
Funded by the Australian Government, Department of Health and Ageing through the Improved Services Initiative

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Aboriginal Cultural Security Guide for Human Services Organisations
First Edition

This document has been developed as a guide to help Australian human services organisations to improve their capacity to deliver culturally secure services to Aboriginal people and their communities. “Cultural security” is a guiding principle that ensures respect for cultural difference. This will require services on an ongoing basis to be mindful and inclusive of cultural differences which may (or may not) require additional service considerations. Cultural security expands on cultural awareness whereby organisations and individuals need to make a positive shift away from altering attitudes and values, and move towards changing organisational and individual behaviours and practices.

Table 1: Organisational and structural/systemic level

Please Note: For the purposes of this document, the word Aboriginal is used to represent all Australian traditional custodians of the land and waters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy: Policy and procedures</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment of Aboriginal people’s relationship and connection with the land:</td>
<td>• Acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land, past and present, eg. in significant meetings, speeches (through a Welcome to Country speech), in email signatures, and on websites. Organisations can develop a policy and procedure for Welcome to Country and acknowledgment of traditional land custodians.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgment of the traditional custodians of the land to show respect and commitment to the cultural rights of Aboriginal people.</td>
<td>• Compile and hold a list of local Welcome to Country speakers who are available to speak at significant events. A Welcome to Country is a formal ceremony performed by a recognised and appropriate Aboriginal person who is preferably from the traditional land on which you are meeting. It can take many forms and can include singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| Respect: Creating respectful relationships between Aboriginal people and other Australians whilst recognising the negative impact that colonisation has had on Aboriginal people, their families and their communities. | • Develop a culturally secure framework/strategy or Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) for your organisation. A RAP is a business plan that uses a holistic approach to create meaningful relationships and sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. These documents turn good intentions into actions and outline key strategies for working with Aboriginal clients, staff and community members (www.http://www.reconciliation.org.au). Ensure regular reviews across the entire organisation. 
• Engage an Aboriginal cultural consultant to assist with the implementation of a RAP and/or a culturally secure framework. |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Significant events:</th>
<th>Reorganise and celebrate significant events:</th>
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</table>
| Celebration and recognition of significant cultural events so that Aboriginal people (staff and clients) feel welcome and staff in the organisation have a cultural solidarity. | • National Reconciliation week [www.http://www.reconciliation.org.au](http://www.reconciliation.org.au).  
• National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee (NAIDOC) week [www.naidoc.org.au](http://www.naidoc.org.au).  
• National Aboriginal and Islander Children’s Day (4 August) and International Day of the world’s Indigenous People (9 August), [http://www.snaicc.asn.au](http://www.snaicc.asn.au).  
• National Sorry Day (26 May); Survival Day (26 January), Harmony Day (21 March).  
• Develop a cultural events calendar for the workplace. |

| Inclusion in policy and planning: | • Outline a commitment to cultural security and diversity in the organisation’s strategic plan.  
• Conduct a culturally secure audit (i.e. cultural competence audit) of organisational policies and procedures and identify the policies and procedures that need to be amended to be inclusive of the needs of Aboriginal people. This may include policies relating to staff recruitment, service delivery processes, grievance procedures, and consumer engagement.  
• Form an Aboriginal reference group to consult on policies, procedures and strategic planning changes.  
• Identify local Aboriginal services and organisations that can be partners in service initiatives. Ensure that strategies to build relationships with these services are incorporated into your organisation’s annual strategic plan.  
• Involve Aboriginal staff in the development of cultural policies, procedures, strategic plans and reference materials (i.e. Aboriginal posters, brochures). |

| Language and terminology: | • Develop a language policy which provides guidelines for booking and effective use of interpreters.  
• Provide training to staff on how to work with interpreters and Aboriginal people.  
• Develop a list of local interpreters accessible to all staff.  
• Using uncomplicated language and terminology is important for engaging and connecting with Aboriginal cultural groups. Consider some of the following:  
  - avoid using acronyms;  
  - avoid using labels such as client, patients, clinician, and professional. Instead use words such as family member, participants, Aboriginal person, worker;  
  - speak clearly and simply. If necessary, seek clarification from the Aboriginal person that they have understood you;  
  - be aware that misunderstandings in communicating cross-culturally can occur. |

Inclusion of Aboriginal people in the planning, consultation, implementation and evaluation of service initiatives to enable Aboriginal people to have ownership and input into the services they receive.  

