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SA Health Aboriginal Culture and History Handbook



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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are warned that this document contains images of deceased people.

The term Aboriginal is used respectively in this document as an all-encompassing term for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture.

Introduction

This handbook presents background information on Aboriginal history, culture, demography and current affairs. This document is intended to provide brief and guiding information but is in no way intended to be exhaustive. There are many other resource guides available which may be specific to your job role and/or clinical area. This document is also not intended to negate the need for cultural competency/ capability and/or Aboriginal cultural awareness training.

A Note on Cultural Capability

Cultural capability is a continuous process of learning and broadening our knowledge and respect for diverse individuals and communities. Cultural capability means having an understanding of Aboriginal histories, values, beliefs and experiences. It is not about being an expert on Aboriginal culture but it is about being aware of cultural differences, appreciating and understanding those differences, and accepting them.

One of the most critical factors in cross-cultural engagement and communication is to remember that culture is not homogenous. Within the Aboriginal community there is diversity in language and values just as in any other community. The content in this guide should not take away from the importance of considering individual choice, experience and background. Always ask what an Aboriginal person's preference is for engagement or communication styles as they will differ from the next.

A Note on Terminology

Documents relating to Aboriginal health make varying and sometimes confusing use of the terms 'Indigenous', 'Aboriginal' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. The choice of term is largely determined by context. Aboriginal people are those who belong to country within mainland Australia whilst Torres Strait Islander people belong to the islands of Torres Strait just north of Australia.

'Indigenous' or 'Indigenous peoples' is sometimes used, particularly in a national context and in academia, to make reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, in South Australia these are generally not the preferred terms. It is preferable to make reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, in some instances only mentioning 'Aboriginal people' is common. In this case it may be culturally inclusive to include a disclaimer at the beginning of the document, similar to the one that appears on this resource.

Some terms are inappropriate and can have negative connotations. The following terms are not widely accepted as appropriate:

- > Aborigines
- > Aboriginals (use Aboriginal people instead)
- > Natives
- > Tribal
- > Acronyms such as ATSI
- > Any abbreviations or nicknames

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The acronym ATSI is often used in written documents but is generally not a preferred term. Verbally describing someone or something as ATSI is particularly inappropriate.

'Aboriginal' should be capitalised, just as 'Australian' would be. The term 'aboriginal' in lower case refers to an aboriginal person from any part of the world, and not specifically to the first peoples of Australia. Similarly, it is widely agreed to be inappropriate to quantify the amount of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage somebody has. Terms such as half-Aboriginal are considered offensive.

Nunga/ Nyunga are terms used to refer to a South Australian Aboriginal person and are used mostly by Aboriginal people in coastal or metropolitan regions of South Australia. In remote communities that are north-west of South Australia, the word Anangu is used.

Similar identified terms are used in some areas of Australia.

- > Koori/Koorie for New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania
- > Murri for some areas of Queensland
- > Noongar for some areas of Western Australia

The most important message when considering this terminology is to simply ask an individual how they would like to be referred to. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities are diverse so confirming with each individual is the best course of action.

Background

Language Groups

Aboriginal settlement of Australia is estimated to date back approximately 50,000-150,000 years. It is estimated that prior to European settlement there were approximately 270 language groups with around 600 different dialects¹.

Aboriginal Communities in South Australia

There are numerous Aboriginal communities across South Australia that fall under several Land Rights Acts. Most of these communities are located on land which was previously used as missions or reserves. They are governed by a council elected by the community, most require permission or a permit to enter, and alcohol is prohibited.

Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (Far North West of South Australia)

- > Amata
- > Mimili
- > Kalka
- > Pukatja (Ernabella)
- > Iwantja (Indulkana)
- > Umuwa
- > Yunyarini
- > Kaltjiti (Fregon)
- > Pipalyatjara
- > Watarru

Maralinga Tjarutja Lands (Far West of South Australia)

- > Oak Valley

Other Communities

- > Yalata (West Coast)
- > Koonibba (West Coast)
- > Port Lincoln Aboriginal Community Council
- > Gerard (Riverland)
- > Nepabunna (Flinders Rangers)
- > Dunjiba (Oodnadatta)
- > Point Pearce (near Port Victoria)
- > Raukkan (near Meningie)
- > Umoona (adjacent to Coober Pedy)
- > Kalparrin (Murray Bridge)
- > Davenport (Port Augusta)

Most of these communities are self-contained and have Aboriginal schools, TAFE and health services.

