Guideline

Communicating Positively: A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology

Summary	The purpose of the Communicating Positively: A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology is to support a culturally safe health system for Aboriginal patients, clients and staff. Communicating Positively provides information and guidance on appropriate word usage when working with Aboriginal people previously as and communities, and when developing policy and programs.
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Audience	All of NSW Health and its stakeholders

COMMUNICATING POSITIVELY: A GUIDE TO APPROPRIATE ABORIGINAL TERMINOLOGY

The purpose of the Communicating Positively- A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology (Communicating Positively) is to support a culturally safe health system for Aboriginal patients and staff. The use of accurate and non-offensive language is essential to ensure health services and programs that Aboriginal people access are culturally safe.

This guide provides NSW Health staff, and other stakeholders, with information and guidance on appropriate word usage when working with Aboriginal peoples and communities, and when developing policy and programs.

KEY PRINCIPLES

The Communicating Positively guide is underpinned by the seven principles of the *NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013 – 2023*. These principles are essential if improvements in Aboriginal health are to be achieved:

- Trust and cultural respect

- Recognition of the cultural values and traditions of Aboriginal communities

- Wholistic approaches to the health of Aboriginal people

- The valuable and unique role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS's)

- The participation of Aboriginal people at all levels of health service delivery and management

- Partnership with Aboriginal communities through ACCHS's and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW.

- Recognition of the contribution the health system can make to the social determinants of health

USE OF THE GUIDELINE

NSW Local Health Districts / Networks and Pillar Health Organisations are responsible for the implementation of Communicating Positively within their services / facilities. All staff should be aware of the Guideline and actively participate in its implementation.

This guide supports NSW Health to meet its CORE values of Collaboration, Openness, Respect and Empowerment, by supporting more appropriate and respectful engagement with Aboriginal communities.

Communicating Positively affirms the shared commitment to the NSW Health Code of Conduct which requires that everyone be treated and must treat others with respect, dignity and fairness.

REVISION HISTORY

Version	Approved by	Amendment notes
July-2019 (GL2019_008)	Deputy Secretary Population and Public Health	Initial Document

ATTACHMENTS

1. Communicating Positively-A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology

NSW Health

Communicating Positively:

A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology

NSW GOVERNMENT

Contents

1 Introduction

Aboriginal people are the first people of Australia and have strong cultures and communities. NSW Health is committed to achieving health equity for Aboriginal peoples in NSW and to providing services and work environments that respond to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people. *Communicating Positively* supports a broader set of NSW Health initiatives to achieve health equity. A culturally respectful and responsive health system is essential to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people. Usage of some terms may vary with location if you are unsure about using a particular term, ask the local Aboriginal community/ies or Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to identify their preferred terms. Alternatively, contact the Director of Aboriginal Health in your Local Health District, the Local Aboriginal Land Council (LALC), or the Centre for Aboriginal Health for further guidance.

2 Purpose

The purpose of the *Communicating Positively – A Guide to Appropriate Aboriginal Terminology (Communicating Positively)* is to support a culturally safe health system for Aboriginal patients and staff. The use of accurate and non-offensive language is essential to ensure health services and programs that Aboriginal people access are culturally safe.

This guide aims to provide NSW Health staff, and other stakeholders, with information and guidance on appropriate word usage when working with Aboriginal peoples and communities, and when developing policy and programs.

3 Principles

The *Communicating Positively* guide is underpinned by the seven principles of the *NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013 – 2023*. These principles are essential if improvements in Aboriginal health are to be achieved:

- Trust and cultural respect
- Recognition of the cultural values and traditions of Aboriginal communities
- Wholistic approaches to the health of Aboriginal people
- The valuable and unique role of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs)
- The participation of Aboriginal people at all levels of health service delivery and management
- Partnership with Aboriginal communities through ACCHSs and the Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council of NSW (AH&MRC)
- Recognition of the contribution the health system can make to the social determinants of health.

4 Roles and responsibilities

NSW Health staff and organisations have a responsibility to provide culturally safe health services and work environments to Aboriginal patients and staff.

This guide supports NSW Health to meet its CORE values of Collaboration, Openness, Respect and Empowerment, by supporting more appropriate and respectful engagement with Aboriginal communities.