Language and terminology:  
It is important to recognise the diversity of Aboriginal cultural and language groups in Australia. Communication among Aboriginal people in metropolitan Perth is typically a dialogue consisting of a combination of English, Noongar and Aboriginal English. Body language plays a very important part in communication with Aboriginal people.  

Terminology can be a barrier to working with Aboriginal communities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural awareness:</strong> Cultural awareness is a learning process which needs to be practised as well as built upon on an ongoing basis. All people working within an organisation should have an understanding of the historical factors that have influenced alcohol and other drug-related harm and wellness in Aboriginal communities. There is requirement that staff understand the history of colonialism and the role racism has played in the oppression of Indigenous people. It is also important that staff understand the diversity of needs of Aboriginal people from urban, rural and remote communities. When considering diversity, kinship systems also need to be understood as family feuding in some Aboriginal communities may mean that some clients or employees will avoid contact with feuding family members, or their friends. Culturally secure training can be accessed through a number of means including: web-based training programs; specialised cultural trainers who deliver generalised and targeted workshops; field trips/excursions and supervised placements in Aboriginal communities/organisations.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cultural security training is best if it addresses areas of organisational business as well as individual interactions with Aboriginal people. Ensure all staff (including board members, managers, clinicians and administrative staff) have received Aboriginal cultural awareness training which includes: the importance of the land to Aboriginal culture and the effect of land dispossession; the effect of colonisation on Aboriginal communities; Aboriginal cultural kinship systems; myths and misconceptions; bereavement; death and funerals; shame; taboos; payback systems; engagement processes; sexuality; racism and oppression; marginalisation; spirituality and dreamtime; cross-cultural communication techniques and differences (such as body language, yarning, meeting processes and customs); and the impact of historical government policies including the “stolen generation”. • Incorporate cultural awareness training and supervision into staff induction processes. • Communicate the fact that the service is culturally secure in a visually and stylistic way. • Develop and implement a staff cultural competence tool.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Relationships:</strong> Aboriginal communities place a lot of importance on the development of relationships. Relationships require time and commitment to build rapport and trust. Ensuring the retention of staff is helpful as continuity is vitally important in maintaining rapport and trust with Aboriginal communities.</td>
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## Strategy: Funding Agreements

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<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Resources:</strong></td>
<td>Applications for funding could include additional expenses(^\text{12}) for items such as:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Culturally secure practices require additional resources, including time and specific funding. In addition, the funding of services that target Aboriginal people often require a long term commitment as the engagement of Aboriginal communities often takes much longer than other community groups.(^\text{11})</td>
<td>• staff cultural awareness and practice/intervention training (including specific training for Aboriginal staff such as Aboriginal Mental Health First Aid and professional development opportunities that up-skill Aboriginal staff to attain formal qualifications);</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• staff cultural competency audits and evaluations;</td>
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<td>• interpreter costs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the development, printing and purchasing of culturally secure resources for Aboriginal people;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• outreach service delivery costs;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• culturally secure supervisors and/or mentors for Aboriginal workforce;</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• staff relief workers (for Aboriginal staff who need extended leave to attend to their cultural, social and family obligations);</td>
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<td>• Aboriginal specific resources and information texts;</td>
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<td>• Welcome to Country speaker fees; and</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Aboriginal consultant and supervision fees, for advice as well as assessment consultations.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Footnotes (references):


4 The Western Australian Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies (WANADA) (2011). The Culturally Secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Recruitment and Retention Guide. Western Australia: WANADA


Table 2: Service delivery and program level

**Please Note:** For the purposes of this document, the word *Aboriginal* is used to represent all Australian traditional custodians of the land and waters.