In addition to Aboriginal communities, there are Aboriginal Homelands, or Outstations. Homelands are “small decentralised communities of close kin, established by the movement of Aboriginal peoples to land of social, cultural and economic significance to them”ⁱⁱ. The Homelands Movement began in the late 1960s and into the 1970s and 80s, when close family groups left a larger community and relocated to their traditional lands and waters. Homelands are the result of Aboriginal peoples’ decisions, rather than that of any government. Homelands can often have lower levels of social problems, and improved health and wellbeing compared with larger communities.

Population

Conversely to the non-Aboriginal population, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is getting younger and is also growing at twice the rate of the non-Aboriginal population. If efforts towards closing the gap in health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not meaningful and effective, this population growth will have critical effects on the health system and expenditure.

Approximately half of South Australia’s Aboriginal population lives in metropolitan Adelaide, and the other half in rural South Australia. Approximately 30% of the South Australian Aboriginal population lives in Northern Adelaide.

Recent History

Stolen Generations

Aboriginal history from 1869 to 1969 were characterised by the lawful and unlawful removal of Aboriginal children from their families. Aboriginal children were forcibly removed from their families and placed in reformatory, industrial school, dormitories and other state or church institutions. Some were adopted out to non-Aboriginal parents. In South Australia, this practice officially started under law in 1911, however was practiced before thenⁱⁱⁱ.

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In South Australia, the Colebrook Home housed and schooled hundreds of Aboriginal children. Originally established in Oodnadatta in 1924, it was moved south to Quorn in 1927. Children were from language groups such as Adnyamathanha, Arrente, Arabana, Antakarinja and Pitjantjatjara. Some children were placed at the home so they could receive schooling in town, but others were forcibly removed from their families for assimilation and/or religious purposesⁱⁱⁱ.

In 1944 the Colebrook Home moved to Eden Hills in Adelaide where the children attended school on site until 1953, because other schools refused to accept them. Colebrook Home was closed in 1981, and the Eden Hills building no longer exists. The Colebrook Blackwood Reconciliation Park was opened at the site^{iv}.



Colebrook Home in Eden Hills, Adelaide ca. 1930

Colebrook Home, ca. 1930, *State Library of South Australia B49356*, viewed 28/09/12, <<http://guides.slsa.sa.gov.au>>

The removal of children from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continues to have an impact today. It has had significant impact on families, for example in some cases, the loss of cultural norms for parenting.

In the 1990s the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission conducted a national inquiry into the practice of removing children. The 'Bringing Them Home' National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children was tabled in Parliament on 26 May 1997. The resulting report outlined the various experiences of individuals and families as a response to these policies, for example:

- > Many of the institutions and homes in which the children were placed were very cruel, and sexual and physical abuse of the children was common.
- > Many who managed the removals, including both the government and churches, abused their power and breached their obligations as protectors and carers.
- > Slave-like conditions were experienced by young girls sent out to rural properties to perform domestic duties.

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Many Aboriginal people currently in their middle years are victims of the Stolen Generations. It is fair to say that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced some impact, whether direct or indirect, as a result of these policies. These policies have a continued impact, for example:

- > Feelings of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress and suicide are commonplace among victims.
- > 50% of deaths investigated by the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody were of people who had been removed from their families as children.
- > Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were placed with white families did not find out about their background until late in life.
- > Sometimes when victims of the Stolen Generations come to parent their own children there is a lack of understanding about how to parent due to their past experiences growing up.

One of the key recommendations of the report was for members of State and Commonwealth governments to apologise for these past policies, in a spirit of Reconciliation. In 1997, the Prime Minister John Howard refused to make an official apology, on the basis that the Commonwealth is not responsible for the mistakes of the past. Instead of an apology the Prime Minister passed a 'Statement of Regret and Motion of Reconciliation' in Parliament.

At the state level, governments responded more positively to the 'Bringing Them Home' Report. NSW Premier Bob Carr was the first State leader to make a formal apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the NSW Government and the Australian people. In the following years all state and territory leaders also apologised. Many church leaders have also apologised and have started programs to raise awareness amongst their members about the Stolen Generations.

