

Appendix C – Supporting Aboriginal peoples



'Aboriginal peoples' in this document refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as defined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Act 2005.

Tracy was at home with her family when there was a knock on the door. A stranger came in and took Tracy's little sister away. She didn't do anything wrong, Tracy never knew where they took her sister or when she would come back. Tracy was fearful she may be next. Years later, sitting on a bench in the park, a stranger approaches Tracy and her heart starts to race and she starts to put up walls to protect herself.

Each person has their own unique experience and needs. It is important to understand the intersectionality between a person's gender, race, sexual identity, culture, experiences and circumstances. Workers may refer to multiple appendices to assist their understanding, engagement and support for each person they engage.

Overview

Aboriginal peoples are the traditional custodians of Australian land and waters. Aboriginal peoples are recognised as having the longest continuous cultures in the world and their people and cultures remain strong and resilient.

However, Aboriginal peoples have and continue to experience discrimination. Historically, this has included government policies, which resulted in the removal of Aboriginal children, dispossession of land, controlled lives and generational disadvantage. The removal of Aboriginal children, known as the Stolen Generation, broke important cultural, spiritual and familial ties and has left a lasting and intergenerational impact on the lives and wellbeing of Aboriginal peoplesⁱ.

Some Aboriginal peoples may also experience barriers to obtain and maintain appropriate accommodation, education, employment and health servicesⁱⁱ. All of this has resulted in Aboriginal peoples being 15 times more likely to experience homelessness than non-Indigenous Australiansⁱⁱⁱ and 32 per cent of the total clients seeking specialist homelessness services in NSW in 2022/23^{iv}. Aboriginal peoples are also overrepresented in out of home care and the justice system, and experience higher rates of chronic and complex health conditions. These factors make homelessness more likely and more complex for Aboriginal peoples.

Some Aboriginal peoples may experience disconnection from Country, culture, and family and kinship networks. Aboriginal peoples have a strong connection to Country which is integral to social and cultural identity, so disconnection or forced disassociation can lead to a loss of identity, sense of agency and social and cultural capital^v in addition to trauma. Aboriginal peoples may choose not to accept housing that is away from their mob or Country. A worker must be empathetic and understand this important connection and how it may impact all engagements.

Due to governmental, societal and familial impacts, including intergenerational trauma and disadvantage, Aboriginal peoples may also experience domestic and family violence (DFV) at greater rates than the non-Indigenous population.^{vi} For information on supporting people who experienced DFV, see **Appendix L**.

Aboriginal peoples may also remain in difficult circumstances or not seek assistance out of fear of further harm, such as children being removed or adults being incarcerated. A worker should respect that Aboriginal peoples may choose not to engage with mainstream services and may have a distrust of government and other support services^{vii}, including religious organisations. This is often due to the historical and personal impacts of discrimination and systemic disadvantage.

It is also important to be aware that unconscious bias, though not aligned to how a worker or person may feel or act when consciously thinking about someone, can impact interactions and outcomes during engagement. All workers should complete Cultural Capability training and understand how to create and maintain cultural respect and safety when interacting with Aboriginal peoples. This will contribute to improving interactions and overall outcomes for Aboriginal peoples experiencing homelessness and may affect social and systemic change.

NSW Government is working with Aboriginal peoples, their communities, organisations and businesses to implement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. Closing the Gap aims to overcome the entrenched inequality faced by Aboriginal peoples so that their life outcomes are equal to all Australians. It acknowledges that to close the gap, Aboriginal peoples must determine, drive and own their desired outcomes, alongside government and non-government organisations. This can assist in building trust and social capital. Agency is also central to self-determination which means providing Aboriginal peoples with 'choice' and control.

Understanding Culture to Improve Interactions

Some terms and cultural practices a worker should be aware of include^{viii}:

- Aboriginal peoples are diverse with approximately 500 different Aboriginal nations in Australia each with their own languages, dialects and territories and are made up of different tribal groups.
- The term 'Mob' refers to extended family or wider community group, from a particular place or Country.
- 'Elders' are often leaders who support and influence the community. Elders are the holders of community stories and ways of living, ensuring alignment with spiritual, physical and emotional wellbeing.
- Aboriginal peoples have a strong and personal connection to Country, although this has been disrupted for many people. Aboriginal peoples, in particular people who have been released from custody, may express a desire to be outside, rather than housed, due to their connection to Country.
- Many Aboriginal peoples acknowledge Elders and leaders as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle', even if the person is not blood-related or kin. This is a sign of respect in Aboriginal culture. Under some circumstances it may be appropriate for a non-Aboriginal person to address an elder Aboriginal person as Aunty or Uncle. This may include when the person has been introduced using the term Aunty or Uncle and/or when the person is personally known to themix but it is important to ask the person how they prefer to be addressed.

