



# **NATIONAL DISABILITY SERVICES**

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## **Aboriginal Resources & Pathways Project**

**Cultural Proficiency in Service  
Delivery for Aboriginal People  
with a Disability**

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**N**ational Disability Services, through the Aboriginal Resources and Pathways Project has developed this booklet as a guide to assist Disability Service Providers to improve the delivery of service to Aboriginal disabled people.

## Aboriginality

**It is important to remember that ONLY Aboriginal people can determine who is Aboriginal and who is not.**

“Being Aboriginal is not the colour of your skin or how broad your nose is. It is a spiritual feeling, an identity you know in your heart. It is a unique feeling that is difficult for a non-Aboriginal to fully understand.”<sup>1</sup>

Aboriginal people can be no more ‘part Aborigines’ than they are part human beings.

Aboriginality lies in the meaningful way in which Aboriginal people interact with their people, with their feelings about their people and their home, with the way they think, work and speak. Aboriginality lies in the identification of an Aboriginal person’s relationships with their family and community. It is their relationships with their grandparents, brothers and sisters, uncles and aunties, cousins and Elders.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people both individually and collectively as a community, define themselves by their culture not the colour of their skin.”<sup>2</sup>

The definition and identification of Aboriginality is sometimes a paradox to the uninitiated and even sometimes for Aboriginal people. That is, in most cases the confirmation of Aboriginality is a very easy and simple process. However, some attempts at confirmation of Aboriginality are difficult, complex and may lead to very heated debates, because, as in mainstream society, Aboriginal people at times, may agree to disagree about who is an Aboriginal person.

The official formal criteria used by the Australian Government and most State Governments developed in consultation with Aboriginal peoples are set out in the following formula:

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<sup>1</sup> Informed by the success of an action research approach in these programs, it is a specific requirement for Family Relationship Centres to undertake action research. See: Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, *Operational Framework for Family Relationship Centres*, July 2007, Appendix K  
[www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Families\\_FamilyRelationshipServicesOverviewofPrograms\\_ForFamilyRelationshipServicesPractitioners\\_FamilyRelationshipCentreResources](http://www.ag.gov.au/www/agd/agd.nsf/Page/Families_FamilyRelationshipServicesOverviewofPrograms_ForFamilyRelationshipServicesPractitioners_FamilyRelationshipCentreResources) accessed online 27 April 2009.

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth Attorney-General’s Department, *General Feedback Report on Action Research for Family Relationship Centre*, July 2006-2007, p. 11.

An Aboriginal person must meet the following three criteria:

- Must be of Aboriginal Descent
- Must identify as an Aboriginal
- Must be accepted as an Aboriginal by the community in which they live.

3

## Confirmation of Aboriginality

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act (ALRA) states that to be a member of a Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC) you must be an Aboriginal person. The definition of an Aboriginal person, as defined by the Aboriginal Land Rights Act, is a person who:

- is of Aboriginal descent.
- identifies as an Aboriginal person, and
- is accepted by the Aboriginal community in which he/she lives.



When a person seeks to become a member of a LALC, the members of a LALC must be satisfied that the person is in fact Aboriginal and must make a resolution to accept the person as a member before a LALC Chief Executive Officer can enter their name on a membership roll.

When a LALC is satisfied that a person is Aboriginal and then proceeds to join the LALC they can then write a letter of confirmation for that person, confirming their Aboriginality. A LALC should not write a letter of confirmation if the person being confirmed as Aboriginal is not first a member of the LALC.<sup>4</sup>

## An Exemption Certificate

An Exemption Certificate was introduced, exempting certain Aboriginal people from restrictive legislation and entitling them to vote, drink alcohol and move freely but prohibiting them from consorting with others who are not exempt. Aboriginal people used the derogatory terms 'dog tag' or 'dog licence' to refer to the certificates. For many Aboriginal people this renunciation of their traditional lifestyle was promoted as the only opportunity to overcome poverty, gain work and access to education and social welfare benefits.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/everybodys-business/protocols-aboriginal/documents/protocols-for-consultation.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.alc.org.au/land-councils/overview.aspx>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/aboriginal-history-timeline-early-20th.html#ixzz0v2EP0GyP>

## **Goori /Koori /Murri /Nunga and other such terms**

These terms are directly derived from Aboriginal languages and are the names used by Aboriginal people in specific areas when referring to themselves. Note: that many Aboriginal people from other areas of Australia reside within NSW and still use their traditional names. Some examples of these terms are:

<b>Goori</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in northern NSW coastal regions
<b>Koori</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in parts of NSW and Victoria
<b>Murri</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in north-west NSW and Queensland
<b>Nunga</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in South Australia
<b>Yolngu</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in Northern Territory (north- east Arnhem Land)
<b>Anangu</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in Central Australia
<b>Noongar</b>	is usually used by Aboriginal people in south-west Western Australia

Always check with the local Aboriginal community about using this type of terminology. There are many Aboriginal language groups within the above-mentioned areas and the use of such terms can be restrictive.

## **Mob**

‘Mob’ is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country. ‘Mob’ is a term that is extremely important to Aboriginal people because it is used to identify who they are and where they are from. ‘Mob’ is generally used by Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people. Therefore, it may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use this term unless this is known to be acceptable to Aboriginal people.