### Strategy: Policy and procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Confidentiality:</strong></td>
<td>• Organisations need to develop clear and concise policies and procedures around confidentiality based on the local needs (and circumstances) of an Aboriginal community. Issues to be aware of include: family feuding; large family kinship groups; and cross-sectoral organisational involvement. Confidentiality needs to be addressed with all Aboriginal clients.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal people are often involved with their extended families and their larger community. In view of this, upholding confidentiality can be challenging for Aboriginal workers and organisations.</td>
<td>• Expectations of confidentiality by Aboriginal people usually exceed organisational expectations. Agency record keeping should be explained, and also who can/can’t access recorded information. There is often an expectation that key family members should be kept informed, but always check if this is acceptable to the Aboriginal person, and check again regularly, because that key person may change.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

### Strategy: Service and workplace environment, layout and design

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Workplace:</strong></td>
<td>• Display Aboriginal specific resources in your reception area and counselling rooms. The Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO) has Strong Spirit Strong Mind resources that can be accessed by all services. <a href="http://www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/informationresources/publicationsresources">www.dao.health.wa.gov.au/informationresources/publicationsresources</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It is important that Aboriginal people feel welcomed into a service. Organisations can show acceptance and respect of Aboriginal people by designing the workplace to be inclusive and reflective of Aboriginal culture.</td>
<td>• Display Aboriginal art in public areas of the building.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Organise a cultural library for staff and clients.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Develop a cultural webpage on your internet and extranet.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Display the organisation’s reconciliation statement and an Aboriginal welcome at the main entrance of the facility.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• If funds and space permit, construct an outdoor Aboriginal meeting place on the organisation’s premises.</td>
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</table>

### Strategy: Service evaluation and reporting

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Evaluation:</strong></td>
<td>• Negotiate with funding bodies on alternate reporting mechanisms such as:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Funders often require services to report on key performance indicators and outcomes. Aboriginal services and programs often do not provide traditional</td>
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Practical interventions so outcomes are difficult to report to funders.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strategy: Partnerships and relationships</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural consideration</td>
<td>Improved linkages and partnerships can be achieved through:</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• employing Aboriginal people in positions that have the role to develop partnerships and relationships with Aboriginal communities/organisations.</td>
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<td>• documenting clinical referral pathways to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal specialist services.</td>
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<td>• developing models of shared care and case management including case reviews and care planning meetings.</td>
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<td>• developing Memorandum of Understandings (MOU’s) with local services that outline each agency’s roles and responsibilities relating to clinical referral pathways, information exchange, and shared management of clients.</td>
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<td>• working in collaboration with cultural consultants, who can advise about cultural matters, as well as provide guidance and mediation.</td>
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<td>• hosting cross sectoral networking meetings with Aboriginal services, AOD and mental health and other social services.</td>
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<td>• sharing training initiatives with Aboriginal organisations.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• initiating cross organisational staff placements.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• supporting existing Aboriginal organisations (and their staff) to build their capacity to work with Aboriginal communities.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Strategy: Workforce Development</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cultural consideration</td>
<td>Consider the following:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal cultural awareness and security training: Clinicians may need additional professional development opportunities to work effectively with Aboriginal people.</td>
<td>• provide training in Aboriginal specific assessment tools, using interpreters in therapeutic settings, comorbidity, grief and loss, (and how it relates to Aboriginal culture), and mental health first aid.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One significant area of Aboriginal cultural awareness is complex trauma, grief and loss. Research has identified that psychological distress, in particular that associated with unresolved grief, is a major public health issue for</td>
<td>• develop a training program for staff on how to engage Aboriginal people in a therapeutic setting.</td>
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<td>• critical and self-reflection on Aboriginal culture in clinical supervision and staff appraisals.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• provide training for staff on how to reflect critically on cultural differences and how this influences practice.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• engaging in clinical group case studies to explore effectiveness of Aboriginal engagement</td>
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Aboriginal communities. Dispossession, oppression and degradation are common experiences that have resulted in immense loss and trauma experienced by Aboriginal people since colonisation. The resolution of grief is an important contributor to wellbeing and psychological and emotional health. If a person or community is overwhelmed by unresolved grief it can show as frustration, anger and violence.\(^7\)

### Strategy: Program Delivery

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cultural consideration</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Outreach and community services:** Services are more effective if they specifically target the needs of Aboriginal people within their local community.\(^8\) | Often services are not located in areas where Aboriginal people live or access. Therefore services need to be delivered in the local community, which requires special considerations such as:  
  - the provision of more outreach services in consultation with Aboriginal people.\(^8\) Outreach services need to consider the following:  
    o travel time  
    o staffing (safety)  
    o engagement time  
    o realistic expectations of achievements and time required for rapport building  
    o staff retention  
  - services to account for families and extended family, not just individuals;  
  - services to offer gender focused health and educational programs;\(^6\) and  
  - ensure that if Aboriginal staff are working out in their communities they have access to support within the office that can assist with completing their administrative tasks. This can prevent burnout from unmanageable workloads.\(^7\) |

