CHECK**UP**

Strong Futures Start Here

Workforce Planning for
First Nations Health and
Community Services

Acknowledgement of Country

CheckUP staff and board respectfully acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and recognise their continuing connection to the land, water and community. We pay respect to Elders past and present, and future leaders.

CheckUP strongly supports equality for all. We embrace diversity and condemn any kind of discrimination, be it on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity or disability.

Artwork Story

A connected community

We acknowledge and pay tribute to Leah Cummins who passed away unexpectedly and is well-known and respected in the health and community services sectors for her love of art, her passion to inspire and uplift her people, and her contribution to the sharing of culture and stories.

This artwork commemorates CheckUP's 25th anniversary and acknowledges the collaborative connections that exist between CheckUP, our partners and Queensland's diverse communities.

www.bunyadesigns.com.au

A connected community is representation of the diverse and interconnected communities within the state of Queensland. This artwork serves as a reminder that despite our differences and geographical separations, we are all part of a larger whole and can come together in unity.

Leah Cummins

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About CheckUP

CheckUP is a not-for-profit organisation dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of people in rural, regional, and remote communities across Queensland.

Since 1998, we've worked with over 150 service provider organisations to deliver innovative programs that reduce health disparities and ensure everyone, regardless of background or location, has access to quality healthcare.

By collaborating with local communities, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, we create tailored solutions to meet unique needs and support healthcare equity. We also focus on building a strong, diverse workforce and developing education-to-employment pathways to strengthen the sector's sustainability and resilience.

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. Through partnerships, we drive innovative change, working together to create an equitable healthcare system that supports healthier, thriving communities across Queensland.

What is Workforce Planning?

Workforce planning helps organisations build strong teams by matching people, skills, and roles with the needs of community— today and for generations to come.

Workforce planning is about making sure your organisation has the right people, with the right skills, in the right jobs, at the right time so you can meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.

As demand for health and community service grows, workforce planning can help you:

- Understand your current team, their skills, qualifications, backgrounds, goals and values.

- Identify what kind of workforce you'll need in the future, based on service demand, regulations, population changes and what the community expects.

- Recognise gaps in leadership, staffing, skills, systems and support.

- Develop practical plans, actions and partnerships to build the workforce you need to meet the needs of individuals, families and communities.

Workforce planning is not about predicting exactly what will happen in the future, it's about starting now, knowing your next steps forward and being proactive and responsive to change, challenges and opportunities.

Carissa McAllister
First Nations Industry Workforce Advisor, CheckUP Australia

Why Workforce Planning Matters?

Supports strategic workforce planning

Helps employers promote their organisation and attract the right people to meet current and future workforce needs.

Improves employee engagement and wellbeing

Reduces burnout and boosts motivation by placing employees in the right roles and providing opportunities to grow.

Addresses skills shortages

Identifies existing and emerging skills gaps early, so organisations can train or recruit for critical capabilities before they become urgent.

Provides workforce insights and practical solutions

Helps employers understand challenges, develop effective plans, and access grants or incentives available through Business Queensland and other government programs.

Prepare for future workforce challenges

Supports planning for an ageing population, advances in AI and technology, and the growing impact of chronic disease and mental health concerns.

Queensland's First Nations Health and Community Services Workforce
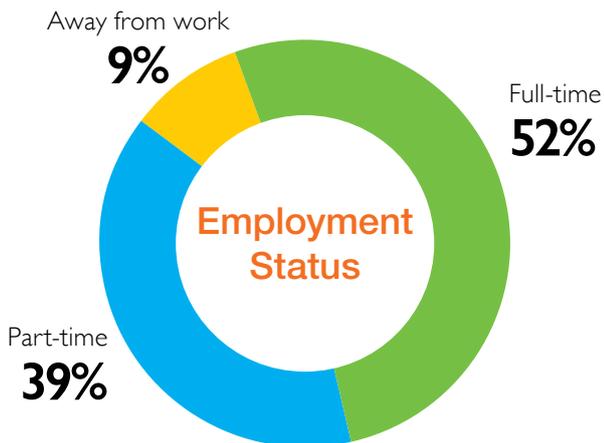
Employment Summary