- Family and community connectedness (sometimes referred to as kinship) is paramount in supporting Aboriginal identity formation, understanding spiritual and cultural belonging, and establishing strong links with community.
- Aboriginal men and women have distinct but equally important roles, customs and practices which are referred to as '*men's and women's business*'. Respecting men's or women's business may require the worker to avoid certain conversation topics, and other practices unless consent is provided^x. The worker should ask if unsure.
- Sorry business' is a sacred, sensitive and significant time for Aboriginal peoples which occurs after the death of a family member, if a family/community member is ill or imprisoned, or to mourn the loss of cultural connection to family and land.

Engagement Strategy

Creating a culturally safe space for engagements:

- Understand the cultural and historical background of the area in which the interaction occurs.
- Use the traditional name for places, when known, to acknowledge and celebrate the Aboriginal connection to those places.
- Collaborate with local Aboriginal Elders, community leaders, and Aboriginal services to understand best practice and approaches for the specific community being engaged.
- Always lead with empathy and patience. Aboriginal peoples often perceive time differently, with more value placed on relationships, connection and spatial connection to Country.
- Care should be taken to set clear and realistic expectations about why the engagement is taking place and what the outcomes might be.
- Eye contact should not be expected or forced, and a lack of eye contact should not be assumed to be a sign of disrespect or disengagement.
- Aboriginal peoples may use Aboriginal English which contains words from traditional languages as well as English words that have alternative uses or meanings^{xi}.
- Aboriginal peoples' use of non-verbal communication and "gratuitous concurrence" may lead to harmful misunderstandings especially in interactions with government workers including police^{xii}.
- Children play a vital role in the link between the past, present and future. Workers should provide support for children to be safe and supported both physically and culturally.

- Act ethically and demonstrate cultural respect. All workers should undergo appropriate cultural training on an ongoing basis.
- Where possible work with an Aboriginal partner or organisation to provide cultural information, support and assistance.
- Specify the purpose of your engagement and provide reassurance of confidentiality to build trust. Be clear about the circumstances in which information may need to be shared with others and any limits on confidentiality.
- Ask the person where they are from, share stories and find other common ground. Narrative can be important to understand the context of a person's circumstances.

Strategies for engagement:

- Introduce yourself in a friendly manner, stating your name and the agency/organisation you work for.
- Maintain appropriate physical distance from the person throughout.
- Ask the person if they are comfortable engaging with you where they are or consider if there is a yarning space (i.e comfortable and not clinical) to continue the interaction.
- You cannot make an assumption that a person is Aboriginal from their looks. If the person discloses to you that they identify as Aboriginal, provide the person with the choice to engage an Aboriginal worker and/or an Aboriginal service and connect them where possible. However, this should not impact the provision of an immediate response if required.
- Use a trauma-informed and person-centred approach throughout the interaction, acknowledging that each person has their own unique wants and needs.
- Be mindful of the person's body language and other non-verbal behaviours as this can be more informative than the conversation.
- Give the person time and space to process information and assess their options. Silence during the conversation may allow the conversation to breathe.
- Seek continual consent, remembering that this can be withdrawn by the person at any time.
- Provide the person with referral/support options for further assistance if they need or request it. This includes discussing culturally appropriate mainstream or Aboriginal specific services and connecting the person where possible. If the person identifies as Stolen Generations, offer assistance to connect the person to Stolen Generation support services as appropriate.



