

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health

Protocols and Inclusive Practices

Cultural protocols are customs, lores and practices that guide the behaviour of, and are unique to, individual cultural groups.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have extensive cultural protocols.

Cultural protocols enabled clan groups to live peacefully and transiently for thousands of years across what is now the Australian continent.

In Australia, disengagement can occur when community groups, organisations and services impose non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander models and frameworks.

In education and health service provision, particular attention should be made to ethically and appropriately embedded concepts of *mens' and womens' business*, and *Brotherboy* and *Sistergirl* identities.

It is also important to consider cultural pride and retention of languages (English is often the second, third or fourth spoken language).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have experienced a long history of oppression, disempowerment and disadvantage.

Service delivery should be conscious of bias, profiling, inclusion and exclusion, stigma and shame, and privilege and power.

Services should also consider community perspectives, voices and participation when making decisions in the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Embedding Cultural Perspectives

Embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts and perspectives in service delivery can increase health and wellbeing outcomes for communities, increase organisational cultural competence and accountability, and can support the implementation of organisational reconciliation.

Relationships and participation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous populations can also be enhanced through providing a more accurate and richer understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history and cultures.

Embedding cultural perspectives includes:

- participating in cultural awareness training to develop competency in the workplace
- developing supporting policies and procedures
- displaying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- developing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives within curriculum and training materials.
- paying respect to the traditional owners by giving an *Acknowledgement of Country*
- consulting with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, including Elders, when planning and developing programs and/or services

Inclusive Practices

Inclusivity means actively working towards incorporating Aboriginal

and Torres Strait Islander perspectives and privileging voices that have been unheard. Inclusive practices must always reflect both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

Publications should adopt approachable language that is relatable to local communities and incorporate local artwork and images.

Consultation with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders is essential.

If working with children and young people, encourage parents and carers to participate in the process.

Lore

Aboriginal lore is based on cultural knowledge, customs and value systems. Lore is based on connection, a clan of people and responsibility.

Aboriginal lore is not written but is passed down through word of mouth. Lore's and customs are not all the same and can differ from clan groups across Australia.

Torres Strait Islander cultures have concepts of lore though use of alternative languages to describe these concepts.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

It is important to recognise in Australia that Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people are two distinct groups.

It is best practice when referring to Australia's *First Nation People* or *First People of Australia*, to always acknowledge both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

It is inappropriate and discriminatory to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as *ATSI*, *Aborigine*, *Abo*, *Coons*, *Blacks* or *Native*.

This language carries strong connotations of colonisation and racist attitudes and behaviours.

Community Centred Approaches

Colonial models of health care and education can refer to client or patient centred care, a model that emphasises institutionalisation and individualism, overlooking community led models of care.

Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations requires firstly placing the person at the centre, secondly enabling that person to define their own community and thirdly working with whole-of-community responses.

Community centred care provides the best opportunities for health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the communities that they live within.

Stolen Generations

The *Stolen Generations* are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children who were removed from their families by Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions between 1910 and 1970, through a policy of assimilation.

Children were separated from their families and forced to adopt a European/Western culture, were unable to speak their traditional languages or to refer to themselves by the names that they were given by their parents.

Children were placed in institutions where neglect and abuse was common.

It is important to acknowledge that *Stolen Generations* still exist. Australia has over representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in child safety systems across Australia.

When working with any Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and families, be mindful of intergenerational trauma and non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children safety policies and frameworks.

Key Concepts

Welcome to Country

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander custodianship of country needs to be recognised where public events are held. A *Welcome to Country* is a ceremony performed by a traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander custodian or Elder to welcome visitors onto their land.

Acknowledgement of Country

An *Acknowledgement of Country* can be informal or formal and is a way for visitors to show awareness of, and respect for, the traditional Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander owners of the land on which a meeting or event is being held.

Mens' and Womens' Business

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, certain customs, roles and practices are performed separately by men only or women only. These are referred to as *Mens'* and *Womens' Business*.

Cultural Safety

A culturally safe and secure environment is one where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel safe, included and valued and draw strength in their identity, culture and community.

Cultural safety is established through building trust and genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Yarning Circles

The *Yarning Circle* is a traditional method of communication for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and involves sitting in a circle so that participants are considered equal. The yarn enables the individual in the circle to share their journey, knowledge and experiences in a safe and respectful environment.

Kinship System

The *Kinship System* is a complex system that determines how people relate to each other and their role, responsibilities and obligations in relation to one another.

In the kinship system an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person can have multiple mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, aunts, uncles and cousins not related by blood, region or language groups. These systems vary across Australia.

Sorry Business

Sorry Business refers to the death of a family or community member and includes the funeral and mourning period.

Attending funerals and taking part in the mourning process varies depending upon individual community customs. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities it is forbidden to use the name of a deceased person.

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References

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