In 2007 a new Labour Government was elected and promised to finally make a Commonwealth apology to the Stolen Generations. At the first session of the new Federal Parliament, on 13 February 2008, the new Prime Minister Kevin Rudd issued an official apology to the Stolen Generations on behalf of the Government. Members of the Stolen Generation were invited onto the floor of Parliament and to watch the apology from the gallery. The apology was welcomed by the majority of Australians and celebrations were held across the country.

Self-Determination

Self-determination was introduced as a formal policy by the Whitlam Government in 1972. In a practical sense, this was different across the country but saw limited rights or ownership over land, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, community-elected councils and a growing ideology among policy makers to defer to Aboriginal people to make their own decisions on issues that affect them^v.

Self-determination can be defined as the right of all peoples to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development^{vi}. It also involves transferring decision-making power from governments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples^{vii}.

SA Health supports self-determination in a practical way by assisting Aboriginal health services to transition to community-control. SA Health advocates that Aboriginal Community Controlled-Health Services are the preferred model of health care for Aboriginal people, increasing both access to services and positive health outcomes.

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The peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) is the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia. The following list provides the names of all the ACCHS in South Australia and their location:

- > Aboriginal Sobriety Group (State-Wide)
- > Ceduna/ Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service
- > Kalparrin Community (Murray Bridge)
- > Nganampa Health Council (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands)
- > Nunkuwarrin Yunti of SA Inc. (Metropolitan Adelaide)
- > Nunyara Wellbeing Centre Inc. (Whyalla)
- > Oak Valley Health Service (Maralinga Tjarutja Lands)
- > Pangula Mannamurna Inc.(Mt Gambier)
- > Pika Wiya Health Service (Port Augusta and Far North)
- > Port Lincoln Aboriginal Health Service
- > Tullawon Health Service (Yalata, near Ceduna)
- > Umoona Tjutagku Health Service (Coober Pedy)

Reconciliation

The 1991 Report of the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody began discussions about formal Reconciliation. A recommendation of the report was for all political leaders and their parties to recognise that Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians must be achieved. Formal Reconciliation works towards the prevention of community division, discord and injustice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples^{viii}.

Part of this process involved the establishment of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, to promote Reconciliation between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community. The year 2001, the centenary of Federation, marked the end of the Council's term; however Reconciliation Australia was established, a not-for-profit foundation with the aim of continuing the national focus for Reconciliation.

According to the Reconciliation Australia, "Reconciliation is about building better relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the wider Australian community for the benefit of all Australians"^{viii}.

The 2001 anniversary saw numerous 'bridge walks' occur across Australia, with the most famous happening across Sydney Harbour Bridge, where 300,000 people crossed the bridge in support of Reconciliation and a national apology to the Stolen Generations. Other cities soon followed and in Adelaide 55,000 people crossed King William Street in a show of support ^{vii}.



Sydney Harbour Bridge During the Walk for Reconciliation

National Museum Australia, 2013, *Symbols of Australia*, viewed 24/10/2013,
<https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/walk-for-reconciliation>

Native Title

The struggle for Aboriginal land rights has been a continual one and has unfortunately only been successful for some language groups. However, since 1992, Native Title has been recognised under Australian law. Through a historic case, Eddie Koiki Mabo challenged the doctrine of terra nullius (land belonging to no one) for his homeland in Murray Island in the Torres Strait. The High Court ruled that terra nullius should not have been applied to Australia and that common law would recognise Native Title^{ix}.

Native title is the recognition by Australian law that some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have rights and interests to their land that come from their traditional laws and customs^{ix}. This may include rights to:

- > live on the area
- > access the area for traditional purposes, such as camping or to do ceremonies
- > visit and protect important places and sites
- > hunt, fish and gather food or traditional resources like water, wood and ochre
- > teach law and custom on country.

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Eddie Mabo on the Island of Mer

Museum of Australian Democracy, 2012, *Documenting a Democracy*, viewed 28/9/12, <
<http://foundingdocs.gov.au/enlargement-eid-86-pid-33.html>>

Native title rights and interests are different from land rights in that land rights are a grant of title from government. The source of Native Title rights and interests is the system of traditional laws and customs of the Native Title holders themselves. There have been several Native Title Consent Determinations in South Australia, and many Indigenous Land Use Agreements are in place^x.