Workforce
First Nations Health and Social Assistance Workers
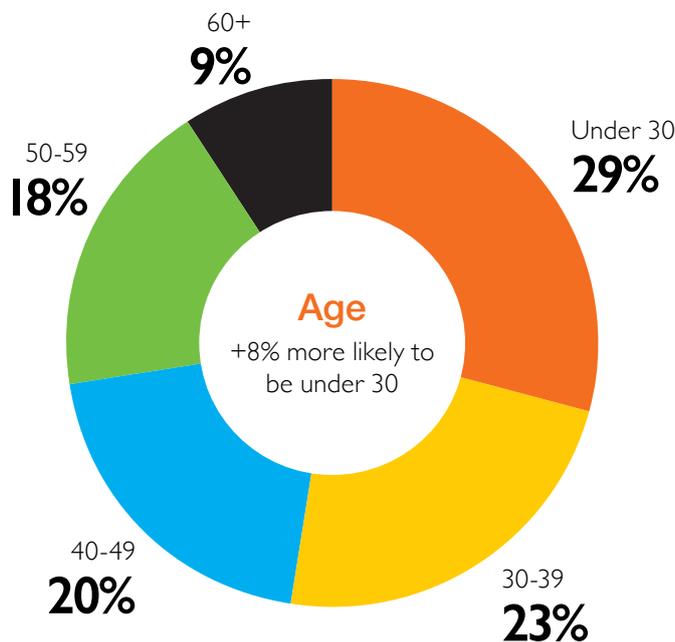**12,397 (3.3%)**

Social Assistance
4.4%

Female
9,682
78%

Male
2,711
22%

Employment Status
Away from work
9%

Full-time
52%

Part-time
39%

Caring
18% provide unpaid caring assistance
+4% higher than non-First Nations workers

Health
2.6%

Age
+8% more likely to be under 30

60+
9%

50-59
18%

Under 30
29%

40-49
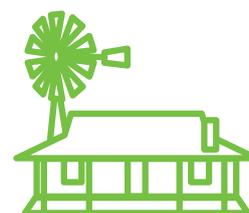**20%**

30-39
23%

Location
Metro
55%

Regional
45%

Business Owner Summary

Workforce

First Nations Health and Social Assistance Business Owners/Managers QLD highest % compared to other states
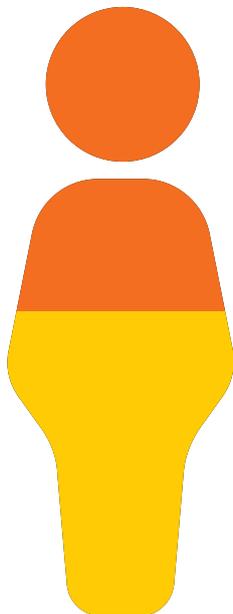
537 (11%)

Employment Status

Entities without employees
67%

Entities with employees
33%

Age

Average business owner age 11 years younger

First Nations
34

Non-First Nations
47
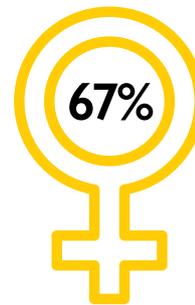
Female
362
67%

Male
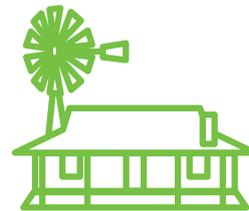157
29%

Social Assistance

+4.8% more likely to be social assistant business owner than other states

Location

Metro
55%

Regional
37%

State Comparison

28% of all health and social assistance businesses were found in Queensland making it the second largest state in this sector with more than twice the business owners in Victoria.