This publication affirms the shared commitment to the NSW Health Code of Conduct which requires that everyone be treated and must treat others with respect, dignity and fairness. NSW Health requires all staff to attend the *Respecting the Difference: Aboriginal Cultural Training* to increase staff cultural skills and protocol knowledge.

5 Strengths based reporting

Aboriginal communities and organisations have expressed frustration regarding how Aboriginal peoples and Aboriginal health is reported and portrayed. The 'deficit discourse' refers to communication (both written and verbal) that represents Aboriginal people in terms of deficiency i.e. absence or failure. This includes implying responsibility for health outcomes is with individuals without acknowledging broader socioeconomic structures and institutionalised racism that affects health.

A 'strengths-based approach' attempts to counter the deficit discourse and is a framework for developing initiatives and reporting on impact. Strengths-based approaches to communication acknowledge the resilience and strength of Aboriginal people and the successes in Aboriginal health. Case studies that describe local initiatives that are responding to the aspirations of Aboriginal people can assist with adding context and 'strengths' to descriptions of health outcomes.

6 Terminology Guide

Terms used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

Aboriginal

Description

An 'Aboriginal person' is a person who:

- is of Aboriginal descent
- identifies as an Aboriginal person and
- is accepted as an Aboriginal person by the community in which they live.[1]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Although it is grammatically correct, avoid using the term 'Aborigine(s)' as it has negative connotations with many Aboriginal people. The use of 'Aboriginal person' or 'Aboriginal people' should be used instead.

Be aware that the term 'Aboriginal' is not generally inclusive of Torres Strait Islander people, and reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should therefore be spelt out where necessary.

Always capitalise the 'A' in 'Aboriginal' as you would other designations like 'Australian', 'Arabic' or 'Nordic'. The word 'aboriginal with a lowercase 'a' refers to an indigenous person from any part of the world. As such, it does not necessarily refer to the Aboriginal people of Australia.

Do not use 'Aboriginal' as a noun – it should only be used as an adjective.
Example (*X*): The Government's new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginals.

Never abbreviate the term 'Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' as this is offensive.
Example (✓): The Government's new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginal people.

Be careful not to frame Aboriginal people as being separate from Australian people. Consider the following statements:
Example (*X*): 'Most Australians continue to see Aboriginal people…' This infers that Aboriginal people are not Australian, which is incorrect.
Example (✓): 'Most non-Aboriginal Australians continue to see Aboriginal people…'

Aboriginal people/s

Description

'Aboriginal people' is a collective name for the original people of Australia and their descendants, and does not emphasise the diversity of languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs. By adding an 's' to 'people', you are emphasising this diversity. 'Aboriginal people' can also be used to refer to more than one Aboriginal person.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Both 'Aboriginal people' and 'Aboriginal peoples' are acceptable depending on the context.

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1   Department of Aboriginal Affairs, (1981) Report on a Review of the Administration of the Working Definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, cited in J Gardiner-Garden, The Definition of Aboriginality: Research Note 18, 2000–01 (2000) Parliament of Australia, 2.

Example (✓): 'At the time of European invasion, there were approximately 600 Aboriginal people.' Note that in this instance 'people' is used to describe the groups of Aboriginal people, each with their own language, cultural practices and beliefs.

Example (✓): 'In 1788, there were between 300,000 and 1 million[2] Aboriginal people living in Australia.' Note that in this instance 'people' refers to more than one person.

If you wish to emphasise the fact that Aboriginal people are Australians, consider the use of 'Aboriginal Australian(s)' instead of 'Aboriginal people'. Never abbreviate the term 'Aboriginal' as this is offensive.

Note that within NSW Health, the term 'Aboriginal' is generally used in preference to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW (refer NSW Health Policy Directive PD2005_319).

First Australians/First people

Description

'First people' or 'First Australians' are collective names for the original people of Australia and their descendants, and are used to emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived on this continent prior to European invasion.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Both 'First people' and 'First Australians' are acceptable. Use these terms to emphasise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived on this continent before the European invasion.