RESOURCES

CRISIS SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
Ask Izzy	A website directory that connects people in need with nearby services such as housing, food, health care and legal services in their local area	Website: https://askizzy.org.au
Link2Home	A statewide telephone service providing information, assessment and referral to specialist homelessness services, temporary accommodation and other appropriate services for people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. It is available 24 hours a day 7 days a week every day of the year.	Phone: 1800 152 152 Website: https://www.facs.nsw.gov.au
OTHER SUPPORT		
Name	Service	Contact Details
13YARN	A 24/7 national crisis support telephone service that provides confidential, culturally safe and appropriate assistance for Aboriginal peoples to speak about their needs or concerns.	Phone: 13 92 76 Email: enquiries@13yarn.org.au Website: https://www.13yarn.org.au
AbSec (NSW Child, Family and Community Peak Aboriginal Organisation)	AbSec is the peak organisation working to empower Aboriginal children, young people, families and communities impacted by the child protection system. Absec also supports a quality Aboriginal Community Controlled child and family sector to deliver needed supports in Aboriginal communities.	Phone: (02) 9559-5299 Email: admin@absec.org.au Website: https://absec.org.au
Aboriginal Legal Service (ALS)	Provides legal assistance for issues related to criminal law, children's care and protection law, and family law. ALS also has a tenancy advocacy service that provides advocacy, outreach, and tenancy legal education for Aboriginal peoples experiencing housing stress.	Phone: (02) 9213 4100 Website: https://www.alsnswact.org.au
Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Centre	Lists the locations of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services across NSW where Aboriginal people can obtain culturally safe healthcare	Website: https://www.ahmrc.org.au/about/members
Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation	Delivers healing programs, provide direct practical support, advocate for policy change, truth telling, raises awareness of the impacts of intergenerational trauma, and links Survivors and families to support services.	Phone: (02) 8004 6162 Email: admin@cootagirls.org.au Website: https://cootagirls.org.au
Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia	An Aboriginal community controlled national peak for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention. Provides a list of resources if a person is in need of help.	Phone: 02 5134 2100 Email: info@gayaadhuwi.org.au Website: https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/if-you-need-help
The Healing Foundation	Provides up to date information and resources on organisations and agencies that can support the healing journey for members of the Stolen Generation and their families.	Phone: (02) 6272 7500 Website: https://healingfoundation.org.au

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Name	Service	Contact Details
Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation	Helps to restore and reconstruct the identity, dignity and integrity of Aboriginal men who were forcibly removed from their families and placed in the Kinchela Boys Home, and to address the intergenerational trauma that adversely impacts on the lives of the men's families and descendants.	Phone: (02) 9051 1690 Email: office@kinchelaboyshome.org.au Website: https://kinchelaboyshome.org.au
Link Up (NSW)	Supports Aboriginal people who have been directly affected by past government policies on their healing journeys. Link Up can assist with reunification, family link, redress, and community building targeted family earlier intervention.	Phone: 1800 624 332 Email: Linkup@nsw.link-up.org.au Website: https://www.linkupnsw.org.au
National accreditation authority for translators and interpreters (NAATI)	NAATI can connect people to certified interpreters and translators practicing over 30 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages across Australia.	Phone: 1300 557 470 Email: info@naati.com.au Website: https://naati.com.au
NSW Aboriginal Land Council (NSWALC)	NSWALC is committed to ensuring a better future for Aboriginal people by working for the return of culturally significant land, pursuing cultural, social and economic independence for its people and politically proactive on issues that affect Aboriginal people.	Phone: (02) 9689 4444 Website: https://alc.org.au
Service Our Way (SOW)	SOW provides culturally appropriate service coordination, support and capacity building for Aboriginal peoples and families at risk. It links people to existing, non-government and government programs and services, as well as specialist, informal and community support.	Phone: 1800 952 717 Email: sowenquiries@aho.nsw.gov.au Website: https://www.aho.nsw.gov.au/programs/services-our-way
Stolen Generations Council NSW/ ACT	Provide advocacy and support to survivors and descendants of the Stolen Generations who are at risk or are experiencing intergenerational trauma.	Email: reception@glalc.org.au
WellMob	Online social, emotional and cultural wellbeing resources for Aboriginal peoples.	Website: https://wellmob.org.au

- i Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), *The Stolen Generations*, AIATSIS website, 2023.
- ii P Memmott and S Long, *Categories of Indigenous 'homeless' people and good practice responses to their needs*, AHURI Final Report No. 49, Australian Housing and Urban Research Instituted Limited, 2003.
- iii University of South Australia, *Aboriginal homelessness requires a different cultural approach*, University of South Australia website, 2022.
- iv Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), *Specialist homelessness services annual report 2022-23 - State and territory summary data and fact sheets*, AIHW website, 2023.
- v S Pearce, *Indigenous Women and Entrepreneurship in NSW*, University of Technology Sydney, 2016.
- vi AIHW, *Family, domestic and sexual violence - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, AIHW website, 2023.
- vii Office of the Victorian Information Commissioner, *How organisations can build trust when collecting and handling the personal information of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*, Office of the Victorian Commissioner website, 2020.
- viii NSW Health, *Communicating Positively: A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology*, NSW Health, 2019.
- ix Ibid.
- x NSW Public Service Commission (PSC), *Everyone's Business*, PSC website, accessed 16 February 2023.
- xi The Conversation, *10 ways Aboriginal Australians made English their own*, The Conversation website, 2020.
- xii Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC), *Commission Submission - On common difficulties facing Aboriginal witnesses*, AHRC website, 2007.