## **Terms not to be used**

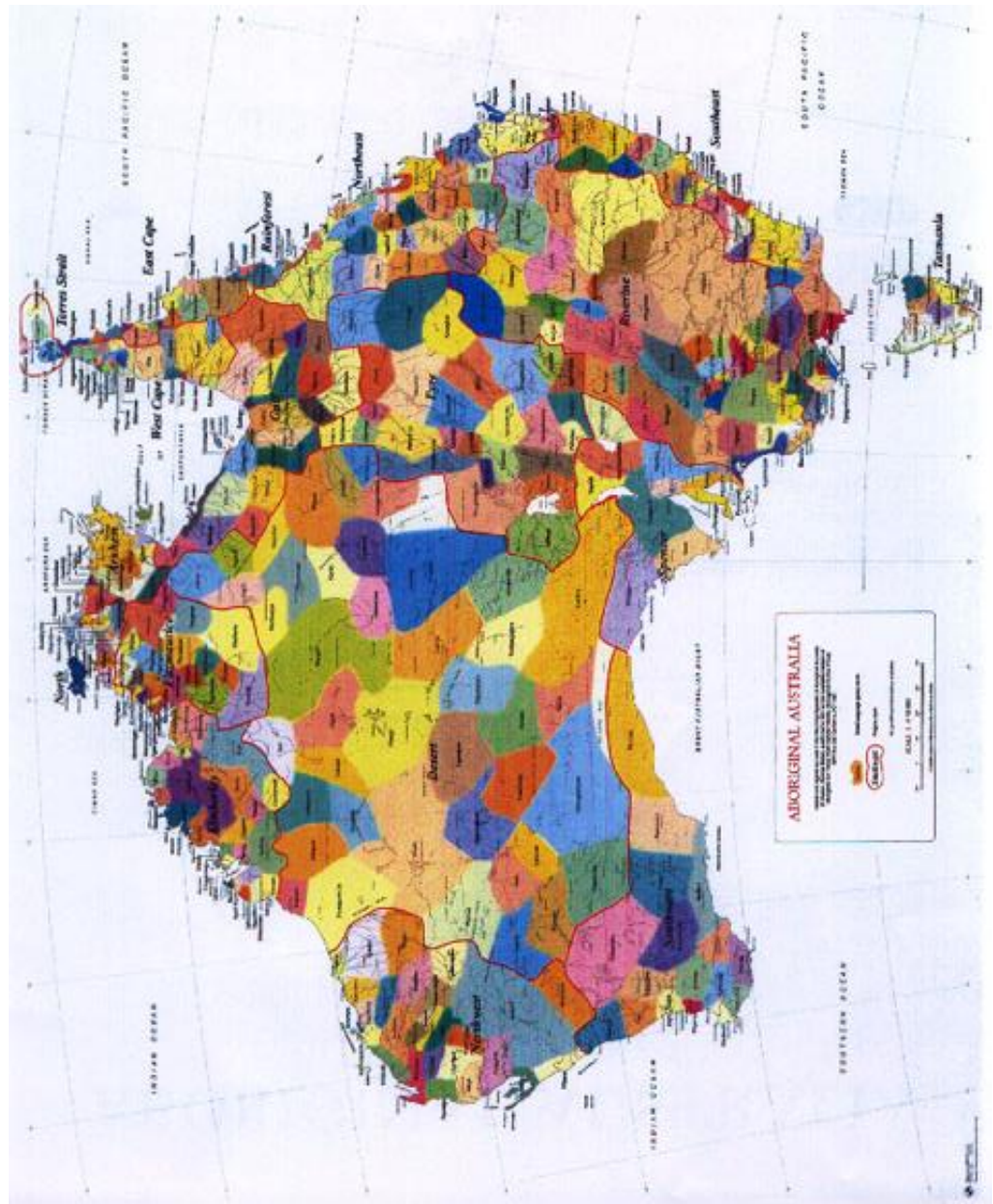
The following terminology is inappropriate or dated, and **MUST BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES AS IT IS OFFENSIVE**:<sup>6</sup>

ATSI	Native
Mixed blood	Half-caste
Quarter-caste	Full-blood
Part-Aboriginal	25%, 50% Aboriginal
Them	Them people
Those people	Those folk
You people	Doesn't look like a real Aboriginal

<sup>6</sup> [http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2004/pdf/aboriginal\\_terms.pdf](http://www.health.nsw.gov.au/pubs/2004/pdf/aboriginal_terms.pdf)

## Aboriginal Tribal Map

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<http://www.abc.net.au/indigenous/map/default.htm>



## Aboriginal Perception of Disability

A lack of reliable data on the prevalence of disability in Aboriginal communities was identified by the Aboriginal Disability Network, who also provided some reasons why this may be so:

... there is a figure of 37% of the Aboriginal population are Aboriginal people living with disabilities, however that figure also acknowledges that this figure may in fact be a conservative one given that it does not include psychological disabilities. One of the most basic reasons why data on prevalence continues to be unreliable is that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities do not in fact identify as people with disabilities. This occurs for a range of reasons including:

- Why would you identify as a person with disability when you already experience discrimination based on your Aboriginality? i.e. Why take on another negative label?
- In traditional language there was no comparable word to disability which suggests that disability may have been accepted as part of the human experience.
- Or in some communities particularly communities that continue to practice a more traditional lifestyle disability may be viewed as a consequence of 'married wrong way.' That is many Aboriginal people with disabilities and their parents and family members experience stigma related to a kind of 'bad karma' view of disability.
- A predominance of the medical model of disability has had a profoundly negative impact on the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. Much of the focus on contemporary Indigenous Australia relates to the Closing the Gap campaign. This campaign whilst essential often focuses heavily on primary health interventions.

This does not address the whole of life needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disabilities. An example of this includes recognition, rightfully of the high prevalence of hearing impairment amongst young Aboriginal children and a concerted campaign to address this. What tends to happen however is that many Aboriginal children are getting their hearing impairment treated however their accompanying learning disability which has occurred because of extended periods without proper hearing does not get addressed? This results in only part of the job being done, that is a medical intervention has taken place but a 'social model of disability' intervention around the more long term related impairment has not.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL

Report 44 – November 2010

Standing Committee on Social Issues

Services provided or funded by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care

Submission 97: - Aboriginal Disability Network – Damien Griffis

Labeling and perception of different types of disability are described and viewed differently by Aboriginal people compared to those categories and views offered by disability service providers in service delivery to Aboriginal people. The social model of disability, rather than the medical model, appears to fit more closely with the perception of disability by Aboriginal people and communities.