Community outreach work with Aboriginal people and their families may take place in many different locations. Workers may not be invited into a home, but that does not mean they are not welcome. Workers can still work effectively sitting on the front veranda, in the back yard, or in a park - and a lot of the time this is more acceptable to Aboriginal people.
| Culture and assessment: | To attain an accurate assessment, investigate some of the following:

- seek cultural explanations from a cultural consultant before an assessment
- conduct the interview with a cultural expert present if the Aboriginal person consents
- utilise Aboriginal assessment and cognitive screening tools when available and appropriate (e.g. www.indigenouspsychservices.com.au [many of these tools need to be purchased and are not freely available], http://menzies.edu.au, Indigenous Risk Impact Screen [IRIS] and Brief Intervention Project: Screening Instrument and the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment [KICA]. The KICA and information booklet can be found at http://wacha.org.au and information on the IRIS can be found at http://www.health.qld.gov.au).
- ensure program appointment times for assessments with Aboriginal people are long enough to allow the client to ‘yarn’ about their circumstances.
- flexibility with appointment times. As the concept of time is often different in Aboriginal culture, setting specific appointment times may not be effective in engaging Aboriginal clients.
- ensure interview rooms allow for non-confronting seating arrangements (e.g. side by side seating instead of face-to-face) and room for significant others, as well as interpreters if required.
- an important communication protocol is also to “allow time for yarning” (usually on social topics) at the start of any contact. It is considered rude to get straight down to business.

An Aboriginal person’s explanation of their circumstances will be within their cultural context but may be misunderstood by non-Aboriginal clinicians if an assessment is not made within a cultural context. In addition the concept of time in Aboriginal culture often differs from that of non-Aboriginal people. The traditional concept of time was cyclic rather than continuous. The past and future revolve around the present. There is less urgency to plan the future. Plans for the future can be modified or even put aside if something more urgent arises. In western society we give precedence to prior arrangements. Aboriginal people give preference to family and kinship obligations.

In the context but be their

Family and individual interventions:
Aboriginal people are members of a community so mainstream interventions with mental illness and substance use are not always relevant or effective. Research has shown that family is a motivator and “key ingredient” for change. Families are the “hub” of wellbeing for Aboriginal people where they help define an Aboriginal person’s identity and provide them with a sense of connectedness to kinship and culture. Aboriginal people will often present with issues that have been influenced by the person’s collective family group - in other words transgenerational issues - including trauma, which extends from the long-term negative effects of colonisation.

- Use holistic approaches to mental health and substance use intervention, such as:
  - narrative therapy
  - strengths based perspective
  - social model of health
  - solution focused and goal oriented interventions
  - holistic family systems perspectives
  - social learning models of care
  - motivational interviewing and harm minimisation.
- Mainstream models of clinical practice also need to incorporate an Aboriginal “world view” whereby the importance of strengthening our “inner spirit” is integral to enhancing a person’s ability to make good decisions and positive behavioural changes.

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### Strategy: Evaluation and quality improvement

<table>
<thead>
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</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Evaluation and reporting:** Programs and services need to keep detailed records of their interventions with Aboriginal clients and their communities in order to demonstrate positive changes for individuals and families and account for program funding. | A lot of work undertaken with Aboriginal people, their families and communities goes unnoticed by funders. Services are recommended to develop individual reporting measures and tools that capture the work undertaken by their staff. This can include:  
- recording demographic data of all the people seen in an assessment/intervention (including family members);  
- recording occasions of service (for all people seen including the family); record details of any consultations and conversations held with Aboriginal community members/organisations;  
- undertake regular qualitative feedback consultations with Aboriginal people on services;  
- record the number of staff trained and supervised in Aboriginal cultural awareness and security. |
Footnotes (references):

2. The Western Australian Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies (WANADA) (2011). The Culturally Secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Recruitment and Retention Guide. Western Australia: WANADA
8. Westerman, T.G. (2002). Psychological Interventions with Aboriginal People. Connect, Health Department of Western Australia (need NIH publication number or where retrieved from).

