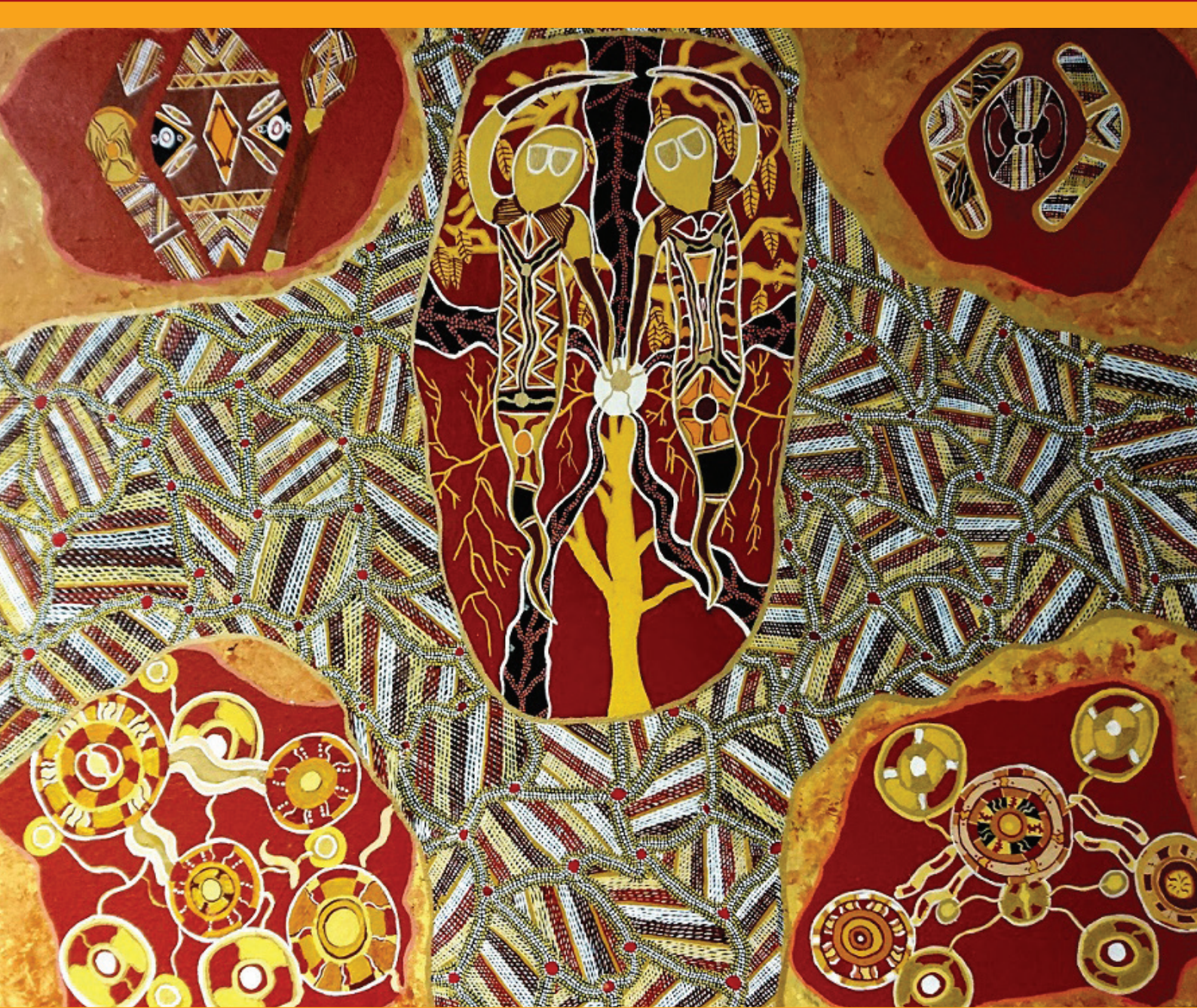




Office of the Public Advocate

Walk with Me, Talk with Me

A practice guide for OPA staff



May 2019



'Origins'

by Wally of the Mutti Mutti people

The painting, reproduced with permission on the front cover of this publication, is about connection to family and Aboriginality.

We are all connected to each other and to land. The bottom corners represent neighbouring tribes, be they near or across country. The top corners are a representation of our Aboriginal heritage tools and weapons uniquely made by our people, our ancestors. The two centre spirits are joined by a ball of power. This represents the making of your own family and the continuation of the bloodlines and family tree, which are the red dots and the golden tree behind the spirits.

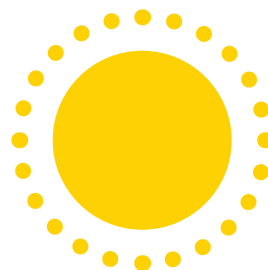
Everyone and everything has an origin. We all branch back to our Dreamtime and we all move forward to it as well.

The painting was purchased from Confined 8, an exhibition of artworks by Indigenous artists currently in, or recently released from, prisons in Victoria. The exhibition is held annually by The Torch which aims to support and provide Indigenous artists with the opportunity to connect with their communities and to promote the practice of culture in rehabilitation. The entire purchase price of artworks goes to the artist for their use on release.