It is not so much the disability itself, but the inability of a person to function as part of his or her community that can become the disability through cultural and social isolation or exclusion. In respect to the cultural and traditional roles of men, women and family, this inability to be culturally and socially part of the group might become the disability or barrier to the person, if they cannot function or keep up with the group.<sup>9</sup>

Whether people perceive themselves to have a disability is dependent upon their level of support from others, and upon the nature of any pre-existing medical conditions. Major illnesses and conditions may or may not be considered as disabilities, but may instead be normalized due to their frequent occurrence.<sup>10</sup>

Aboriginal people with a disability are generally not excluded from or stigmatised in their communities;

- some disabilities may be seen as a 'pay-back' for a past wrongdoing, and other may be seen as something 'special';
- independence may not be seen as a major issue in some Indigenous communities;
- disability may be viewed as a family or community problem, rather than a personal one;
- some people with severe disabilities may be seen as the responsibility of 'welfare'; and
- a person may be identified and named after their disability (for example, a person with an eye injury may be known as 'one eye').<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> [http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_oneill.pdf](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_oneill.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.homemods.info/files/AboriginalHousingSummBul\\_v4\\_.pdf](http://www.homemods.info/files/AboriginalHousingSummBul_v4_.pdf)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_oneill.pdf](http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_oneill.pdf)

## Being an Aboriginal person with disability

Many consultation participants indicated that there are various reasons why they may not identify as having a disability. Amongst the most fundamental of reasons for choosing not to identify is the potential for further discrimination. Aboriginal people are frequently discriminated against because of their race. Therefore, unwillingness to self-identify another potentially discriminatory aspect of one's life has led to the under reporting of disability in Aboriginal communities.

Furthermore, ideas of disability in some instances can be constructed differently in Aboriginal communities. There is a focus on physical or visible types of disability at the expense of recognition of mental illness as a type of disability. This can result in a serious under reporting of disability in some communities, which can lead to a perception by government authorities or non-government agencies that disability is not a significant issue within Aboriginal communities.

Due to the sometimes sensitive nature of discussions about disability in some communities, it is important that any discussion of disability focus upon the human rights and resultant entitlements for the Aboriginal person with disability. The traditional labels of disability be they physical, intellectual, psychiatric, sensory, acquired brain injury or other forms of disability descriptors are problematic when discussing disability in Aboriginal communities. This is because Aboriginal people do not use such ways of describing members of their communities. There are several reasons for this including the fact that disability is not an unusual experience in Aboriginal communities. That is to say, the prevalence of disability is such that having a physical impairment or a psychiatric disability is seen as not such an unusual occurrence. Associate Professor Lindsay Gething states in the Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal:

*The concept of disability is often not relevant in the Aboriginal context. In the eyes of the Aboriginal community, issues associated with discrimination and disadvantage from being Aboriginal are more important than disability ..... Problems associated with disability are widespread and accepted as part of life; they are so vast yet secondary to being Aboriginal or of Torres Strait Islander background that they do not rate a mention on any agenda of priorities or needs..... Poor living conditions and their consequences are a common element with the Aboriginal experience.*

[Narration by Associate Professor Lindsay Gething that appeared in the *Aboriginal and Islander Health Worker Journal* Volume 18 No.3, May/June 1994, pp 30 and 32]<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> *Telling it like it is* Report – Aboriginal Disability Network [www.pwd.org.au/adnsw/news/telling\\_it\\_like\\_it\\_is.doc](http://www.pwd.org.au/adnsw/news/telling_it_like_it_is.doc)

## Shame

The concept of ‘shame’ is a specific cultural factor which has been identified as significant in Indigenous responses to disability. Shame refers to situations where a person has been singled out for any purpose from the security and anonymity provided by the group. There may be considerable concern expressed if the impairment or disability is perceived as likely to cause a ‘shame job’.

Being identified as having a disability has been recognised also as shameful for Indigenous people living in New South Wales. The term ‘handicapped’ is also considered shameful by some. Regardless of its context, the shame felt by some Indigenous people is likely to be a major impediment to access to disability support services.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Source: [http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_oneill.pdf](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_oneill.pdf)

## History of Interaction with Disability Services

### 1939

Under the Child Welfare Act, children with disabilities could be removed from their parent's care and made Part IX wards. These children were institutionalised in hospitals for appropriate care.

### 1990 – 1995

Twelve Aboriginal children were placed in adoption by the Department of Community Services in the 5 years from July 1990 to April 1995. The children were placed in the following situations:

Eleven infants (up to 12 months old) were placed through the local adoption program. All were placed with Aboriginal adopters and the other child was a 13 year old blind boy with cerebral palsy and an intellectual disability. This child was placed through the Special Needs Program with a non-Aboriginal family following extensive efforts to recruit an Aboriginal family. However, this placement was later disrupted and the child was not adopted.<sup>14</sup>

In rural and remote communities, where the availability of, and access to, disability services may be minimal, Aboriginal people with disabilities may face difficulties regarding mobility and access around the home, and also facilities within their neighbourhood. Beliefs about disability are interesting, in that participation in health services may depend upon whether another family is already accessing that particular health service.

Aboriginal people with a disability, even if an acknowledged disability, may be resistant to requesting assistance as a result of the belief that they either do not require, or perhaps do not deserve, such assistance. As a result, services that provide to Aboriginal people may feel their services are obsolete, unnecessary, or being pitched to a community that does not wish to change. This stereotyped perception may be damaging to both services and clients, perpetuating a cycle of disrupted communication and, thus, inadequate service provision and further disability.<sup>15</sup>

In terms of take-up of disability support services, poverty has been identified as an inhibiting factor, even when services are free. Poverty presents obstacles to obtaining a service – these are often not recognised by service providers and/or misinterpreted as stereotypic characteristics, cultural differences or personal lack of commitment.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> [http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/publications/securing\\_the\\_truth.pdf](http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au/publications/securing_the_truth.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.homemods.info/files/AboriginalHousingSummBul\\_v4\\_.pdf](http://www.homemods.info/files/AboriginalHousingSummBul_v4_.pdf)

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_oneill.pdf](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_oneill.pdf)

## Children with disabilities

Aboriginal children with disabilities are over-represented in all welfare statistics, particularly in non- Aboriginal substitute care. In May 1995 Aboriginal children represented 79% of all children with disabilities in care in the Northern Territory. Just over one-half (53%) of children in care were Aboriginal and almost half of these children had disabilities. Only 37% of Aboriginal children with disabilities were placed with Aboriginal carers.