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### Table 3: Human resource management of Aboriginal staff in your organisation

**Please Note:** For the purposes of this document, the word *Aboriginal* is used to represent all Australian traditional custodians of the land and waters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item: Recruitment and Retention of Aboriginal staff</th>
<th>Practical suggestions and ideas on how to achieve this strategy</th>
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</table>
| **Policies and practices:**  
Cultural considerations need to be included in the recruitment and retention of Aboriginal staff. To be culturally secure, organisations need to demonstrate a commitment to creating a fair and respectful environment that meets the cultural needs and obligations of all workers.¹ | Develop specific recruitment and retention policies for Aboriginal staff. These will need to be communicated to Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal staff.² Policies and practices may want to consider the following:  
• social and cultural obligations within their families and communities (such as attendance at funerals, care giving responsibilities of extended family members, financial obligations to family and community members). Organisations may want to consider offering Aboriginal employees extended personal leave to attend to their cultural and family responsibilities. This can be negotiated as part of employment contracts.  
• religious and spiritual practises (including traditional practices such as Lore).  
• providing regular informal supervision to Aboriginal staff (e.g. take time to have a yarn) and ensuring they have access to culturally secure clinical supervision.  
• provide Aboriginal workers access to appropriate educational and training opportunities, and supporting them to obtain and upgrade formal qualifications.  
• encourage Aboriginal staff to access internal and external Aboriginal networking, peer support and mentoring/buddying systems to help reduce the incidence of Aboriginal staff working in isolation.¹,³ These systems can also be utilised to provide feedback to the organisation on their cultural security frameworks, policies and procedures.  
• an acknowledgment of the *concept of time* differing to that of non-Aboriginal employees.⁴  
• practices that allow Aboriginal staff to access counselling and support for grief and loss issues from culturally appropriate providers. |
| **Advising:**  
The manner in which a staff vacancy is advertised can influence an organisation’s ability to attract Aboriginal applicants.¹ |  
• an Aboriginal designated position should be advertised as a 50(d) position in accordance with the Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (this means only Aboriginal people are eligible to apply).  
• encourage Aboriginal applicants to apply for a generic position within an organisation - the advertisement can state “Aboriginal people are strongly encouraged to apply”.  
• advertise in Aboriginal specific media. To attract local Aboriginal people to a job also look at informing senior community members, Aboriginal community controlled organisations, and advertising at the local shops.  
• Write the advertisement in clear and concise language, without jargon and acronyms.⁵ |
Job description forms (JDF) and selection criteria:

To attract Aboriginal people to a position it is important to highlight in JDFs that life skills, abilities and knowledge specific to people with Aboriginal backgrounds are essential. In addition, literacy issues need to be considered in evaluating a person’s suitability for a position.

Advice can be sought from Aboriginal community members on the selection criteria and JDFs. Consider the following:

- be flexible in accepting a verbal expression of interest for a job;
- selection criteria in the JDF can be desirable, depending upon the job role; and
- ensure applicants are given clear instructions about the selection process and interview requirements.¹

The interview process:

Consider the following:

- consider an informal yarn with an applicant about the job in the first instance. A more formal interview can be arranged afterwards if the organisation needs to ascertain the applicant’s skills, knowledge and training requirements for the position.
- keep language simple and without jargon.
- enquire about the person’s knowledge of the local community, customs, and family structures.
- involve a local Aboriginal community member in the interview if appropriate.¹

Footnotes (references):

¹ The Western Australian Network of Alcohol & other Drug Agencies (WANADA) (2011). The Culturally Secure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Recruitment and Retention Guide. Western Australia: WANADA
Table 4: Practice and responsibilities of individual staff members

**Please Note:** For the purposes of this document, the word *Aboriginal* is used to represent all Australian traditional custodians of the land and waters.