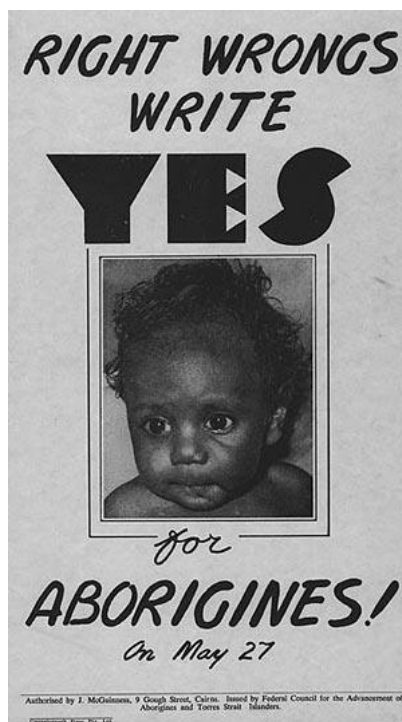
Attorney-General John Rau visits De Rose Hill Station, the first South Australian Native Title Claim to receive a Consent Determination

SA Native Title Services, 2011, *Attorney General Meets De Rose Hill Native Title Holders*, viewed 2/10/2013, <<http://www.nativetitlesa.org/>>

Constitutional Recognition

The Constitution, written in 1901, is the basis for our laws and political system. The Constitution specifically denied the Commonwealth power to make laws for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and excluded the necessity to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the census. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were governed by the Flora and Fauna Acts under their state laws^{xi}.

In a historic referendum in 1967, 90% of Australian voters supported changes to these parts of the Constitution which were discriminatory to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This is the most overwhelming 'yes' vote of any Australian referendum^{xi}.



Campaign Pamphlet for 1967 Referendum

National Museum of Australia, 2008, *Campaigning for Indigenous Rights*, viewed 28/09/2012, <https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/indigenous-referendum>

The Constitution still, however, includes the possibility for discrimination based on race and ignores Australia's first peoples and their role as custodians of the world's oldest continuing culture. This is why further constitutional reform is seen as a pressing issue among some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples^{xi}.

The only way to change the constitution is through a referendum process, which is historically very difficult in Australia. The Commonwealth Government appointed an expert panel to consult and discuss the issue of constitutional recognition with the public. These discussions formed the body of a report provided to government in January 2012^{xi}.

After a period of consideration, discussion and consultation with all Australians, the Panel developed options for formally recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the Constitution. They provided their report to government on 19 January 2012^{xi}.

On 21 March 2013 the South Australian parliament reformed the South Australian constitution via the

Constitution (Recognition of Aboriginal Peoples) Amendment Bill 2013. The bill recognises past injustices and acknowledges Aboriginal people as the traditional owners of South Australia.

A Continuing Culture

This section discusses historical, socio-economic and cultural aspects of Aboriginal life in Australia, in general and broad terms. There are many differences across Australia's culturally distinct language groups.

Cultural competency is not about being an expert in all aspects of culture^{xii}, and the following is just provided as a guide. An awareness of the following aspects of culture, however, will go a long way in lifting the cultural capacity of SA Health and starting a learning process.

Spirituality

The Dreamtime refers to a time in the far distant past when the land was flat, dark and empty. Spirit Ancestors appeared both in human form and others appeared as being both human, plant and/or animal and described by terms such as kangaroo-man or native fig-man. They are described as being both equally in essence, rather than in form, e.g. a centaur. Spirit Ancestors moved through the land and created geographical features such as rivers, hills, rocks, flowers and the natural environment. Then they disappeared into the earth, sea and sky. The places where Spirit Ancestors disappeared are sacred places. While the Dreamtime refers to a past era, all people have a direct link to it through their conception and relive it in their participation of daily and ritual lifeⁱ.

The Dreaming, which is seen as past, present and future, explains the origins of the universe, the workings of nature and humanity, and the cycle of life and death^{xiii}. Each Aboriginal group has its own Dreaming. The Dreaming is told through song, story, poetry, art, drama and dance. These stories can, for example, provide a map of locations of food and water sources, landmarks of importance, and sacred sites. Various Aboriginal languages have their own word for the Dreaming. Pitjantjatjara people in North-West South Australia refer to it as Tjurkurpaⁱ.

Dreaming stories have been told verbally over generations to record the journeys of the Spirit Ancestors. They are told for amusement, to advise of rules and taboos, to warn of danger, and to explain how things came into being e.g. a story to explain why the emu cannot fly, or why the kookaburra laughsⁱ.