Aboriginal children and young people with intellectual disability are in a position of double jeopardy, being devalued not only on the basis of their disability, but also their Aboriginality. Where Aboriginal children and young people with disabilities originate from rural and remote communities they are multiply disadvantaged. The low participation rate of Aboriginal people in disability services may lead to inappropriate welfare intervention being the only support available. Aboriginal children easily disappear into long-term non- Aboriginal residential care without being detected.

There is a failure of services under the Disability Services Act 1993 (NSW) to cater for Aboriginal children. The Act has established service principles which include the requirement to meet the needs of persons with disabilities who experience additional disadvantage including Aboriginal people to 'recognise the importance of preserving family relationships and the cultural and linguistic environments of persons with disabilities' and to establish transition plans where these needs are not met. A review of several hundred of the 850 transition plans developed for specialist disability services, not a single plan addresses reunion of Aboriginal children with their families or takes steps to establish plans for substitute care arrangements for Aboriginal children with their family or community.<sup>17</sup>

## Poverty

Poverty may affect Aboriginal people in a number of ways, including:

- they may not be able to afford the cost of services, some of which are provided privately;
- they may have restricted access to transport, and hence to services;
- they may not be able to visit relatives in institutions and hospital;
- they may have limited resources for purchase of clothing, which may inhibit presentation for services and/or work;
- they may not be able to carry through recommendations, such as purchase of equipment;
- they may be more susceptible to family difficulties (arising from financial difficulties); and
- they may not have the stable background and supports required to take advantage of a program or service.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> <http://www.gwb.com.au/gwb/news/sorry/stolen49.html#Heading192>

<sup>18</sup> [http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_ocill.pdf](http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_ocill.pdf)

## Aboriginal Concept of Family

Australian Aborigines are a group for whom the concept of family extends well beyond the nuclear model. Aboriginal immediate families include aunts, uncles and a number of other relatives who would be considered "distant relations" in context of the nuclear family. Aboriginal families have strict social rules regarding who they can marry. Their family structure incorporates a shared responsibility for all tasks.

It refers to people related by blood or near age, in contrast to elementary/nuclear family and joint family, have married/unmarried offspring, married/unmarried siblings and may not have three generations living together- 6-10 members living in a house.

A big family is a family consisting of at least three generations living together. Usually the family is headed by the oldest man. More often than not, it consists of grand-parents, their sons and their son's families.<sup>19</sup>

## Extended Family

An extended family structure is based on:

- blood-related (mum, dad, brother, sister, grandmother/ father, cousin, aunty, uncle)
- marriage (aunty, uncle, cousin)
- community (Elder, neighbour, friend, organisation)
- kinship system (aunty, uncles, cousins or Elders)
- non-related family (Elder, friend, community member)
- mutual respect
- a sense of belonging
- acceptance and knowledge of Aboriginal kinship ties
- mutual obligation and support.

## Kinship

Kinship systems define where a person fits into the community. Kinship systems may vary across communities and nations but the principle is the same across Australia. Kinship defines the roles and responsibilities for raising and educating children and structures systems of moral and financial support within the community. The family structure is linked with the community and with this knowledge comes a complex system of roles and obligations within the community. Aboriginal children learn at an early age the kinship ties that exist within their community and subsequently their place in the community.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extended\\_family](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extended_family)

<sup>20</sup> [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/working\\_with\\_aboriginal.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/working_with_aboriginal.pdf)

## Broaden your Concept of Family

Aboriginal-Australians understand 'who is family' and 'what is family' differently to non-Aboriginal Australians and this influences decision-making around parenting. Decisions are often based on a consensus of extended family and kin (community) views rather than on the opinion of key individuals in the 'immediate' family group. This extended view of family and consultation needs to occur in your practice with Indigenous families.

The concept of family in Aboriginal culture differs from western culture. Even distant relatives are considered very close. Responsibilities are often shared and it is not uncommon for grandmothers and aunts to care for the children. Aboriginal elders in the community are greatly respected and valued for their knowledge. In Aboriginal society, commonality, generosity, sharing and looking after each other are the main priorities.<sup>21</sup>

## The Concept of Family

*Aboriginal society:* "family" consists of the extended family, often including quite distant family members. Family concerns are of primary importance, and the greater part of a person's life and his or her social activities may be conducted closely within the family group. Death or illness in the family generally takes priority over everything else.

*Anglo-Australian society:* the basic family unit consists (perhaps) of one set of parents and children. Frequently, feelings of obligation towards those in lineal family relationships are stronger than those in collateral family relationships. Family and social relationships are not necessarily co-extensive.

## Responsibility for Children

*Aboriginal society:* children may be perceived as the responsibility of the extended family, or even the wider social group. Older people are often referred to as "Aunty", "Aunt", "Uncle" or "Unc" as a mark of respect, even if they are not blood relatives. However, children are also expected to make their own decisions from an early age.

*Anglo-Australian society:* parents are held responsible (or hold themselves responsible) for a child's behaviour, advancement and well being into that child's mid-to-late teenage years, and perhaps even beyond that time.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures\\_engaging\\_aboriginal.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures_engaging_aboriginal.pdf)

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.aija.org.au/Aboriginal%20Benchbook%202nd%20Ed/Chapter%203.pdf>



# Apparent Differences between Aboriginal and Anglo-Australian Cultural Values

## Identity

*Aboriginal society:* a person's identity may be influenced by family and social factors. The nurturing of relationships is highly valued, as is the existence of a strong social network.

*Anglo-Australian society:* personal identity is typically individualistic and measured by a person's occupation, level of education and socio-economic status.

## Life Orientation

*Aboriginal society:* the focus is often group-centred. In traditional groups, the past and the present are of great importance: the future may be less so. Immediate economic matters may take precedence over future ones. Often cooperation, rather than competition, is important.

*Anglo-Australian society:* the emphasis tends to be on individual achievement and individual rights. There is often a strong focus on the future, and perhaps the pursuit of personal happiness. Career, family and the accumulation of wealth are priorities. People are often highly competitive. Society is often diverse, stratified and status-conscious.