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<th>Strategy: Working with Aboriginal people</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural consideration</strong></td>
<td><strong>Engaging, connecting and initial contact with the Aboriginal person/family/community:</strong> Communicating and engaging with people from an Aboriginal background is often different to other cultures. Being aware of certain relationship building principles can assist in working with Aboriginal people and their families. This is where cultural awareness and security training is important. Aboriginal people need to know your relationships with others before they can decide their relationship with you. Aboriginal culture is based on a complex structure of obligations and entitlements based on relationships and kinship systems. The kinship system is at the heart of Aboriginal life and culture. Visitors, even other Aboriginal people, first establish what relation they are to each other and then apply the rules of behaviour appropriate to that relationship, e.g. respect, avoidance, familiarity.</td>
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<td>Below are some suggestions on how to engage with Aboriginal people, however, it is important to be mindful that these suggestions may or may not apply to all:</td>
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<td>• Initial greeting: greet each person with a loose handshake, with arm fully extended (so as not to invade personal space) and use only fleeting eye contact (many Aboriginal people are taught to avoid eye contact as a sign of respect, especially towards older people and elders). Try to greet the elderly first as a sign of respect. When an Aboriginal person attends your service for the first time, it would be ideal if they could be greeted and welcomed by an Aboriginal staff member.</td>
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<td>• Be mindful when using first names unless you have checked that it is alright to do so. This is due to the fact that when there is a death in an Aboriginal community, the name of the deceased person is [sometimes] no longer used out of respect for that person. Address people, particularly in remote communities using Mr, Miss or Mrs or asking them directly what they would like you to call them. This practice of not using the first name of a deceased person is specific to some geographical areas or tribal groups and does not necessarily apply to all metropolitan areas.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Creating a safe environment including seating arrangements and body language: position yourself so that you are not directly facing anybody. Ideally sit side by side and face the same direction as the Aboriginal person. This allows closeness without intimidation. Informal and open spaced environments are preferred. Ask the Aboriginal person where they would like to meet, sit, and who they would like to be present. Be aware of power relationships between yourself and the Aboriginal person as this is very significant in building therapeutic relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal people.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Aboriginal communities have protocols for building trust and partnerships. Some communities have “vouching” processes in place where one (or more) community members may attest/vouch for the person wishing to work with the community.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Do not rush introductions and the beginning of a conversation. You could begin with introducing yourself, where you are from, your family, your background (“your mob”) and then give a full description of your role, your “story”. Who you are is more important than what you are. While maintaining confidentiality, highlight any connections you may have with people they may know in their community. Do not start an interview with open-ended questions as it puts too much pressure on the Aboriginal person to “open up”. Ask about their “story” and family (“their mob”). Aboriginal people like to consider questions and information at length before replying. Quick replies can be seen as impolite. Allow periods of silence. Too</td>
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</table>
many questions can be seen as an invasion of privacy.³
- Be mindful that in some communities English may not be their first language. Speak clearly and simply.
- When working with Aboriginal people allow more time for appointments so they can yarn about their “story” which is integral to engaging and learning about that person.⁷
- Consider if there may be any gender issues that may come into play in the engagement process. As a general rule, ask the client if there will be any problems when there is a member of the opposite gender involved in the interactions. There may not be, but it is respectful to ask.

| Ceasing contact with the Aboriginal person/family/community: | • Have an open door policy – a policy whereby the Aboriginal person is aware they can return to your service if they need to.  
• Have follow up arrangements in place with the Aboriginal person.  
• Information systems may be changed to allow for episodes of care to be open indefinitely such as on a “maintenance mode” rather than discharging the client altogether.⁵ |
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<td>An open door policy is important and makes the Aboriginal person feel welcome to return if they need to.⁵</td>
<td>The cultural and personal context:</td>
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| - Cynicism within Aboriginal communities towards Government agencies is strong and based on a history of many broken promises. Not following through with something is likely to be judged harshly by Aboriginal people. You have to put this into a historical perspective and always endeavour to do what is promised.²  
The concept of shame is very important within many Aboriginal communities and can be a barrier  
- When working with an Aboriginal person, where possible ensure all areas of their life are talked about. Often this is helped by having some of their family members there and building your relationship with them as well. Family relationships and involvement, to many Aboriginal people, are integral to their well being and recovery, so involving significant others in care and treatment plans is a requirement for working with most Aboriginal people.⁴⁵  
- Talk about that person’s strengths and family relationships before talking about any problems. The Aboriginal person will often identify the issues that are most important to them and will benefit from practical assistance with these issues (i.e. working alongside the Aboriginal person to find solutions to the issues).  
- Practical solutions to problems are most useful as is the building of self reliance, dignity, cultural pride and connectedness.⁵  
- In Aboriginal culture some topics may not be openly discussed such as: bereavement (Sorry business); death (not using the name, or showing pictures of the deceased); ceremonial business; sexuality and fertility (use professionals of same gender); and domestic habits⁴.³  
- For cultural safety purposes always use appropriate language and behaviour.  
- Support people to seek and use culturally-based services if available.³ |
Shame may also be caused through not practicing cultural safety. Be aware of what language and behaviours cause shame within the person’s community. Understand how the person you are helping might feel shame if you behave in a certain way or use certain words (page 2).³

Furthermore be aware that as a result of historical factors such as dispossession of Aboriginal land and domination of culture, Aboriginal people might feel societal shame.³

### Interventions and tools:
Tailor interventions and services to meet the cultural and individual needs of the Aboriginal person and their family. Flexibility in service delivery is key as Aboriginal communities differ especially in rural, remote and urban locations.