The Dreaming tells how the Spirit Ancestors gave life to the land and laid down the Lore^{xiii}. The Lore governs the structure of society, rituals to maintain the life of the land, and rules for human behaviour. The Lore structures Aboriginal life, relations between sexes and kinship, and prescribes a network of obligations to people, land and spirits. Everyday living, hunting and gathering is governed by the Lore. In some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures an Aboriginal boy or girl cannot marry until they obtain adulthood through initiation, for example. Adulthood in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities is not determined by European measures or legal legislative age; rather it is determined by an individual's knowledge system.

A strong concept interconnected with The Dreaming and the Lore is Country. Country is central to Aboriginal identity and has spiritual, religious, economic, social, protective and recreational significance. Country provides a link between The Dreaming, Aboriginal people and the Lore^{xiii}. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' relationships with Country is sacred and cannot be lost^{xiv}. Generally speaking, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people believe they do not own the land, in the European sense, but believe they belong to and sprang from it. As such, strong

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connections to Country are maintained because it defines cultural identity. The territorial boundaries of each language group are validated through the Dreaming, as each Dreaming story is unique to the language group ^{xiv}. Anthropologist WEH Stanner described Aboriginal people's relationship with Country in 1979,

"No English words are good enough to give a sense of the links between an Aboriginal group and its homeland. Our word 'home', as warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean 'camp', 'hearth', 'country', 'everlasting home', 'totem place', 'life source', 'spirit centre', and much else all in one... I have seen an Aboriginal embrace the earth he walked on. To put our words 'home' and 'land' together into 'homeland' is a little better but not much. A different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance".

Linked in with the concepts of Dreaming, Spirit Ancestors and Country, Aboriginal language groups and/or smaller sub groups (or families or individuals) have a special, spiritual relationship with a Totem. There is a bond of friendship and kinship between the individual and the totem. The totem could be an animal, plant, or other object and there are various different types of totems across Australia^{xv}.

Ancestral totems derive from the Spirit Ancestors, who left behind their life essences which transformed into some part of the natural environment (animal, plant, body parts, rocks etc.) An individual's spirit comes from their ancestral totem and links them to Country. Individuals with the honey ant totem, for example, are considered human descendants of the honey ant spirit-being ^{xiv}. Spirit Ancestors are forever linked to their sacred places and Country. A person's obligation to maintain and look after those sites is because of their intrinsic connection to Spirit Ancestors and that caring for Country is linked with the health of Spirit Ancestors.

Conception totems may be held in conjunction with ancestral totems. A conception totem originates where an individual's mother was impregnated with a Spirit Child. Spirit Children are released in particular sacred places by the Spirit Ancestors. If a woman should become aware of her pregnancy near a totem, the unborn child is affiliated with that totem. Conception may occur later than the finding of a Spirit Child, however. Upon death, an individual's conception totem returns to dwell in the resting place of the Spirit Children. In some groups, initiation totems exist, and are conferred after initiation ceremonies or when reaching a certain age.

The individual or group is said to 'vibrate' to the key of their totem. In this way the totem is protected and everything is done to benefit the totem. A totem can warn of danger, for example, if it appears and/or acts differently. If a totem is edible, it cannot be eaten by those whose totem it is ^{xv}.

While certain spiritual beliefs and practices are specific to certain groups, the interconnectedness of land, kinship and spirit, and how they contribute to Aboriginal wellbeing, are commonly held Aboriginal beliefs^{xvi}.

Social Organisation

Aboriginal social organisation is a complex, interrelated system and differs greatly across Australia. The Dreaming and the Lore are inseparable from how Aboriginal society is organised.

Social classification occurs within each language group and/or smaller subgroup across Australia. Each classification system is different:

- > Alternate generational levels are where an individual and his/her siblings are on the same generational level, but different from their parents. An individual must marry someone on their same generational levelⁱ.
- > A moiety divides Aboriginal groups, life forms and inanimate natural phenomena into two. Moiety is significant for ritual and social interactions and for marriage. An individual from one moiety must marry someone from the other moiety.
- > Classifications based on moiety and generation levels are combined to make further divisions and a section system is created.
- > Many language groups use a section system with four, six or eight skin names. An individual gains a skin name at birth based on the skin names of their parents. Skin names can sometimes be used as personal identifiers, in context, like a personal name in English. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have a number of names, for example, a European first name and surname, a bush name, a skin name and maybe even a nickname^{xvii}.
- > Skin names for an individual can either be matrilineal or patrilineal depending on the language group/smaller subgroup.

