dance Theatre

2011-2014: Deputy Chair, National Aboriginal & Torres

Strait Islander Health Equality Council 2009-2012: University of South Australia

EEO categories:

Torres Strait Islander

(if available)