Trips may need to be delayed as a result of tribal rituals and ceremonies. During Aboriginal ‘sorry time’ people cannot usually be contacted for weeks at a time. Similarly for boys going through the Lore, they will be ‘busby boys’ for a couple of months.

To avoid misunderstandings and tokenism it is sensible to encourage consultation with the local Aboriginal community on a regular basis and not exclude consultation only to crises.²

- To assist in interviews it may be appropriate to use pictures instead of words (story telling cards) or allowing them to tell stories that use metaphors and symbols that represent familiar experience.⁷
- DAO has created the Strong Spirit Strong Mind Counselling and Story Telling Cards (2012).
- Eco-maps, family trees (geno-grams), timelines and kinship structure diagrams are useful tools when getting to know the Aboriginal person’s cultural obligations and expectations.²,⁹ Geno-grams are a valuable tool when collecting family data, whilst the kinship structure diagram is helpful to use within an Aboriginal community as it encompasses the Aboriginal kinship structure. When using timelines as a tool it provides an opportunity to map out the Aboriginal person’s life in detail and provides him/her with a reference point as to when change has occurred.⁹
- Be mindful that mental health screening and assessment tools, such as the Mental State Examination (MSE), may not be culturally appropriate for some Aboriginal people. Other tools such as the Kimberley Indigenous Cognitive Assessment (KICA) and/or the Indigenous Risk Impact Screen (IRIS) may be more appropriate tools. Clinicians need to be aware of the person’s socio-cultural norms in order to be able to make an accurate assessment of the person’s mental state. Take into consideration the spiritual and cultural context of the person’s behaviours when assessing a person. Things to be aware of include:
  - reasons for any self harm/mutilation (such as sorry business self injury);
  - shyness (being mistaken for flat affect);
  - spiritual beliefs and awareness (seeing or hearing voices of deceased loved ones being mistaken for delusions or hallucinations); and
  - Lore scars mistaken for self harm scars.
- Working with Aboriginal people within their own environment (home or community) is an effective way of being able to ascertain how the person is coping at home and how they interact with family members. Talk about family as this will give you a sense of what is important to them. Also talk about what activities...
they like to do as this will show what keeps them strong in their life.²
- Establish rapport and trust with Aboriginal communities by having regular visits/consultations.²
- Provide the client with a range of culturally appropriate resources to provide the right information.⁵
- Humour is a most valued commodity in Aboriginal communities and it cannot be underestimated as a way to establish rapport.²

### Rural and remote communities:

The single most difficult challenge facing service providers who work in rural and remote communities is establishing a space that encourages and supports open communication and being able to engage communities that can build meaningful relationships.¹⁰

It can take up to a year to establish a quality relationship with a community. Entry into a community is best if it is prefaced by a series of consultations and a long term commitment by the service provider.¹⁰

Consider the following prior to visiting any remote community:
- Always give plenty of notice to the community (at least two weeks) and follow up with a phone call, fax or email where possible.
- Acquire first hand knowledge of the road conditions and what to take (water, fuel, weather forecasts).
- Put in place occupational health and safety measures, such as:
  - letting someone else know where and when you are going and returning;
  - take plenty of water and fuel;
  - carry a first aid kit; and a satellite phone.
- Upon arrival at a community always visit the community office first in order to obtain directions.²
- Aboriginal community gatherings often attract many members of the community.
- Fridays are often funeral days so visits to a community may not be well attended if held on this day.
- Determine if formal permission is required to enter a community.¹¹
- Be aware that there may be friction within a community.¹¹
- Be aware of who is needed for decision-making within the given community.¹¹
Footnotes (references):


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Gratitude is extended to all of people whose research is referred to in this guide.

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