Closing the Gap in Queensland

Workforce planning is more than an organisational strategy, it is a powerful tool for advancing equity, opportunity, and self-determination. The Closing the Gap targets provide a national framework for improving outcomes in education, employment, and economic participation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. By aligning workforce planning efforts with these targets, organisations can contribute meaningfully to systemic change.

This section highlights Queensland's progress and challenges, offering data driven insights to guide local workforce strategies and ensure planning efforts are responsive to community needs, values, and aspirations.

Students achieve their full learning potential

Target 5

By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (age 20-24) attaining Year 12 or equivalent to 96% (QLD)

Observation

While progress is still needed, Year 12 attainment among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students has steadily progressed from 50.9% in 2001 to 75% in 2021. Queensland is outperforming the national average and leading progress towards closing this gap.

Latest Value

75%

Students reach their full potential through further education pathways

Target 6

By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-34 years who have completed a tertiary qualification (Certificate III and above) to 70% (QLD)

Observation

While the target has not yet been met, the rate of tertiary qualification has more than doubled over 20 years, from 19.8% in 2001 to 47.2% in 2021, showing steady progress at each census.

Latest Value

47.2%

Youth are engaged in employment or education

Target 7

By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (15-24 years) who are in employment, education or training to 67% (QLD)

Observation

While the target has not yet been met, the proportion of 15–24-year-olds fully engaged in employment or training has increased from 49% in 2001 to 58% in 2021, showing steady progress over time.

Latest Value

58.1%

Strong economic participation and development of people and their communities

Target 8

By 2031, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 25-64 who are employed to 62% (QLD)
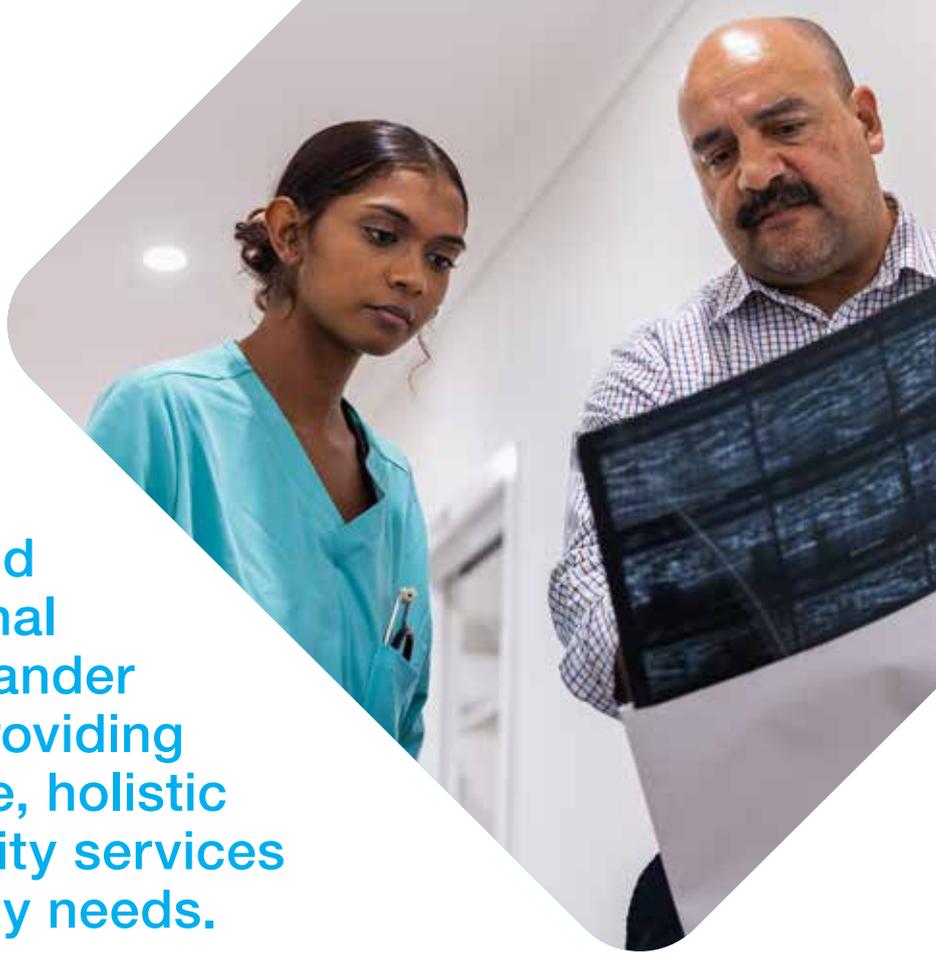
Observation