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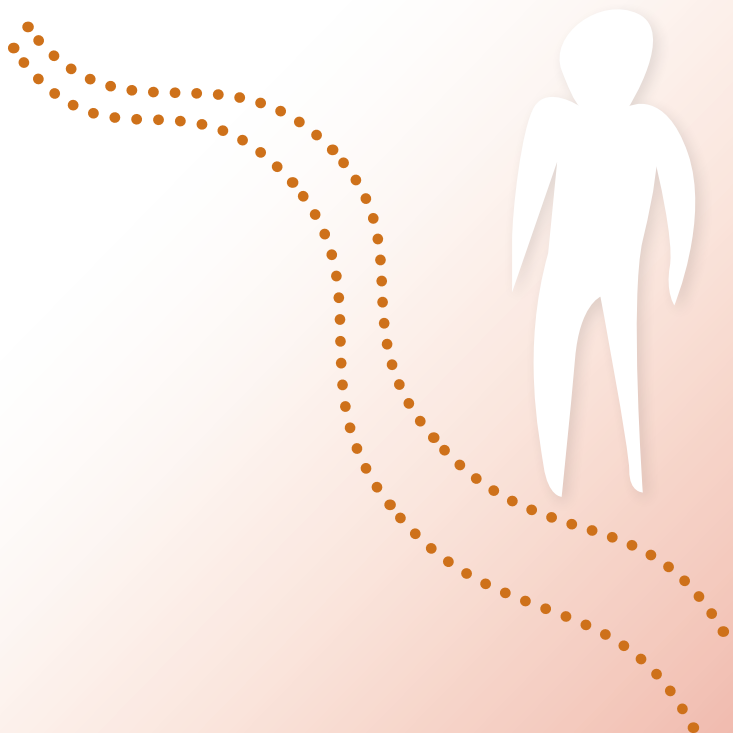
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Message from the Public Advocate

The Office of the Public Advocate (OPA) has long been concerned about how to best support members of the Victorian Koori community who have a disability and may come under guardianship or need its other services.

The development of its *Koori Inclusion Action Plan 2017- 2019* provided an opportunity to commit to actions to address gaps in service provision and data to better understand and improve it. One of the proposals was to produce a practice guide for OPA staff.

Its objective was to assist and inform OPA staff in working collaboratively and in partnership with Aboriginal communities. To enhance the inclusion and cultural understanding of anyone identifying as Aboriginal living with a disability in Victoria who may benefit from OPA's services.

A small group of OPA Advocate Guardians managed the project and met with Deaf Indigenous Community Consultancy founder, Jody Barney, to discuss ideas, themes and issues. Consultant Tracey Evans was engaged to review information, ideas and draft the guide.

The draft was provided to the Aboriginal Community Elders Service and the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission for comment. An OPA representative at Balit Narrum providing a Koori perspective to the disability sector provided the group with progressive advice.

Some of the information in the guide is drawn from *Working with Aboriginal People and Communities – A Practice Resource*, published by the NSW Department of Community Services in 2009.

On behalf of OPA's Koori Inclusion Action Plan committee, I commend this excellent guide to you. It aims to help improve services to anyone who identifies as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent in this state by explaining key cultural practices, traditions, history and sensitivities.

It may well find a broader audience and others are welcome to use and benefit from it by also helping to improve their services to Aboriginals in Victoria or elsewhere.

Colleen Pearce

Colleen Pearce
Public Advocate

OPA's Reconciliation Statement

Reaffirming the rights of Aboriginal Victorians with a disability

OPA's vision is of a just and inclusive society that values, respects, protects and promotes the dignity and human rights of all people. Our mission is to uphold the rights and interests of people with disability and work to eliminate abuse, neglect and exploitation.

OPA acknowledges Victoria's Aboriginal communities and their rich culture. We pay our respect to their Ancestors, Elders and communities, who are the custodians of the land on which we work. OPA acknowledges the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with whom we work and for whom we provide a service.

OPA recognises the importance of family and kinship networks for Aboriginal people. We acknowledge the impact of colonisation on family and kinship networks and the continued fragmentation that this entails. In undertaking our roles as advocate and as adult guardian of last resort for people with disability, in our provision of advice and education and in the operation of our Volunteer Programs that promote and protect the rights of people with disability,

OPA respects kinship ties within Aboriginal communities. We commit to developing a better understanding of the diverse experiences, priorities and needs of Aboriginal people with disability, their families and carers.

OPA recognises the importance of connection to country for Aboriginal people and their continuing spiritual connection to land. We acknowledge the impact of colonisation and dispossession of land that have contributed to Aboriginal people experiencing disadvantage across all measures of wellbeing. OPA commits to providing a welcoming, culturally responsive service that responds to the needs of Aboriginal people with disability, their families and carers. We commit to developing relationships with Aboriginal controlled organisations with a view to making our services more responsive and sensitive to the needs of Aboriginal peoples.

This vision of reconciliation will be achieved through a plan of action. The plan is monitored by the OPA Koori Inclusion Action Plan Committee. Progress against the aims of this plan are reviewed every twelve months.



Introducing the practice guide

This practice guide is intended for use by all OPA staff providing services to Aboriginal people and their communities in Victoria.

The term 'Aboriginal' is used in the guide to refer to anyone belonging to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

This guide has been developed to provide you with information about Aboriginal history and offers practice tips to how best work in collaboration and partnership with Aboriginal communities in Victoria. This resource will help you to become more culturally aware and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal people and communities.