Indigenous people/s

Description

The word 'indigenous' is defined as 'originating in and characterising a particular region or country'.[3]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

For example, whilst United Nations documents tend not to capitalise 'indigenous' as they collectively refer to people originating from more than one region or country, Commonwealth documents generally capitalise 'Indigenous' as they refer specifically to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Because 'Indigenous' is not specific, some Aboriginal people feel that the term diminishes their Aboriginality and must be avoided.

If using the term 'indigenous', always capitalise 'I' when referring to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Example (✓): The Australian Government's new strategy will support increased business with Indigenous people.

Example (✓): Australia will be hosting the inter-country tennis competition where Indigenous peoples from Canada, New Zealand and the Asiatic region will be competing for the right to challenge last year's winners.

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2   Human Rights Commission (2005) Questions and Answers about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, Face the Facts
3   Indigenous.2017 *Macquarie Dictionary.* 7th ed. Sydney: Macquarie Dictionary Publishers, http://www. Macquiaredictionary.com.au/features/word/search/indigenous/. [Accessed 26 Nov,2018]

Torres Strait Islander/person/people

Description

Torres Strait Islander or a Torres Strait Islander person is a person/descendant from the Torres Strait Islands which are located to the north of mainland Australia. Although not originally from NSW, there are Torres Strait Islander people living in the state.

Recommended usage

Always capitalise 'Torres Strait Islander'.

Never abbreviate the term 'Torres Strait Islander' as this is offensive.

Within NSW Health, the term 'Aboriginal' is generally used in preference to 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander', in recognition that Aboriginal people are the original inhabitants of NSW (refer NSW Health Policy Directive PD2005_319).

Example (✓): This policy applied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.'

Goori/Koori/Murri/Nunga and other such terms

Description

These terms are directly derived from Aboriginal languages and are the names used by Aboriginal people in specific areas when referring to themselves.

Many Aboriginal people from other areas of Australia reside within NSW and still use their traditional names. Some examples of these terms are:

Goori – usually used by Aboriginal people in northern NSW coastal regions

Koori – usually used by Aboriginal people in parts of NSW and Victoria

Murri – usually used by Aboriginal people in north-west NSW and Queensland

Nunga – usually used by Aboriginal people in South Australia

Noongar – usually used by Aboriginal people in south-west Western Australia

Aboriginal people in areas of Central Australia and Northern Territory still identify themselves by their individual tribal groups. There are too many tribes and clans in Central Australia and Northern Territiory to list in this document. However, research can be undertaken by individuals and services if required.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Always check with the local Aboriginal community about using this type of terminology. There are many Aboriginal language groups within the above-mentioned areas and the use of such terms can be restrictive. For further information about the names of language groups, refer to Horton (1994).vi[4]

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4   Horton D. (1994). Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

Terms associated with Aboriginal communities and community organisations

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) and the Aboriginal Community Controlled Health sector

Description

An Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHSs) is a primary health care service initiated and operated by the local Aboriginal community to deliver wholistic, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate health care to the community which controls it, through a locally elected Board of Management.[5] ACCHSs are a crucial part of the health system, providing accessible and culturally appropriate comprehensive primary health care services, and working with NSW Health to improve the health system more broadly. The provision of primary health care is just one function of an ACCHS, and typically, these services also provide community support, special needs programs, and advocacy.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

The first ACCHS in Australia, known as the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS), was established in the inner city Sydney suburb of Redfern in 1971. The AMS Redfern was a response to the urgent need to provide decent, accessible health services for the growing and largely medically uninsured Aboriginal population of Redfern.[6] AMS Redfern pioneered the concept of community controlled health care in Australia, expanding to become a major healthcare facility providing free medical, dental, psychological, antenatal and drug and alcohol services.[7]

The Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council (AH&MRC) is the peak body and voice for Aboriginal communities in NSW on health. The AH&MRC represents and supports close to 50 ACCHSs and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Related Services throughout NSW who are member services.

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) is the national peak body for ACCHSs, representing close to 50 ACCHSs across the country on Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues.[8]

Aunty/Uncle

Description

Aunty and Uncle are commonly used terms of address for an elder in Aboriginal communities (not necessarily a blood relative).

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

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 them.