Another layer of social organisation occurs through kinship systems governed by the Lore. Kinship determines how people relate to each other and each of their roles, responsibilities, and obligations^{xvii}. Kinship is the basis for social relations and indicates expected behaviours^{xviii}. This system differs between groups across Australia, however, serves the purpose of each family being a self-sufficient unit with every member having well-defined responsibilities. Kinship serves social, economic and emotional purposes^{xiv}.

A governing principle of some kinship systems is the equivalence of same-sex siblings; siblings of the same sex who belong to the same sibling line are considered to be the same^{xiv}. As such, the terms mother, uncle, brother, etc., have different relationship meanings for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. For example, assume there are two brothers, one of whom has a daughter. The brothers are equivalent in that the daughter regards both her biological father and her father's brother as her father^{xiv}. Similarly, if a person recognises a man as his father, he must also recognise that man's brothers as fathers, not as uncles. An uncle is generally a man on his mother's side^{xii}.

The practice of avoidance relationships is intrinsic to some kinship systems. For example, as children grow to adolescence, brothers and sisters (including classificatory brothers and sisters) are expected to behave in a reserved manner to one another. Similarly, for example, a son-in-law is unable to be in the presence of a father-in-law, or a brother is not able to use his sister-in-law's name^{xix}. One of the strongest avoidance rules is often that which exists between a man and his mother-in-law and her skin name. Avoidance relationships are in place to prevent shame, conflict and/or problems, etc.ⁱ

The Kurna language group, which occupied the Adelaide plains prior to European settlement, has a moiety system with two groups: Mathari and Kararru. Instead of subsection names the Kurna system uses a series of birth-order names. Kurna shares this system with other languages in South Australia such as Adnyamathanha, Barngarla, Ngadjuri, Nukunu and Narungga^{xx}.

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Deeply rooted in kinship and systems of social organisation, the extended family is of great importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. A large number of family members may visit a client, for example, as there may be a cultural obligation or expectation for them to do so. Generally speaking, family is of utmost importance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and caring for family is prioritised over other obligations.

Elders in Aboriginal society are highly respected as the custodians of knowledge of the all Spirituality. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have an oral history that has been passed on from generation to generation. The Elders pass this knowledge on to those that are younger and children are gradually introduced to Dreaming stories over time. Increasing someone's understanding of the Dreaming is a lifelong process and the Elders hold most of the knowledge and are respected because of this^{xii}. Elders provide leadership in matters affecting the group, including dispute resolution, educating the young and marriage^{xiv}.

Art, Music and Dance

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander art is the oldest ongoing tradition of art in the world. Aboriginal art has spiritual and symbolic meaning. Aboriginal visual art can be on rock facings and in caves, on wood, bark and on clay and sand^{xiv}. Totemism has large influences on art; many paintings, carvings and dress are representatives of the totems and ancestral beings who create them^{xv}.

Stories, poetry, songs and dance are integral to Aboriginal culture and relate to the Dreaming, magic, totems, hunting, fighting, epics or mourning^{xxi}. Usually, traditional songs are simple and short with much repetition, often accompanied with clapping sticks. Dances mimic the movements of Spirit Ancestors, animals and humans, and may be performed solo or in groups.

Art, music and dance continue to be important expressions of Aboriginal culture and history. Aboriginal contributions to art, music and dance extend beyond traditional Aboriginal forms and very much into Western expressions as well. Aboriginal peoples' influence on Australia's art, dance and music culture cannot be understated. The strength of Aboriginal art, music and dance continues to be part of Aboriginal peoples' healing, as well.

Cultural Protocols

Sorry Business

Customs relating to death and funerals are complex and diverse in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and are often called Sorry Business. Sorry Business takes precedence over all other matters^{xiv}. Sorry Business is intrinsically linked to the Dreaming, for example through a spirit leaving the body and relocating to its ancestral place. The importance of family relationships means that death and attending funerals is obligated. Aboriginal funerals can last one day to several weeks depending on the status of the deceased. This may 'close down' the community until Sorry Business is complete. Similarly, Aboriginal services may close for a period when a respected Elder passes away, as a show of respect.