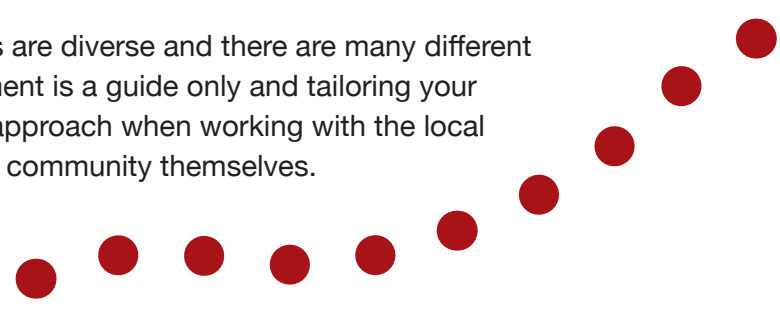
'Walk with Me, Talk with Me' provides important information to improve your knowledge and understanding of the diverse cultural differences that exist within Aboriginal families and communities.

It provides engagement and communication strategies that will improve the way OPA staff and volunteers work with and relate to Aboriginal people.

This resource will help staff to break down barriers by offering practical advice and solutions. Where possible, staff and volunteers should be guided by the Aboriginal workers that they will form partnerships with as they are the best resource.

Having a greater understanding of the history of Aboriginal people provides a foundation of understanding on how the past affects the Aboriginal community today and provides better opportunities and outcomes for Aboriginal people using OPA's services.

Victorian Aboriginal culture and communities are diverse and there are many different clans, or tribes, living in Victoria. This document is a guide only and tailoring your consultation, collaboration and partnership approach when working with the local Aboriginal community is best learnt from the community themselves.



Unique and diverse cultures

Australia's first people are two distinct peoples that are culturally very different - Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to acknowledge and celebrate the diversity of these people.



Aboriginal flag

The Aboriginal flag was designed by Aboriginal artist Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from central Australia in 1971.

The black represents the Aboriginal people, the red the earth and the spiritual relationship to the land, and the yellow the sun, the giver of life.

The flag was designed to be an eye-catching rallying symbol for Aboriginal people, a symbol of identity and unity.

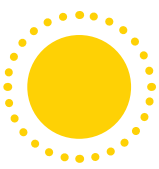


Torres Strait Islander flag

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok of Thursday Island.

The green stripes represent the land, the black stripes represent the people, the blue represents the sea, the white 'Dhari' (headdress) is a symbol of Torres Strait Islanders and the white five-pointed star symbolises the five major island groups.

As a whole, the flag symbolises the unity and identity of all Torres Strait Islanders.



Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country

Welcome to Country

Aboriginal custodianship of country needs to be recognised, where possible, at all public events. It demonstrates the commitment OPA has to reconciliation and is an important sign of respect for Aboriginal people.

Arranging a *'Welcome to Country'* ceremony that acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land shows respect for Aboriginal people as Australia's first peoples.

The ceremony is to be undertaken only by elders, locally recognised Aboriginal community spokesperson on whose land the event is being held.

If a *'Welcome to Country'* ceremony cannot be undertaken then an *'Acknowledgement of Country'* should be conducted.

Acknowledgement of Country

An *'Acknowledgement of Country'* is a way that an Aboriginal person, who is not a custodian of the land where the event is being held or non-Aboriginal people can respect the land they are on.

A chair, speaker, Master of Ceremonies or other nominated person can begin the meeting by acknowledging that the meeting is taking place in the country of the traditional owners.

'I acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land [insert name, if known] we are meeting on. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present and emerging and to any other Aboriginal people that are here today.'

Aboriginal history

History of mistrust of welfare agencies

Historically, the words 'protection' and 'intervention' have not been associated with positive outcomes for Aboriginal people, even where the actions of individuals offering such services may have been well-intended. There is an understandable mistrust of people who offer services based on these concepts.

Some reasons for this mistrust stem from European colonisation and the subsequent forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities, resulting in the Stolen Generation.

Removing children from their families was official government policy in Australia in the past and is still occurring today. Taking children from their families was one of the most devastating practices of colonisation and, for many Aboriginal people and their families, the impact of this is still felt today through trans-generational trauma.



National Apology

On 13 February 2008, history was made when newly elected Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd MP, issued a formal apology to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on behalf of current and successive Commonwealth Governments.

Apology to the Stolen Generation

'We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians.'

We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say 'sorry'.

To the mothers and the fathers, the brothers and the sisters, for the breaking up of families and communities, we say 'sorry'.