While the target has not yet been met, employment rates for people aged 25-64 have grown steadily from 47.9% in 2001 to 57.2% in 2021. However, Queensland experienced a decline between 2006 and 2016 and has not yet returned to 2006 levels. This decline was more pronounced in Queensland than across Australia.

Latest Value

57.2%

Queensland's Unique Workforce Challenges

Queensland's First Nations workforce faces unique challenges, such as limited access to education and training, geographic isolation and cultural disconnects. These factors affect employment opportunities.

Limited access to education and training

Restricted access to remote communities

Staff isolation

Understaffing

Climate Change

Cultural Disconnects

Geographic Isolation

Workplaces lacking Cultural Safety

What does success look like?

Building a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce means providing culturally responsive, holistic health and community services that meet community needs.

Model for success: strong and sustainable future workforce outcomes

Workforce Data Planning, Development and Governance

Sustainable governance and leadership models.

Consistent data and metrics to inform workforce planning and advocacy.

Attraction, Recruitment and Retention

Staffing and occupation ratios meet community and organisational needs (i.e. Model of Care and transition to community control).

Education, Training and Employment

Future and current staff are provided with the right education and training and professional development to undertake their roles.

Focus Areas

When planning for a strong First Nations workforce, it's important to focus on key areas. These areas guide your actions, set your direction, and make sure your efforts match your organisation's goals.

Focus areas can link to your business strategy or reflect the voices and aspirations of your people. When shaped this way, your workforce plan creates better pathways for participation, optimism, and long-term commitment.

The following focus areas are examples to help guide and strengthen your own workforce planning:

Empowered Leaders

Embedding empowerment for current and future leaders into everyday practice and workforce planning builds confidence, invests in people, and strengthens cultural identity. This approach supports self-determination, nurtures personal and professional growth, and fosters stronger engagement and retention. By focusing on empowerment, organisations create inclusive, culturally responsive pathways that drive sustainable change, grow future leaders, and build a loyal, resilient workforce committed to serving and uplifting communities.

Courageous Communication

Strong, courageous communication is essential to influence and inspire people inside and outside your organisation. By boldly sharing your unique value across the employee lifecycle, marketing, and operations, you strengthen reputation, build awareness, and showcase cultural and professional impact. Embedding values-driven communication improves attraction and retention, builds trust and pride, and demonstrates genuine commitment to cultural responsiveness, community outcomes, and a sustainable, respected workforce.

Strong Pathways

Clear pathways are essential for effective workforce planning. Mapping opportunities in education, training, employment, governance, and leadership makes future options visible and easy to access. Providing tailored support, mentoring, and culturally responsive development builds confidence and skills, while clear communication keeps people informed and engaged. This approach improves attraction and retention, creating a skilled, valued workforce ready to grow, lead and deliver meaningful community impact for communities.

Many thanks CheckUP - I'm so grateful to work with you on this piece of work. It's helping me think strategically as well as operationally about growing the business!

First Nations Allied Health Professional, Central Queensland

Workforce Plan on a page
First Nations Health and Community Services

Vision

A strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce provides culturally responsive and holistic health and community services care that meets the needs of its communities.

Success Looks Like

Workforce Planning and Governance

- Strong governance and leadership models
- Reliable data and measures to guide planning and advocacy.