## Social Obligation

*Aboriginal society:* people may conform to others' expectations, particularly those of the immediate and extended family. No-one should be left in need. Family members are often expected to "look out" for one another.

*Anglo-Australian society:* is characterised by more limited relationships. There may be a sharp decline in a sense of responsibility from immediate family to other persons and to the wider community. However, charitable traits may be apparent.

## Connection with Land

*Aboriginal society:* often a strong sense of relationship to ancestral land exists, even where people have not lived in that place. Spiritual strength is gained from being in one's own country. Traditional people may wish to live in their own country if possible, or at least to visit it, and even to die there.

*Anglo-Australian society:* usually "land" has a secular and economic connotation. Although a person's birthplace may have sentimental value, it is not necessarily of great importance otherwise. Travelling widely is valued, and living far from your birthplace is common.

## Styles of Interaction - Direct or Indirect

*Aboriginal society:* since the greater part of a person's life may be lived within the family group, respect is accorded to "inner" privacy, such as personal thoughts and feelings. Only certain people may be entitled to ask or to know certain matters of a personal nature. Consequently, the use of hints and invitations to volunteer information are preferred to direct questioning.

*Anglo-Australian society:* directness and forthrightness in conversations is valued, as is the free exchange of ideas and public discussion of issues. The asking of direct questions is quite acceptable, except in relation to personal matters.

## Material Possessions

*Aboriginal society:* in traditional society material goods are not highly prized, because family and spiritual matters are of the most importance. In a more contemporary context, material possessions of all kinds may be highly valued.

*Anglo-Australian society:* material possessions are highly prized: the acquisition and accumulation of material goods is socially sanctioned.

## Education

*Aboriginal society:* the word "education" may refer to learning cultural and possibly spiritual ways, as well as to formal education in mainstream institutions.

*Anglo-Australian society:* institutional, multidisciplinary education is highly valued. Often the focus of education is to maximise career and employment prospects.

## Public Behaviour

*Aboriginal society:* social behaviour is often public. In some traditional communities, drinking in public with friends and family is accepted. In such groups, public displays of affection between men and women may be disapproved.

*Anglo-Australian society:* generally speaking, there is disapproval of public drinking. However, public displays of affection between men and women are usually acceptable.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> <http://www.aija.org.au/Aboriginal%20Benchbook%202nd%20Ed/Chapter%203.pdf>

## Use of Language by Disability Service

The communication process requires a variety of skills ie; respect, good listening, patience, understanding, common language, confirmation, clarification and more.

The understanding and use of language used in communicating with the Aboriginal community can be very different from that of the Non- Aboriginal community. There are different ways of using language, which you will have to take into account and adopt when talking to any member/s of the Aboriginal community you are working with.<sup>24</sup>

### Language

Some important points to remember! Don't assume that your meaning will be clear to everyone you talk to. People may not understand you because<sup>25</sup>:

- They don't understand the words you use.
- Ensure jargon or technical words are minimised and if used they should be fully explained;
- They have different meanings for the words you use. Check that you understand their meaning and they understand what you are saying. Don't use common language words because they may not mean the same thing to the people you are talking to (e.g. bunji can mean friend or fiancée depending whether you are speaking to Murrie's or Nyoongah's);
- You may speak too quickly. For each community you visit and consult with, identify how to speak at a rate they can understand. The level of English understood will vary from community to community; individual to individual; and
- Use your own style of speech. Do not mimic Aboriginal patterns of talk, slang, speech or accents.
- Don't assume anything.
- Be honest and sincere.
- Use simple clear, plain and appropriate language.
- Be open minded.
- Never be boastful about your ideas.
- Don't be too direct as this can be taken as confrontational and/or rude.
- Direct eye contact may also be considered confrontational and/or rude.
- Emphasise the purpose of your activity and intended benefits to the person with a disability and/or the community.
- Don't ask hypothetical questions.
- Deal in practical real issues not theoretical ideas.

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<sup>24</sup> <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/health-resources/promotion-resources?lid=4119>

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/everybodys-business/protocols-aboriginal/documents/protocols-for-consultation.pdf>

## **Be aware of the use of Acronyms, Terms or Phrases:**

Language barriers, different understanding of the same word, the use of jargon by service providers, and different life conceptions may lead to misunderstanding and ineffective service provision. Some of the words associated with disability service provision are often misunderstood.

For example, 'rehabilitation' is confused with environmental, prison or alcohol rehabilitation, and 'disability' is often taken to mean sickness.<sup>26</sup>

## **Communication Generally**

Try to be open, honest, and sincere. Always go into a community and a discussion with an open mind. Never be boastful about your ideas. In many situations Aboriginal people will use others to put their ideas forward. You may be expected to do the same.

Off - duty relaxation with Aboriginal people can help in the development of relationships which make work easier. Remote communities are likely to frown on mixing with the opposite gender outside work hours. Mixed groups are not a problem, but it is to be frowned on to join a group of the opposite gender rather than a group of your own gender.

## **Indirect Communication**

In the exchange of information, a natural part of Aboriginal communication patterns is the less direct approach. Aboriginal people tend to find the direct non-Aboriginal style of communication confrontational and maybe even rude.<sup>27</sup>

## **Non-verbal communication**

Non-verbal communication includes hand and facial gestures, eye contact and silence. The most common hand and facial gestures are used to indicate direction. If there are concerns about misinterpreting non-verbal communication, clarify by rephrasing the question or repeating the non-verbal response back by using verbal language. For example, if asking a person how many children they have and that person holds up three fingers, clarify by asking back 'So you have got three children, right?'<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> [http://www.healthinforonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050\\_reviews\\_oneill.pdf](http://www.healthinforonet.ecu.edu.au/uploads/resources/3050_reviews_oneill.pdf)

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.atsip.qld.gov.au/everybodys-business/protocols-aboriginal/documents/protocols-for-consultation.pdf>

<sup>28</sup> [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures\\_engaging\\_aboriginal.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures_engaging_aboriginal.pdf)

## Aboriginal English

There are slight differences in pronunciation and grammatical structure which may make Aboriginal English difficult to understand at first. Some Aboriginal English dialects have greater similarity to standard Australian English than others.