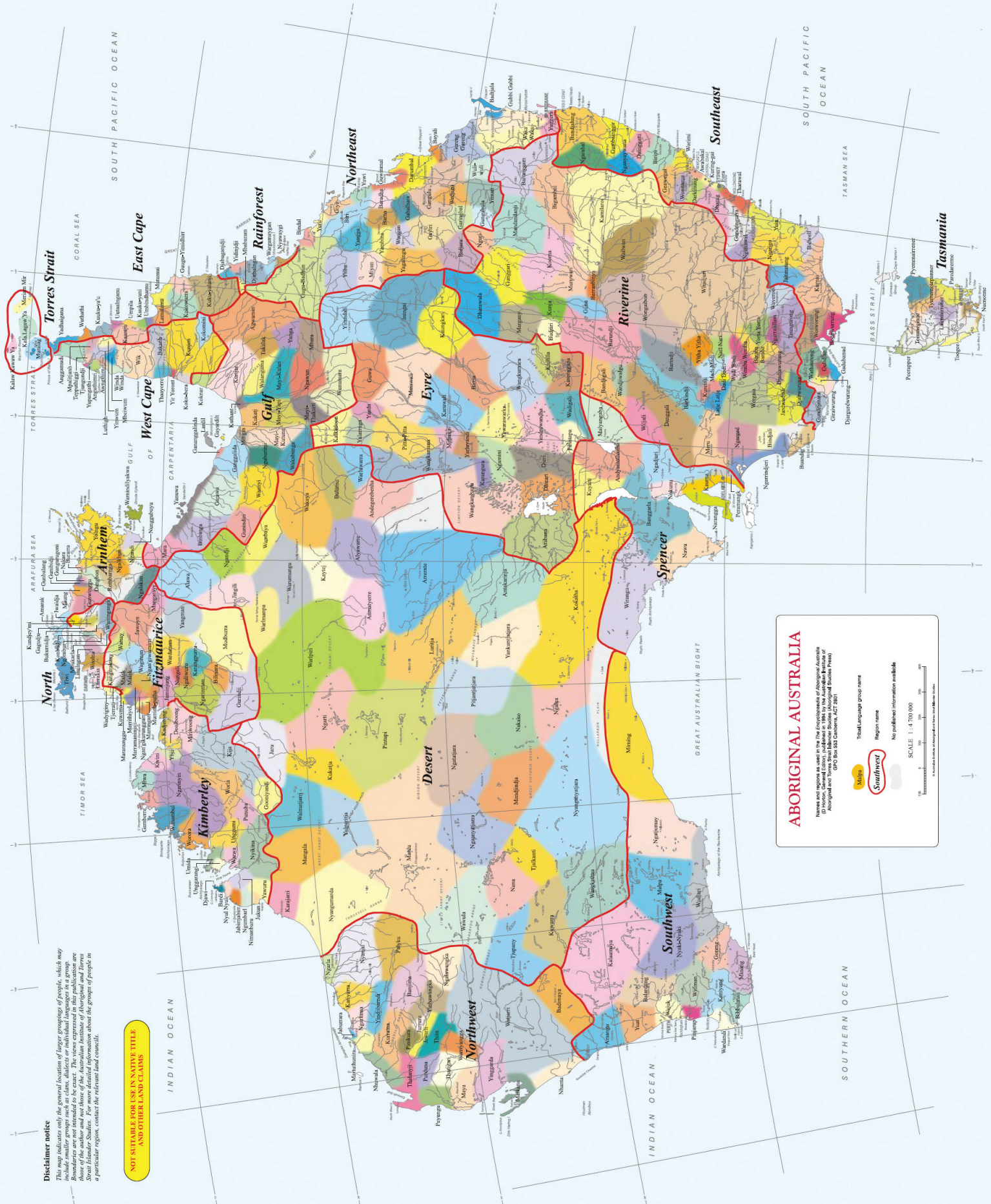
And for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud people and a proud culture, we say 'sorry'.

We, the Parliament of Australia, respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.'

Disclaimer notice

This map illustrates only the general location of large groupings of people, which may have different names in their own languages. Boundaries are not intended to be exact. The views expressed in this publication are those of the author and not those of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Studies. For more information about the group of people in a particular region, contact the relevant land council.

NOT SUITABLE FOR USE IN NATIVE TITLE AND OTHER LAND CLAIMS



ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

Names and locations are based on the Aboriginal Languages of Australia (ALA) project, published in 1988 by the Australian Bureau of Statistics. The project was funded by the Australian Government and the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Business Association (ATSIB). For more information, see the ALA website (www.ala.gov.au).

Mapa Think Language group names
Southwest Region name
No published information available

SCALE 1:4,700,000

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Map of Aboriginal Australia

The map opposite, 'The Tindale Map', is just one representation of many other maps of Aboriginal Australia.

This map attempts to represent all the language, social or nation groups of the Indigenous people of Australia. It uses published resources available between 1988 and 1994.

For a clearer view of this map, refer to a large version of it in the training room at OPA (Photo source: Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages).

David R Horton, creator, © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS and Auslin/Sinclair Knight Merz 1996.

Identifying as Aboriginal

Some Victorian laws adopt the following definition of Aboriginality endorsed by the High Court:

- is descended from an Aboriginal person
- identifies as an Aboriginal person
- is accepted by his/her Aboriginal community.

Practice tips

- people have the right to identify as Aboriginal when accessing services and their identity should not be challenged
- not all Aboriginal people will identify when asked
- you may come across people who are members of the Stolen Generations who may not have a close connection to family and community but who may identify as being Aboriginal
- questioning a person's Aboriginality due to their skin colour is offensive
- many people have mixed ancestry, which does not make them any less Aboriginal
- generic terms like 'indigenous' and 'aboriginal' (both starting with lower case letters) means 'from the beginning' in relation to inhabitants, and 'belonging to a land'
- the term 'indigenous' diminishes cultural identity, and the term should be avoided when addressing individuals or families
- avoid use of the acronyms 'A&TSI' or 'ATSI' in any written or verbal communications relating to an Aboriginal person(s) or a Torres Strait Islander person(s).