The following may also occur and are common:

- > Vacating the house after a person's death- the house may be vacated for a week, months, a year or even permanently, requiring remaining family members to relocate
- > Smoking or sweeping a house to help the departed person's spirit leave the place of death

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- > Often a deceased person's name is not used again and a substitute name is used instead. Similarly, people with the same name, or a similar name, will take a different name to mean 'one who's name cannot be mentioned'.
- > In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankuntjatjara Lands this is kunmanara for a person and kunmanu for an object ^{xxii}.
- > In Central Australia this is Kumanjayi for a person^{xxiii}.

Gender Matters

Traditionally there are subjects about which men and women do not talk about together, as well as specific gender-related, and sometimes discrete practices that occur. These are sometimes referred to as Men's Business and Women's Business. Women's Business pertains to female-specific health, wellbeing and religious matters that traditionally men must not observe. For example, matters relating to the female anatomy, religious ceremony and the maintenance of women's sites of significance are considered women's business and only women should be privy to these matters. Traditionally, it is taboo for men to know about women's ceremonies and vice versa ^{xiii}.

Some Aboriginal people have different cultural norms and expectations about gender, which is important to think about in clinical settings. Among some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people there are many subjects about which discussion should involve only men talking to men, and women to women.

Shame

Shame is twofold: there is shame that is bound in Aboriginal culture, and shame that is imposed. Shame is more than guilt or disgrace. It is experienced by, or for, a person who acts, or is forced to act, in a manner that is not sanctioned by their group or that is in conflict with social or spiritual obligations. It could also occur when someone is singled out from the group, for either praise or blame. Shame is an expression used by Aboriginal people that describes an emotion for when they are put on the spot, caught out unprepared or singled out for either positive or negative attention.

The impact of imposed shame upon Aboriginal people and their communities cannot be underestimated. Throughout history, Aboriginal people have been treated as sub-human, forced to speak English, and conduct a Western way of life. Aboriginal peoples' cultural identity has been worn down over the Stolen Generations. This has resulted in a legacy of imposed shame. Social and emotional wellbeing is poor as a result of continually being positioned low in the social structure.

European settlement has left an unhealthy legacy of individualism and disconnection to community values. When success comes to an Aboriginal person, it is often met with jealousy and negativity from individual, family and community. This is sometimes referred to as lateral violence^{xxiv}.

Reciprocity

Reciprocity is a powerful concept in Aboriginal communities. It guides mutual rights and obligations, and reinforces social bonds. Reciprocity underpins most aspects of community life including ritual, ceremony and the protection of sacred sites and also extends to payback for wrongdoing. Linked with kinship obligations, mutual rights and obligations are observed^{xiv}. This concept is referred to as ngapartji in the Pitjantjatjara language of North West South Australia. Reciprocity reinforces personal and group relationships and maintains social equilibrium^{xiv}.

The Importance of Family

Generally speaking, family is of utmost importance to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This is deeply rooted in traditional aspects of social organisation). In a health setting, the importance of having family nearby, or in contact via telephone, is important to provide physical, economic, social, spiritual and emotional support^{xxv}.

“My nieces in Adelaide came to visit. Family makes a lot of difference. If I was on my own I would be thinking, thinking. But when my family and friends come and visit it is alright.”

For Aboriginal people, the decision to seek treatment can involve several people. They will accompany the sick or injured person, and where the individual is shamed, they may speak on their behalf. Sometimes this can take the form of an escort, who will speak and make decisions on the patient's behalf. For some Aboriginal people a person may not be allowed to know their diagnosis or make decisions about their own care.

Similarly, deeply rooted in social organisation and kinship, a person's obligations to their family take precedence over most matters. This can be seen, for example, in:

- > Overcrowding in houses due to a family being obligated to assist other family visiting from elsewhere,
- > Multiple generations of family living in the same house to ensure financial, emotional and social support to those younger and older than themselves
- > Non-attendance at prearranged meetings due to unforeseen family issues.

Traditional Healing

There are various cultural beliefs about the cause of sickness held by many Aboriginal people. For some Aboriginal people the cause of sickness has a spiritual component. Cultural attitudes and beliefs about health and wellness greatly differ across Australia. The following are some examples:

- > Blood is a sacred fluid and Aboriginal people may be hesitant to give blood for testing or transfusions
- > Dialysis is acceptable when it is understood as a process of cleansing his or her own blood
- > Some might prefer not to have surgery for spiritual or cultural reasons

Aboriginal people may seek the spiritual healing of an Aboriginal traditional healer, believing that physical sickness is, or is in part, a sickness of the spirit^{xix}.