Aboriginal English, an adaptation of the English language, is spoken by many Aboriginal people throughout Australia. While there is a commonality with Australian English, accent, grammar, words, meanings and language use will differentiate Aboriginal English or ‘lingo’ from Australian English and slang. There are also similarities between Aboriginal English and traditional Aboriginal languages.

Just as similarities between traditional Aboriginal languages and dialects vary between areas, the use and meaning of Aboriginal English also varies according to geographic location.<sup>29</sup>

<b>Aboriginal English</b>	<b>Standard Australian English</b>
Country	land, home
mob	family, kin, group of people
lingo	Aboriginal language
Sorry Business	ceremony and rituals associated with death
grow [a child]	up raise [a child]
growl	scold, chastise
gammon	pretending, kidding, joking
cheeky	mischievous, aggressive, dangerous
deadly	fantastic, great, awesome
shame	embarrass, humiliate
tidda	girl female friend, best friend, peer
sista/sister	girl female friend, cousin, peer
brotha/brother	boy male friend, cousin, peer
gunja, yaandii	marijuana
dubbay, dub	girlfriend, female partner
gubba	non-Aboriginal person
duri (doori)	sex
charge-up,	charge drink alcohol
goomi	alcoholic
goom	alcohol
gungi, gungy	police
jillawah, jillabah	toilet
durri (durry)	cigarette, smoke

<sup>29</sup> [http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/\\_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures\\_enagaging\\_aboriginal.pdf](http://www.community.nsw.gov.au/docswr/_assets/main/documents/brighterfutures_enagaging_aboriginal.pdf)

# Historical Timeline of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander History

## Before 1788

Many nations and clans of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in harmony with the land. The 'Dreaming' is important to Aboriginal people, laying out the laws for everyone and everyday life and guiding peoples' relationships to the land. The land, sea and stars are also important to Torres Strait Islander people, whose lives are strongly guided by their spirituality and ancestral and clan laws.

## 1770

Captain James Cook takes possession of the 'whole eastern coast' of Australia in the name of King George III of Great Britain and names it New South Wales.

## 1786

The British Government chooses Botany Bay as a penal colony.

## 1788

Australia is occupied by the British under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip who establishes the first settlement at Botany Bay, which includes a penal colony.

## 1789

Smallpox decimates the Aboriginal population of Port Jackson, Botany Bay and Broken Bay. The disease spreads inland and along the coast.

## 1792

European colonists begin to settle land, fanning out further and dispossessing Aboriginal people of their land.

## 1816

Governor Macquarie announces a set of regulations controlling the free movement of Aboriginal people.

## 1835

John Batman attempts to make a 'treaty' with Aboriginal people for Port Phillip Bay, Victoria, by buying 243,000 hectares with 20 pairs of blankets, 30 tomahawks, various articles and a yearly tribute. Governor Bourke does not recognise the

‘treaty’ and the purchase is voided. This is the only time colonists attempt to sign a treaty for land.

## **1859–1861**

The Central Board for the Protection of Aborigines is established to ‘watch over the interests of Aborigines’. Many Aboriginal people are settled onto missions and reserves for better management and control.

## **1867–1868**

Aboriginal cricket team tours England and comes to note for soundly beating the English.

## **1871**

Reverend Samuel MacFarlane of the London Missionary Society arrives at the Torres Strait Islands to bring Christianity to the Islanders. This is celebrated as the ‘Coming of the Light’ by Torres Strait Islanders to this day.

## **1876**

Truganini dies in Hobart aged 73. The Tasmanian Government does not recognise the Aboriginal heritage of people of Aboriginal descent and claims the last Tasmanian Aboriginal person has died, a falsehood many still believe today.

## **1886**

Aborigines Protection Act changes the definition of Aborigine. Adult “half-castes” are no longer included in the Protection Act. Aboriginal people of mixed descent are excluded from living on missions and settle on the outskirts of towns. They are known as ‘fringe dwellers’.

## **1937**

The Conference of State and Commonwealth Authorities adopts the concept of assimilation. Aboriginal people, except those with ‘full blood’, are to be assimilated into white society.

## **1958**

The Federal Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders is formed. This national organisation’s goal was to achieve equal rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This organisation gave Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people their first political voice at a national level.

## 1965

Aboriginal activist Charles Perkins and other activists tour country New South Wales with a busload of University of Sydney students in what is to be called the 'Freedom Rides' to highlight the widespread segregation, discrimination and disadvantage experienced by Aboriginal people.

## 1967

The people of Australia vote overwhelming 'yes' in a Commonwealth referendum to grant 'Civil Rights' to all Aboriginal people, including the right to be counted in the census, and grant the Commonwealth Government the power to take control of Aboriginal Affairs throughout Australia, overriding states if necessary.

## 1972

The Tent Embassy is established on the grounds of Parliament House in Canberra creating publicity for 'Land Rights' claims and causing embarrassment to the government of the day.

## 1976

The Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976 (a fundamental piece of social reform for Aboriginal people living in the Northern Territory) is passed. It marks the first attempt of the Australian Government to recognise the Aboriginal system of land ownership. Where Aboriginal people are able to prove their traditional relationships to 'unalienated crown land', their ownership and rights to the land is legally recognised. This allows people to maintain their links and responsibilities to the land and for the dispossessed to move back to their land and set up outstations on their ancestors' country. With the Act, land formerly known as 'reserves' becomes Aboriginal land.

## 1987

A Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody is held, making 339 recommendations in its report.

## 1988

The Anti-Bicentenary March is held. Thousands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians marched in Sydney to protest the Bicentenary celebrations because they said they cannot celebrate an event that cost many Aboriginal lives.

## 1991

The Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation is established as a result of the 339th recommendation of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody.



## 1992

The Mabo judgment is delivered, in which the High Court of Australia finds that the people of the Murray Islands in the Torres Strait hold and continue to hold native title. This judgement declares the notion of ‘terra nullius’, which formed the basis of 200 years of land law in Australia, to be invalid.