Historical information

Aboriginal people of Australia have a culture that is the oldest surviving in the world.

The beginnings of colonisation in the 1700s began a series of events that were destructive to the traditional Aboriginal way of life such as dispossession, displacement, exploitation, incarceration, invasion, the introduction of diseases, violent conflict with colonisers including massacres and genocide.

The effects of this are still felt today by Aboriginal people and their communities. In order to work with the Aboriginal community, you must first know about the history of Aboriginal people in this country.

The arrival of Europeans to this country also marked the beginning of government policies that can be categorised into five broad strategies for understanding the Aboriginal people of Australia. This understanding, at times, had been detrimental to the Aboriginal people and has resulted in the further disadvantage of Aboriginal Australians.

■ Dispossession	1788 - 1880
■ Segregation	1890 - 1950
■ Assimilation	1930 -1970
■ Reconciliation	1990- 2012
■ Self-determination	2017 to today.

Dispossession

The dispossession of land shattered the very basis and fabric of Aboriginal society as Europeans settled on it. Fundamentally, all government policies of the day supported this dispossession with the view that the Aboriginal population had no rights. The land was settled on the notion that Australia was 'terra nullius' or 'empty land.'

Segregation

The segregation era was also known as the protection era. The intent was to segregate Aboriginal people from the European population and 'protect them' as they were seen as incapable of looking after themselves or making decisions. Aboriginal people were forced to live on Christian missions where their lives controlled, rations of food provided and they were forbidden to practice the Aboriginal culture.

Assimilation

Towards the middle of the 20th century, the policies and practices across Australia began to change under the assimilation policy. The aim was for all Aboriginal people to adopt the same manner of living as 'white Australia', and be absorbed into mainstream population. The forced removal of children known as the 'stolen generation' began.

Reconciliation

In 1962, the Menzies Government amended the *Commonwealth Electoral Act 1918* to enable all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to enrol to vote in Australia federal elections. However, it was not until the 1967 referendum, that Aboriginal people were formally recognised as Australian citizens. In 1971, Aboriginal people were counted in the census as 'citizens' for the first time.

Reconciliation is about Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people working together and the referendum was the first step in the process as it was the vote of non-Aboriginal people that made this happen.

Self-determination and treaty

Self-determination means that Aboriginal people should have the right to freely pursue their economic, cultural, political and social development and make decisions about their own lives. The Victorian Government is in discussion with Aboriginal Victorians on a 'treaty, an agreement between states, nations or governments. This can include an agreement between Aboriginal peoples and governments.

A treaty can contain statements of principle, guidelines for future relationships, reparations for past injustices, and guarantees and promises about Aboriginal land, sovereignty and identity. It can combine elements of existing historic and modern treaties, and can talk about the past as well as make commitments for the future. There is much debate among the Victorian Aboriginal community as to whether this is the right approach to self-determination.

Aboriginal cultural rights

The preamble to the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities (the Charter) recognises that:

Human rights have a special importance for the Aboriginal people of Victoria, as descendants of Australia's first people, with their diverse spiritual, social, cultural and economic relationship with their traditional lands and waters.

Section 19 (2) of the Charter states that Aboriginal people hold distinct cultural rights and must not be denied the right, with other members of their community to:

- a) enjoy their identity and culture
- b) maintain their language
- c) maintain their kinship ties, and
- d) maintain their distinctive spiritual, material and economic relationship with the land and waters and other resources with which they have a connection under traditional laws.

Family decision-making

Kinship

For many Australians, the term 'kin' means immediate family and a limited number of close biological family members.

For Aboriginal people, 'kinship' refers to a broader range of kin through blood, marriage or community ties. Complex and extended kinship systems are fundamental to Aboriginal communities. Cousins can have the same relationship status as brother or sister. Aunts and uncles take on parental roles and grandparents also take on the role of parent. A biological relationship does not need to exist for family bonds to exist.

Family meetings

Family meetings are used in many sectors including health/education and relate to the service delivery provided to Aboriginal people. They are a good way to bring together the family, support workers and professionals to discuss any matters of interest. A coordinated 'family meeting' should be discussed and arranged early, where possible, as it allows the process or relationship-building to take place.

Practice tips

If you are engaged in any family work with an Aboriginal family it is important to consider the following:

- often decision-making is the responsibility of the family and not the individual. Always ask for example: 'Can you tell me the right person to talk to about your health matters?'
- ask the family spokesperson if there are other decision-makers to involve in discussions about personal and health related information
- ensure that the family spokesperson or decision-makers are consulted on all matters and are present for any sensitive conversations
- ensure that you consult with the right family members and document the reasons for their involvement in decision-making
- personal, family or community events can become the most important commitment for a person at that time and will, therefore, take precedence over any other arrangement. Take the time to discover the reason for any missed appointments, including sorry business
- open, honest, shared knowledge allows awareness, and clarity for the family
- provide ongoing information to families as it is needed to support family members to alleviate distress as events occur

- address any family concerns as they are raised
- allow time for the family to discuss new information and respond
- keep in mind that the family may have questions and need to have these answered, so prepare for the types of questions that may be asked of you
- a record of any family meetings should be kept and which of the family members were in attendance
- it is also useful to draw a genogram or family tree to assist you in understanding the connection between the family members attending any meetings
- when working with families who may not originally be from the local community, try to engage individuals and organisations from their community. This may require contacting services in another state.