Attraction, Recruitment and Retention

- Enough people in the right roles to meet community and organisational needs (i.e. Model of Care and transition to community control).

Education, Training and Employment

- Current and future people receive the right training and professional development to do their jobs well.

12-Step Method

- Nominate your workforce champions
- Know your workforce
- Identify education and training opportunities
- Launch Employee Value Proposition (EVP) statement
- Launch Community Value Proposition (CVP) statement
- Optimise HR strategies and systems
- Strengths and values-based participation tool
- Nominate your current and future leaders
- Governance and succession planning
- Data informed decision making
- Leverage strategic partnerships
- Business and workforce strategy alignment.

Focus Areas

Empowered Leaders

Courageous Communication

Strong Pathways

12-Step Method Workforce Planning Guide

Phase 1

Understand your workforce

Step 1 Nominate Workforce Champions

Key Actions

Identify and empower individuals who are committed to strengthening your workforce.

Outcome

Champions drive momentum, influence culture, and sustain long-term goals.

Step 2 Know Your Workforce

Key Actions

Understand your workforce profile, including demographics, skills, strengths, and risks.

Outcome

Informs tailored strategies for attraction, participation, and retention.

Step 3 Identify Education and Training Opportunities

Key Actions

Map pathways from school to employment and promote training, mentorship, and advancement.

Outcome

Builds job readiness, participation, and workforce sustainability.

Phase 2

Build Value and Culture

Step 4 Launch Employee Value Proposition (EVP)

Key Actions

Define why your organisation is a great place to work and communicate it clearly.

Outcome

Strengthens attraction, engagement, and retention.

Step 5 Launch Community Value Proposition (CVP)

Key Actions

Communicate your organisation's value and impact to the communities you serve.

Outcome

Builds awareness, trust, and strong community relationships.

Step 6 Optimise HR Strategies and Systems

Key Actions

Review and update HR policies and systems to be inclusive, effective, and culturally safe.

Outcome

Removes barriers and supports workforce growth and wellbeing.

Phase 3

Grow Leadership and Governance

Step 7 Use a Strengths and Values-Based Participation Tool

Key Actions

Explore your people's strengths, experiences, and aspirations to encourage participation.

Outcome

Builds confidence, engagement, and values-driven culture.

Step 8 Nominate Current and Future Leaders

Key Actions

Identify and support emerging leaders through culturally safe development and mentoring.

Outcome

Builds leadership capability, stability, and continuity.

Step 9 Governance and Succession Planning

Key Actions

Strengthen governance, ensure First Nations representation, and plan for future leadership.

Outcome

Ensures sustainability, resilience, and cultural integrity.

Phase 4

Strengthen Strategy and Sustainability

Step 10 Data-Informed Decision Making

Key Actions

Collect, analyse, and use workforce and population data to inform strategy.

Outcome

Supports accountability, learning, and continuous improvement.

Step 11 Leverage Strategic Partnerships

Key Actions

Assess, strengthen, and build partnerships across community, government, and sector.

Outcome

Multiplies impact, fills gaps, and strengthens reputation.

Step 12 Align Business Strategy and Workforce Plan

Key Actions

Integrate workforce planning into strategic, business, and operational plans.

Outcome

Ensures sustainability, visibility, and long-term alignment.