## 1995–1996

A National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families is held. The inquiry concludes that “one in three Torres Strait Islander children and one in ten Aboriginal children” were removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.

## 1996

The Wik Decision of the High Court of Australia finds that Native Title can co-exist with mining and pastoral leases. Because of this decision, at the expiration of leases, the land reverts to Native Title.

## 1997

National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families releases its report, *Bringing Them Home*. Amongst its 54 recommendations is the call for a formal national apology to members of Stolen Generations and other reparations, and further efforts to assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations to reduce the continuing over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in the child protection system.

## 1998

Native Title Amendments Act is passed in response to the High Court’s Wik Decision.

## 2000

Corroboree 2000: ‘Sharing our Future’ ceremony marks the end of the 10-year reconciliation process, which began with the establishment of the Council for Reconciliation in 1991.

## 2008

The National Apology by the Parliament of Australia to the Stolen Generations and their families is made by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on behalf of the Parliament on 13 February 2008.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Working and Walking Together : - <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/resourcing/resource.cfm?loadref=187&id=24>

## **Calendar of Key Cultural Events**

### **The National Apology to the Stolen Generations – 13 February**

The formal apology by the national parliament to the Stolen Generations and their families has recognised the anguish the Stolen Generations have experienced and offered them significant comfort. With the dignity of the occasion, it gave acknowledgement to, and respect for, the Stolen Generations' experiences and offered hope and a promise of future renewal for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continue to commemorate the day to mark the significance of the event and to highlight any unfinished business in addressing the needs and aspirations of the Stolen Generations.

### **Sorry Day – 26 May**

This day marks the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission's Bringing Them Home Report. Hundreds of thousands of Australians participated in the first National Sorry Day in 1998. Each year since there have been gatherings and activities across the country, including bridge walks, barbeques and concerts, to highlight the experiences of the Stolen Generations and the legacy of the policies of child removal, and to forge further steps towards healing and reconciliation.

### **Mabo Day – 3 June**

This day celebrates the efforts Eddie Mabo and his co-plaintiffs made in campaigning for recognition of native title rights for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It commemorates the High Court's landmark judgement on 3 June 1992 in favour of Eddie Mabo, David Passi, Sam Passi, James Rice and Celuia Salee, which rejected the doctrine of terra nullius introduced at colonisation and recognised Native Title.

### **Coming of the Light Festival – 1 July**

The Torres Strait Islanders faced significant historical, cultural and social change when Reverend Samuel MacFarlane of the London Missionary Society brought Christianity to the Torres Strait on 1 July 1871. This is referred to by the Islanders as 'Coming of the Light' and is celebrated annually on 1 July by all Torres Strait Islander communities throughout the Torres Strait and mainland Australia.

## **NAIDOC – July**

NAIDOC week begins on the first Sunday in July and is a way to celebrate and promote a greater understanding of the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. During this week communities all around Australia come together to celebrate the survival of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the continuation of culture as well as demonstrate the contribution that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have made to our nation. Posters are available from the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, the National NAIDOC Committee, and NAIDOC Committees from each state and territory. Details are available on [www.naidoc.org.au](http://www.naidoc.org.au).

## **National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day – 4 August**

A SNAICC initiative, this day was first observed in 1988, with each year having a special theme. SNAICC produces an annual poster highlighting the year's theme and other resources to assist organisations and communities to celebrate the day. The day aims to demonstrate how important children are to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## **International Day of the World's Indigenous People – 9 August**

This annual day is an opportunity for governments, non-government groups and international forums to contribute to a greater appreciation of Indigenous history, culture, language, rights and aspirations through various activities and programs. It also highlights the need to work towards addressing issues facing indigenous people internationally in the areas of culture, education, health, human rights, the environment, and social and economic development. It was first designated by the United Nations General Assembly in 1994.

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<sup>31</sup> Working and Walking Together : - <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/resourcing/resource.cfm?loadref=187&id=24>

## Cultural Protocols

### Traditional Welcome to Country

A “Welcome to Country” is where an Aboriginal custodian welcomes people to their land at the beginning of a meeting, event or ceremony. An appropriate person such as a recognised Elder within the local area needs to conduct this welcome. Welcome to Country enables Traditional Custodians to give their blessing for the event. It is an important mark of respect for Aboriginal people.

### Acknowledgement of Country

An "Acknowledgement of Country" is a way that all people can show respect for Aboriginal culture and heritage and the ongoing relationship the Traditional Custodians have with the Land. At the beginning of a meeting or function, a Chair or Speaker begins by Acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the Country of the Traditional Custodians. Where the name of the Traditional Custodians is known, it is specifically used. Where it is not known, a general Acknowledgement is given.

Examples of "Acknowledgement of Country" could be:

*I would like to show my respect and Acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Land, of Elders past and present, on which this meeting takes place.*

*I would like to Acknowledge the \_\_\_\_\_ people who are the Traditional Custodians of this Land. I would also like to pay respect to the Elders both past and present of the \_\_\_\_\_ Nation and extend that respect to other Aboriginals present.*

.....

*“I would like to acknowledge that we are here today on the land of the \_\_\_\_\_ people. The \_\_\_\_\_ are the Traditional Custodians of this land and form part of the wider Aboriginal nation known as the \_\_\_\_\_ of Nation).*

*I would also like to acknowledge the present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who now reside within this area.”*

It should be noted that the acknowledgement includes Aboriginal people whose origins are from other places.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> <http://www.dlg.nsw.gov.au/dlg/dlgHome/documents/Information/AboriginalResourceKit.pdf>

## Smoking Ceremony

Smoking ceremonies are undertaken in Aboriginal communities in order to cleanse the space in which a ceremony is taking place. They are also used in the context of healing, spiritual renewal and strengthening by some Aboriginal healing practitioners. This ceremony is a ritual of purification and unity and is undertaken by an Aboriginal person with specialised cultural knowledge. Given the significant nature of the ceremony, it is usually only performed at events regarded as appropriate by the Aboriginal community.