Aboriginal health

'Aboriginal health' means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being, thereby, bringing about the total wellbeing of their community. It is a whole-of-life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life. (As defined in NACCHO's constitution as amended 9 March 2006 also from the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) 1989).

The social and emotional wellbeing model for Aboriginal people



Healing

Healing refers to recovery from the psychological and physical impacts of trauma.

For Aboriginal people this trauma is predominantly the result of colonisation and past government policies. Healing is not an outcome or a cure but a process that is unique to each individual. It enables individuals, families and communities to gain control over the direction of their lives and reach their full potential. Healing continues throughout a person's lifetime and across generations. It can take many forms and is underpinned by a strong cultural and spiritual base.

Intergenerational trauma

Intergenerational trauma is a form of historical trauma transmitted across generations. Survivors of the initial experience who have not healed may pass on their trauma to further generations. In Australia, intergenerational trauma particularly affects the children, grandchildren and future generations of the Stolen Generations.

Resilience

Resilience is defined as an individual or collective inner strength, developed over time, as a result or reaction to stress, sadness, dysfunction or trauma. Resilience is concerned with experiencing and identifying adversity and learning how to cope. Coping may include developing supportive relationships, maintaining links to culture and community or visiting a support program.

Lateral violence

One of the social issues which impacts Aboriginal people is lateral violence. Lateral violence within Aboriginal communities refers to “the harmful behaviors that we do to each other collectively as part of an oppressed group: within our families, within our organisations and within our communities. When we are consistently oppressed we live with great fear and great anger and we often turn on those who are closest to us” (Richard Frankland, in Australian Human Rights Commission 2011).

Lateral violence occurs in the Aboriginal community today.

Strategies for engagement

Cultural Security

Cultural security is about creating a process or an environment where Aboriginal people are treated well and in a culturally respectful manner. A culturally secure environment provides a space for Aboriginal people to feel empowered to participate.

Practice tips

- explain that you are from OPA and what you would like to discuss with them and what you are seeking from them
- advise Aboriginal people you are working within OPA's confidentiality and privacy policy and ensure that this is upheld at all times
- explain how the information they provide will be used
- Aboriginal people tend to identify with one worker and may expect to retain this same person as their worker. Wherever possible, facilitate this
- arrange a time to meet face-to-face where possible as Aboriginal people prefer this method of engagement.

Communication/use of language

Past government policies have meant that Aboriginal people were unable to practice their traditional language. For example, during the period of stolen generations, Aboriginal children were removed from their families and were punished for speaking their indigenous language. As a result of this, many traditional languages have been lost and with them the culture they convey. However, in some communities language resurrection programs are being used to revive them.

Practice tips

- be mindful that your body language will also be giving a message and Aboriginal people use non-verbal communication just as much as verbal
- be flexible, open and use culturally appropriate communication
- use easy to understand language and avoid the use of jargon wherever possible
- support the individual, family and community to make their own decisions
- use every opportunity to build capacity and resilience through the provision of appropriate supports and education
- the use of silence by Aboriginal people in communication is a reflective way for them to consider matters and respond respectfully.

Building respectful relationships

Building trust requires respect for the individual, their culture and community, and time. Aboriginal people may initially engage at a superficial level but will develop deeper relationships only with time.

Respect for Aboriginal heritage and culture, and the rights of Aboriginal people to control their own culture are a fundamental step towards the goal of reconciliation.

When trying to engage an Aboriginal person in a therapeutic relationship, for example, to offer support to complete an assessment, be aware that western medicine-styles of engagement might not be the most appropriate or effective.

Practice tips

- take the time required to enable the person to feel comfortable - the engagement will not be positive until they feel comfortable and trust that you are genuine in your intent to help and have some understanding of their world-view.
- respect the individual's life experiences and life circumstances
- ensure the discussions take place in a safe space that is conducive to sharing space and solving problems
- consider the venue or setting - sometimes an unfamiliar or confined space can cause distress and cause a person to present as anxious or stressed
- be open to accepting 'third party' referrals when a person may not be able to approach you directly (but be cautious about confidentiality)
- use visual tools, practical concepts and a narrative approach rather than lots of personal questions.

Assessing need

All effective intervention with Aboriginal people is underpinned by good assessment. Every Aboriginal person is unique, despite shared experiences and issues.

Assessment is a process of becoming aware of the individual and the issues and circumstances that impact on them, gathering information and interpreting it to reach conclusions about their needs and how best to respond.

Different types of assessment set out to answer different questions about: patterns, the person's state of mental and physical health, their current readiness and capacity to change, the family and social supports and stressors in their life, risk, and their wishes and needs.

'Needs assessment' assists workers to:

- be well-informed about an individual's needs
- match interventions to the assessed needs
- choose resources which fit the person's age
- choose resources which fit the person's readiness to change
- take a holistic view of the person's needs
- ensure work with the person is proactive and purposeful.

Assessment is an ongoing process of updating the information gathered and refining the understanding of the person's issues and needs. Information is gathered directly from the person as well as from other sources, where possible and appropriate.

As Aboriginal people have a holistic view of health, their immediate practical needs should be addressed before a complete assessment can be made. Practical needs may be transport to attend appointments.

Resilience

The diagram below depicts the important principles of working with Aboriginal people and considerations in each of the following areas will provide you with a better understanding of how best to work with Aboriginal people.