Implementation Checklist

Step	Implementation
1	**Nominate Workforce Champions** ☐ Invite nominations for individuals who demonstrate strong cultural leadership, commitment to community wellbeing, and a passion for developing others. ☐ Encourage cross-organisational involvement with executives, managers, HR, Elders, and community partners, to reflect shared values and a collective voice. ☐ Celebrate your champions through recognition, storytelling, and community events. ☐ Empower your champions to lead workforce initiatives and mentor emerging people. **Example:** Include your cancer care advocate or leader in your workforce planning team to help strengthen the cancer care workforce.
2	**Know Your Workforce** ☐ Conduct surveys, yarning circles and one-on-one discussions to gather insights about your team. ☐ Assess the size and composition of your workforce, considering factors such as turnover, retirements, and future growth. ☐ Analyse at least 12 months of data to identify trends and potential workforce gaps. ☐ Use this information to plan proactively for future needs and develop strategies to build capability and stability. **Example:** Include career, personal, and financial goals in your performance review process to better understand what motivates your people and how you can support their growth.
3	**Identify Education and Training Opportunities** ☐ Collaborate with training providers, community organisations, and schools to create pathways, work experience, and traineeship opportunities. ☐ Communicate pathways and opportunities internally across employee lifecycle and externally to increase awareness and knowledge. ☐ Work with government agencies and advisors to improve access to suitable supports, funding, and incentives. **Example:** Engaging with your peak body or regional government representatives can help you stay informed about opportunities, streamline information relevant to your organisation, and provide a mechanism to communicate workforce needs on the ground.
4	**Launch Employee Value Proposition (EVP)** ☐ Develop your EVP by clearly outlining why people should work for your organisation. ☐ Communicate the EVP clearly to your people and stakeholders through multiple channels, ensuring it is understood and embraced throughout the organisation. ☐ Integrate your EVP across the employee lifecycle, embedding it in recruitment, onboarding, professional development, recognition, and retention strategies to create a consistent and engaging experience. ☐ Consider other related statements such as a Volunteer Value Proposition or Board Value Proposition, to clarify why individuals should invest their time or expertise in your organisation. **Example:** Include your people in developing your EVP. Use exit surveys, current people surveys, yarning circles, and storytelling to ensure it reflects the real experiences, values, and aspirations of your workforce.

Step	Implementation
5	**Launch Community Value Proposition (CVP)** ☐ Clarify what your organisation does best for the community, including the unique value and impact you provide. ☐ Share your CVP with community members, partners, and stakeholders through clear messaging and engagement channels. ☐ Reinforce your organisation's reputation by embedding your CVP in programs, partnerships, and initiatives, demonstrating ongoing value and fostering trust. **Example:** Promote your organisation's history, purpose, and community impact through storytelling across various communications platforms.
6	**Optimise HR Strategies and Systems** ☐ Develop, implement and monitor attraction, recruitment and retention strategies. ☐ Ensure HR systems are current, and your people are trained to use them effectively. ☐ Assess whether existing HR strategies and systems meet organisational needs and future workforce requirements. ☐ Ensure all HR policies and practices are culturally safe, inclusive, and responsive to the diverse needs of employees. ☐ Update or enhance HR systems and strategies to better support workforce growth, retention, and organisational goals. Provide training so your people can confidently implement improvements. **Example:** Consider cultural leave, flexibility for community obligations, wellbeing supports, and specific considerations for different workforce groups such as project carers.
7	**Use a Strengths and Values-Based Participation Tool** ☐ Explore each person's strengths, life experiences, aspirations, and values to understand their unique potential. ☐ Use this insight to support personal growth, enhance confidence and motivation, and encourage higher engagement and participation. ☐ Integrate the tool into development plans, mentoring programs, and workplace opportunities to maximise contribution and fulfilment for your people. **Example:** The Harrisons Tool is a strengths and values-based framework to identify workforce preferences. Combine this with yarning-based interviews and holistic performance assessments to get a complete picture of your people's potential.
8	**Nominate Current and Future Leaders** ☐ Identify and nominate emerging leaders who demonstrate leadership potential and a strong connection to culture and community. ☐ Assess their readiness by considering skills, experience, aspirations, and cultural knowledge to determine suitability for leadership roles. ☐ Provide culturally safe development opportunities, mentoring, and growth to prepare individuals for leadership within the organisation and broader community. **Example:** Recognise the diversity of your leaders, including professional, life experience, cultural, and community leadership. Ensure pathways to leadership are clear and inclusive of skills, culture, and community knowledge.