## Fee for service

In providing cultural services such as ‘Welcome to Country,’ artistic performances and ceremonies, it is important to acknowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are using their own intellectual property. For this reason it is appropriate that people are offered payment and appropriate remuneration for their services. Appropriate payment and remuneration should be negotiated, taking into account speaker fees, travel to and from the event as well as the public profile nature of the event.

## Sorry Business and bereavement protocols

There are a number of responsibilities and obligations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to attend funerals and participate in Sorry Business or bereavement protocols.

In some communities, the Sorry Business prohibitions extend to not conducting activities, events, meetings or consultations during the observance of Sorry Business, and this must be observed and respected by all those working with Aboriginal organisations and communities. These prohibitions may last for various periods of time.

It is important to inquire before going to a location or visiting community members to ensure that Sorry Business protocols are not being observed.

Many Aboriginal communities have a prohibition on naming someone who is deceased that may last for months or even years. Where this is the case, a different name is used to refer to the person who has passed away. Some communities prohibit the depiction of the image of the deceased person, publishing their name, or broadcasting their voice. These should be observed in relation to media protocols and the depiction of images and voices.

Many Torres Strait Islander people also observe strict protocols during a bereavement, especially around using the name of those who have passed away. In some Torres Strait Islander communities, the protocols also involve family members staying in their houses for two days, or even up to a week, when someone passes away. They may only leave when the eldest woman in the family

comes to get them from the house. It may also be inappropriate to conduct other activities or business when a Torres Strait Islander community or family is observing a period of bereavement.<sup>33</sup>

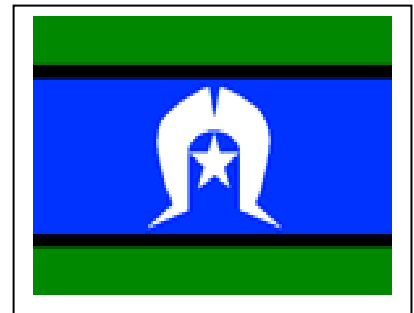
## Flags

When entering an Aboriginal community, you may see one of two flags displayed - the Aboriginal or the Torres Strait Islander.

Divided into two halves, the red base of the flag represents the Aboriginal land, while the black panel symbolises the Aboriginal people. The two halves of the flag are connected by a central yellow circle, representing the sun. The Aboriginal flag was designed by a central Australian Luritja man, Harold Thomas, and was designed to signify the unity of the Aboriginal people during the land rights movement in the 1970's. First flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines day, July 12, 1971, the flag was proclaimed the official 'Aboriginal flag of Australia' in 1975.



The Torres Strait Islander flag consists of a blue horizontal mid panel, flanked by two green panels. These are separated by thin black lines representing the people. A 5 pointed white star, symbolic of peace and the Aboriginal islander groupings, sits central to the flag. This is surrounded by a 'deri'/'dharrri' headdress, symbolic of the Torres Strait Islander People. The flag is attributed to Bernard Namok of Thursday Island.



<sup>33</sup> Working and Walking Together : - <http://srs.snaicc.asn.au/resourcing/resource.cfm?loadref=187&id=24>

## Ten top tips for policy & programs

Research has found that any policies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be based on evidence of what works, supported by strong research into how it works and why. The numerous reports, studies and research papers published over the years outline clear and repeated principles that can guide successful Indigenous programs and policies.

Reconciliation Australia has identified ten ingredients for successful Indigenous policies and programs:

1. Genuine engagement with communities in talking about, developing and implementing policies.
2. Active and well-supported Indigenous led decision-making in program-design.
3. Grass-roots, bottom-up approaches that knit together local knowledge within a national framework.
4. Local and region specific programs that are tailored to the needs of particular communities rather than "one size fits all" approaches.
5. Investment in and support for local Indigenous leadership.
6. Long-term investment in strengthening communities at a local level to decide and manage their own lives.
7. Programs and policy approaches that are geared towards long-term achievements.
8. Real investment of dollars and people based on need and ongoing support for programs that work.
9. Regular and independent public evaluation of programs and policies to make sure we learn from mistakes and successes.
10. Co-operative, cross sector approaches which reduce the burden of duplication and red-tape on community organisations.

These points are a summary of recommendations and findings from the following sources:

- The Productivity Commission Overcoming Indigenous Disadvantage: Key Indicators 2007
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Social Justice Report 2006, 2005 & 2004
- The Telethon Institute for Child Health Research, Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey 2006
- Anderson, P. & Wild, R. Ampe Akelyernemane Meke Mekarle "Little Children are Sacred" Report, 2007
- Reconciliation Australia & CAEPR, Hunt, J. & Smith, D. Indigenous Community Governance Project: Year Two Research Findings 2006 and

Building Indigenous Community Governance in Australia; Preliminary Research Findings 2005

- Dr Ken Henry, Treasury Secretary "Creating the right incentives for Indigenous Development" Address to the Cape York Institute Conference, 2007

## **Closing the Gap: Targets and building blocks**

In 2008 COAG set specific and ambitious targets for Closing the Gap:

- To close the life-expectancy gap within a generation
- To halve the gap in mortality rates for Indigenous children under five within a decade
- To ensure access to early childhood education for all Indigenous four years olds in remote communities within five years
- To halve the gap in reading, writing and numeracy achievements for children within a decade
- To halve the gap for Indigenous students in Year 12 (or equivalent) attainment rates by 2020 (amended to 2015 in April 2009)
- To halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade.

COAG recognises that overcoming Indigenous disadvantage will require a sustained commitment from all levels of government to work together and with Indigenous people, with major effort directed to seven action areas or 'building blocks'.

The building blocks endorsed by COAG are:

- Early Childhood
- Schooling
- Health
- Economic Participation
- Healthy Homes
- Safe Communities
- Governance and Leadership.

The building blocks are linked – achieving the Closing the Gap targets requires progress in each of these areas. Strategies aimed at achieving improvements in any one area will not work in isolation.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> <http://www.facs.gov.au/sa/indigenous/proserv/ctg/Pages/targets.aspx>



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