Aboriginal traditional healers use many different plants and animals as traditional medicines. They have special powers to heal with their hands and the curing of illnesses may take the form of singing. Aboriginal traditional healers are born into the ability through family lines and knowledge passed down through family to family.

In the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunyatjajara Lands traditional healers are called Ngangkari. In the Flinders Ranges they are called Yura urngi in the Adnyamathanha language.

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Aboriginal traditional healers are from the deep past and are equal with doctors in their effectiveness for the people^{xxvi}. There is also strong evidence to suggest that spirituality helps Aboriginal people to cope, be strong, resilient and determined, and to come to terms with life's problems ^{xxv}.

“... they get the Ngangkari that comes, does what they have to do and they get better straight away... you've started them on medication which it's going to be 14 days before there's any effect, that doesn't quite fit into the way that they work... if there's not that understanding of the way that whitefella medicine works, they might not be willing to pursue it”^{xxv}.

Linked in with Aboriginal spirituality and the Dreaming, Aboriginal people often have powerful beliefs about death and dying. It is quite common for Aboriginal patients to fear passing away in hospital and prefer to go home to pass away.

After an Aboriginal person has passed away some Aboriginal people believe that the spirit is torn between wishing to return to the spirit world and wanting to stay with kin. The time immediately after death is dangerous for those near the body, especially if the person is not on their traditional lands. They feel that the spirit may harm them because it is lost. Aboriginal patients who are in the same hospital/health service where another Aboriginal patient is passing may leave or refuse to stay until it is smoked or cleansed. Also, when an infant dies, parents may leave the body as the spirit needs time to leave and go home.

Non-Verbal Communication

Non-verbal communication is a highly important aspect of communication with Aboriginal people. However, it is important to remember that there is diversity within Aboriginal language groups. Being conscious of your own body language messages is a good way to start.

- > Silence may indicate Aboriginal people are listening, remaining non-committal or may be uncomfortable with what is being discussed.
- > Sufficient information, and repetition of information, is important for Aboriginal people to make an informed decision.
- > An Aboriginal person may not look at you while they or you are talking as a show of shyness and/or respect. They will still be listening to you, however.
- > If you are speaking with an Aboriginal person and they are avoiding your gaze, it may be respectful to follow suit. A person with down cast eyes is probably showing their respect to you while you are speaking. It does not mean they are rude and not paying attention.
- > Gesture language is an important part of communication in some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups. Economic, social and religious conditions in pre-settlement Aboriginal life necessitated gestured language, for example in hunting situations.
- > In Aboriginal populations this is also required in social spheres relating to prohibitions about the interactions of some people according to their relationship.
- > Gestures are formalised and convey a range of ideas or a sequence of ideas. For example, in Pitjantjatjara extending the forefinger and pivoting the hand in a clockwise direction indicates a question. Pivoting anti-clockwise indicates a negative[!].
- > Pointing at a person when talking is generally considered rude.

Verbal Communication

There are a number of considerations in verbal communication with Aboriginal people that non-Aboriginal people should be aware of and take lengths to address. The following are some examples:

- > During discussions, Aboriginal people may delay expressing a firm opinion even though they may hold one. Instead, they may listen to others before offering their own view. If their view conflicts with others, they may understate it.
- > Use of silence by an Aboriginal person does not necessarily mean what was said was not understood. Sometimes Aboriginal people may use 'yes' at the end of a question, but they may only be identifying that they understand you, rather than agree. Confirmation may need to be sought.
- > Similarly, non- Aboriginal often speak quickly and expect a quick response. Aboriginal people may expect some time to consider their response.
- > Speaking in a direct and 'to the point' manner may be seen as confrontational.

For some Aboriginal people English may be the second or third language spoken. Similarly, some Aboriginal people may not read or write freely in English. In this situation, the following should be considered:

- > At times it may be difficult for an Aboriginal person to find a word that translates what they are trying to say. It is preferable not to finish the sentence for them and allow them time to choose what words they would like to use.
- > Speak in a manner that is easily understood. Keep technical words to a minimum. If they have to be used, they should be explained in full and be careful not to speak too quickly.
- > Alternative methods of communication may prove useful, e.g. sign language, pictures and/or videos.

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