Implementation Checklist

Step	Implementation
9	### Governance and Succession Planning ☐ Strengthen governance by establishing or reviewing structures to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander representation and a diverse skill set in leadership and decision-making roles. Set clear terms of reference, define roles and responsibilities, and embed cultural governance principles in policies and Boards. ☐ Plan for the future by mapping out key leadership and operational roles, identifying potential successors, and designing clear succession pathways. Provide mentoring, leadership training, and shadowing opportunities to prepare emerging leaders. ☐ Build capacity and continuity by reviewing existing systems and training programs and investing in governance and leadership development. Consult Elders, community leaders, and professional advisors to guide strategy, strengthen capability, and ensure long-term organisational and cultural sustainability. **Example:** Create a First Nations workforce advisory group, mentor emerging leaders through a structured succession plan, and engage Elders to guide decision-making and maintain cultural integrity across all leadership levels.
10	### Data-Informed Decision Making ☐ Collect and manage internal and external data, ensuring CRM and other systems capture key workforce and operational information and can scale to meet future needs. Partner with peak bodies, government agencies, and local stakeholders to gather regional insights for current and future planning. ☐ Analyse data by combining internal workforce and operational information with external population and workforce data to identify trends, inform decisions, and support strategic planning. ☐ Record and monitor key indicators such as recruitment, retention, resignations, and staff development. Use these insights to strengthen accountability, learning, and continuous improvement across the organisation. **Example:** Upgrade client and patient record systems to capture more detailed clinical and social information, enabling your people to identify current service gaps, adjust care pathways, and make informed decisions to plan for future workforce and community needs.
11	### Leverage Strategic Partnerships ☐ Map and assess existing partnerships and potential relationships across your community, region, government agencies, and peak bodies. Identify strengths and gaps in collaboration. ☐ Collaborate with partners to co-develop programs or projects that address workforce development needs. ☐ Agree on shared goals, monitor and measure impact, and use partnerships to extend reach, build trust, and strengthen organisational reputation. **Example:** Regional and remote communities can partner with local organisations to identify shared training needs, increase workforce numbers, and deliver programs that are flexible, locally led, and culturally responsive.

Step	Implementation
12	**Align Business Strategy and Workforce Plan** ☐ Align the workforce plan with your organisation's strategic, business, and operational priorities to ensure consistency and relevance. ☐ Embed workforce actions and measurable indicators within strategic plans, annual reports, and Board updates. ☐ Integrate workforce planning into everyday operations and the Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) cycle to support long-term sustainability and organisational effectiveness. **Example:** Host a workforce planning workshop with workforce champions and managers to co-design a workforce plan that is linked to and incorporates your strategic plan.

Need workforce help? It's free!

CheckUP's Industry Workforce Advisors, funded by the Queensland Government, offer free, tailored workforce planning support to Queensland businesses.

We can help you:

- Develop a workforce plan that addresses your challenges and supports your strategic goals.
- Facilitate engaging workshops to gather insights and align your team.
- Access training, grants, and incentives to implement cost effective initiatives.
- Overcome attraction, retention, and recruitment challenges to build a resilient, diverse, and future-ready workforce.

Contact CheckUP's First Nations Workforce Advisor (Health and Social Assistance) on **0498 801 004** or email **firstnationsworkforce@checkup.org.au** to get started – **it's free!**

Scan QR code for more information

This Employer Guide was prepared by CheckUP's Workforce and Industry Development team. Data provided by Ronan Analytics from multiple sources (e.g. ABS Census, AIHW and Productivity Commission). Content is correct at the time of publication. Copyright (c) 2025 CheckUP Australia. All Rights Reserved.
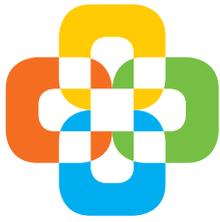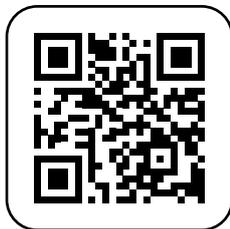
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