For example, ask yourself the following question: 'Does the person have strong cultural connections and if so what should I be aware of?'

If providing a report, be sure to include the protective factors in the areas of family, community, culture and country.

This analysis also provides you with an assessment framework to identify any strengths and weaknesses of a person and their family that you will be working with.



Partnerships and effective consultation

Consider your role as one to provide advocacy and empowerment when working with the Aboriginal community.

Aboriginal workers

Aboriginal workers within Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community organisations can play a significant role in improving outcomes for Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal workers do not make decisions on case management direction as their role is to inform the decision-making process. They ensure that community organisations work in a culturally appropriate way by giving information and advice so that the cultural needs of Aboriginal people are met.

Ask the Aboriginal person you are working with if they would like to speak to an Aboriginal worker such as a Aboriginal Liaison Officer in a hospital setting. Be aware that for cultural or family reasons, they may not wish to be assisted by an Aboriginal worker.

Practice tips

- effective consultation with Aboriginal workers is an essential ongoing process
- consultation with Aboriginal workers should be respectful and professional
- each consultation needs to be booked as per the local protocol with the issues to be discussed clearly defined and ensure enough time for a response
- aim to provide continuity and consistency in staff allocated to working with Aboriginal people as this helps to build rapport
- as members of their community, Aboriginal workers have cultural obligations and responsibilities that extend beyond the workplace and sometimes conflicts of interest may occur. These pressures on Aboriginal workers need to be considered and, where necessary, the Aboriginal worker will declare any conflicts of interest.

Engaging with Aboriginal organisations

It is important to remember that it may take some time to develop a good working relationship with individuals and organisations.

Follow these practice tips when seeking to engage external Aboriginal organisations and peak bodies:

Practice tips

- a respectful practice is for OPA staff to Acknowledge Country prior to any formal discussions being held. This gesture offers respect to the Aboriginal people whose land you are on and demonstrates respect for the person and family. This practice should be part of any VCAT hearings you are involved in
- also acknowledge Aboriginal people identified in any written documentation provided to VCAT. For example “Betty” is a Gunditjmara woman from western Victoria. Also ensure any cultural information is provided where relevant and have the discussion with family members on what should be included
- invite Aboriginal community members to be on steering committees and working groups to ensure their voice is heard
- research Aboriginal organisations in the area and find out what services they provide the community
- find out who the key contacts in the Aboriginal community are so that you are best-placed to be consulting with the right people. These contacts and/or agencies will have historical information that will assist you to be better informed about the person’s family, life and history
- talk to Aboriginal staff, use websites or local directories to get phone numbers and ring and speak to the person you have been advised to contact
- where possible use a suitable venue for consultation (eg. a meeting with elders may be more suited to being outdoors)
- consider acknowledging sensitive questions right from the start. Beginning a consultation with: ‘Maybe it is a bit embarrassing to ask you about this...’ is likely to make the person feel more comfortable in responding.

Remember to recognise the important role that you will play in working with Aboriginal communities to improve outcomes for Aboriginal people in the work that you will be doing.

Useful terms and other information

Elders

Elders are highly respected as important contributors to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They instill and pass down cultural values, traditions and responsibilities to the younger generation and keep the spirit of culture alive. They are the custodians of wisdom and knowledge of culture, law and lore.

Elders often assume multiple roles within families and communities and, as a result, can provide a wide range of opportunities to contribute to family and community functioning. Female and male elders play very different roles in traditional spiritual systems. They share their knowledge and hand down spiritual history and culture to the younger generation. This allows spirituality to be preserved and strengthens social sentiments, i.e. keeping unity and respect.

It is important to note that one does not become an elder at a particular age, that the role they have played in the family and community is what defines elder status.

Aunty and Uncle

‘Aunty’ and ‘Uncle’ are terms of respect within an extended family and do not necessarily follow the traditional western use of these terms. They can also be used as terms of respect for senior people who are not necessarily family members.

Men’s and women’s business

Be aware that Aboriginal culture has strong gender roles expressed through ‘men’s business’ and ‘women’s business’:

Be aware that while Torres Strait Islander cultures have gender based cultural beliefs, the terms ‘mens and womens business’ should not be used.

- women address women’s matters
- men address men’s matters
- however, remember that some Aboriginal people are also comfortable with Western ways of relating to men and women.

Sorry business

The period of mourning for a deceased Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is commonly known as Sorry business. When Aboriginal people mourn the loss of a family member they follow Aboriginal death ceremonies, or 'sorry business'.

When someone passes away in the Aboriginal community and they are not in their own close family, the community mourns the loss of that person as the notion of 'family' also relates to the community one comes from or lives in.

Yarning

A 'yarning circle' is an important process within Aboriginal culture. It provides an opportunity to learn from each other, share stories, build respectful relationships, and to preserve and pass on cultural knowledge. This is an effective engagement tool that can be used when working with Aboriginal people.

Mob

'Mob' is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country. It is a term that is extremely important to Aboriginal people because it is used to identify who they are and where they belong. 'Mob' is generally used by Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people, therefore, it is not appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use it.

Shame

'Shame' is a word that can have many meanings but, more often than not it is linked in with things that are considered embarrassing, private, or have associated stigma or negative connotations.

Shame is also linked with issues of confidentiality. You may often hear Aboriginal people refer to an incident that 'shamed' them or they are too 'shame' to say or do something. This means they were ashamed or embarrassed.

Shame can also be used as a form of punishment. When working with Aboriginal people great care should be taken to ensure that cultural shaming is not used as a form of punishment.

Deadly

Deadly is a term used by many Aboriginal people to mean excellent or very good. It's useage is similar to how some young people use the slang word 'sick'.

Key Aboriginal events

JANUARY 26

Australia Day – Invasion Day or Survival Day

Annual events take place each year across the nation such as 'Yabun' in Sydney, the Survival Day Picnic on the Frankston Foreshore in Victoria, stalls and the Share the Spirit Festival in the Treasury Gardens, Victoria.

The events celebrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and heritage. They showcase all aspects of Aboriginal culture, including music, dance, food, language, politics, literature, and arts and crafts and are a wonderful opportunity to learn more about Australia's Aboriginal heritage.

FEBRUARY 13

Anniversary of the National Apology

On 13 February 2008 the Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd MP delivered a national apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Australian Government.

It marked an important milestone in Australia's history. By validating the experiences of the Stolen Generations, the foundations were laid for healing to take place and for a reconciled Australia in which everyone belongs. See www.nsd.org.au

MARCH 20

Anniversary of the signing of the Close the Gap Statement of Intent on Indigenous Health Equality

The Government and Aboriginal health leaders signed a Statement of Intent in the Great Hall of Parliament House to work together to achieve equality in health status and life expectancy between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal Australians by the year 2030.

APRIL 2

National Close the Gap on Indigenous Health Equality Day

The day gives people the opportunity to show their support for the Close the Gap Indigenous Health Equality Campaign which calls for closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and other Australians. <http://www.indigenous.gov.au/health/>

MAY 26

National Sorry Day

The landmark 'Bringing Them Home' Report was tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997. This report was the result of a two-year National Inquiry into the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, community and cultural identity. This removal and separation was carried out under Federal, State and Territory laws and policies from the 1800s to the 1970s.

The report recommended (Recommendation No 7a) that a National Sorry Day be held each year on 26 May "to commemorate the history of forcible removals and its effects".

As a result of this recommendation, the community-based organisation, the National Sorry Day Committee (NSDC), was formed. See www.nsdcc.org.au

MAY 27

Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum

The 1967 referendum saw 90 per cent of non-Aboriginal Australians vote to give the Commonwealth the power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and recognise them in population determinations.

27 MAY - 3 JUNE

National Reconciliation Week

Australian Football League Indigenous round

National Reconciliation Week celebrates the rich culture of the First Australians. It began in 1996 to provide focus for nationwide reconciliation activities.

National Reconciliation Week coincides with two significant dates in Australia's history which provide strong symbols of the aspirations for reconciliation. May 27 marks the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum and June 3 marks the anniversary of the High Court's judgment in the 1992 Mabo case. See reconciliation.org.au

Commemorating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander war veterans

Ceremonies commemorating Aboriginal veterans are held in the major capital cities during Reconciliation Week, organised by the Department of Veterans' Affairs. See dva.gov.au

JUNE 3

Mabo Day

Mabo Day is held on 3 June to celebrate Eddie Mabo, who helped overturn 'terra nullius' in a ten-year campaign through the courts ending in the historic High Court Mabo Judgment.

The Mabo decision gave legal recognition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's connection to their country, a connection that existed prior to colonisation and continues today. This decision paved the way for land rights or the Native Title system.

JULY (First week)

National NAIDOC Week

NAIDOC originally stood for 'National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee'. It has since taken on the acronym NAIDOC and the celebrations begin on the first Sunday in July and run for one week. There is a national theme every year. One of the main events of the week is the NAIDOC ball and awards.

The awards are celebrated in the national focus city and recognise the outstanding contributions that Aboriginal people make to improve the lives of people in their communities and beyond, or to promote Aboriginal culture in the wider community, or the excellence they've shown in their chosen field. See <http://www.naidoc.org.au>

AUGUST 4

National Aboriginal and Islander Children's Day

An annual event established by SNAICC in 1988 for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders to highlight and celebrate the strength and culture of their children. SNAICC encourages all Aboriginal community organisations, mainstream child and family services, government and early childhood services, schools and any other key stakeholders to celebrate this day.

OPA Resources

■ OPA Koori Inclusion and Action Plan 2017-2019

■ Research report

A Koori Inclusion and Action Plan data report to inform OPA service delivery, June 2010-June 2015

The Your life, Your Choice suite of publications

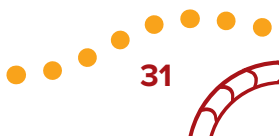
- Planning for your Future (handbook)
- Planning for your Future (brochure)
- Planning for your Future by Making Powers of Attorney (factsheet)
- Guardianship and Administration (factsheet)
- Medical Treatment Decisions (factsheet)

Independent Third Person Program

- Independent Third Person (ITP) Program Card
- Independent Third Person (ITP) Program - Helping Koori people with a cognitive disability or mental illness in interviews with Victoria Police (brochure)

Other Useful Resources

- Korin Korin Balit-Djak, Aboriginal health, wellbeing and safety strategic plan 2017-2027, State of Victoria, Australia
- Balit Murrup, Aboriginal social and emotional wellbeing framework 2017-2027, State of Victoria Department of Health and Human Services





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