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5   NACCHO. (2018). Definitions. [online] Available at: https://www.naccho.org.au/about/aboriginal-health/definitions/ [Accessed 25 Nov.2018].
6   ACCHO. (2018). Definitions. [online] Available at: https://www.naccho.org.au/about/aboriginal-health/definitions/ [Accessed 25 Nov.2018].
7   Marles E, Frame C, Royce M. (2012) The Aboriginal Medical Service Redfern: improving access to primary care for over 40 years. Australian Family Physician ; 41(6): 433-436
8   NACCHO. (2018). Definitions. [online]Available at: https://www.naccho.org.au/about/aboriginal-health/definitions/.[Accessed 25 Nov 2018].

Clan

Description

The 'clan' is a local descent group, larger than a family but based on family links through a common ancestry.[9]

For example, the Yuin nation in south eastern NSW has several clans within it.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

The term 'clan' has an additional and different meaning that comes from non-Aboriginal societies. For this reason, the term should be used with care, and only with local community guidance.

Community

Description

There are many different perspectives on what a 'community' is. Non-Aboriginal people often use 'community' to refer to a particular geographical locality. For example, the use of the expression 'Kempsey Aboriginal community' refers to all the Aboriginal people living in and around Kempsey.

However, it is important to understand that Aboriginal people were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands to live elsewhere. For instance the 'Kempsey Aboriginal community' comprises Aboriginal people from many areas of Australia but the traditional owners of the land are the Dunghutti people. Therefore, what non-Aboriginal people see as one Aboriginal community is not necessarily seen as such by Aboriginal people.

Note that an Aboriginal person may belong to more than one community – for example, where they come from, where their family is and where they live or work. In Aboriginal culture a community is first and foremost about country, extended family ties and shared experience. Community is about interrelatedness and belonging and is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ways of being.[10]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

It is generally acceptable to use the term 'community' to refer to Aboriginal people living within a particular geographical location. However, keep in mind the diversity of Aboriginal people within that 'community'.

If you wish to emphasise the diversity of communities within the one geographical location, use 'communities' in the plural form.

Example (✓): Bourke has two distinct Aboriginal communities – the local community which lives some three kilometres from Bourke in a settlement known as the Alice Edwards Village, and the local population living in Bourke itself.

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9   NSW Office of the Board of Studies (1998). New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Interim Framework K-10. Board of Studies NSW:10

10 Queensland, C. (2018). *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Capability Respectful Language Guide*. [online] Cofc.com.au. Available at: https://www.cofc.com.au/publications/corporate-documents/ reconciliation-action-plan/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-cultural-capability-respectful-language-guide [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

Country

Description

Country is a term used to describe 'Area of land, river and sea that is the traditional land of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language group of community. It has a much broader meaning than its meaning in English incorporating an integral sense of belonging and their place of Dreaming.[11]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Use 'country' to refer to a particular, culturally defined area of land, such as 'Wiradjuri country' or 'Dunghutti country'

Example (✓): Dubbo is in Wiradjuri country.

Culture

Description

'Culture' is defined as 'accepted and traditionally patterned ways of behaving'. It is a 'common understanding shared by the members of a group or community. It includes land, beliefs and spirituality, language, ways of living and working, artistic expression, relationships and identity'.[12]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Traditionally, and until today, Aboriginal cultures were and are many and varied. There is no one homogenous Aboriginal culture. Aboriginal cultures have evolved over time, and modern Aboriginal cultures are different from traditional Aboriginal cultures.

Deceased Person/s Warning

Description

This is a warning usually at the start of video footage containing the images and/or voices of people who may have passed away. This is an element of some peoples' sorry business and can be seen on any materials with Aboriginal people in them, for example in the *Respecting the Difference* e-training.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Consider including a deceased persons warning at the start of any video or website where you have included images or names of Aboriginal people. The suggested text for a deceased person/s warning is below:

'Aboriginal people are warned that this [video/website] may contain the images and voices of Aboriginal people who may have passed away.'

Example:

'The Ministry of Health wishes to advise that this website may contain names and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people now deceased. It may also contain links to sites that may use images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people'.

11   Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocol Guidelines. (2018). 1st ed. [ebook] North Sydney: North Sydney Council, p.10. Available at: http://https:www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].
12   Parbury, N. and Lamberton, K. (2005). *Survival*. Surry Hills, N.S.W.: NSW Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs.

Elder

Description

The traditional meaning of an Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained recognition within their community as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose cultural knowledge and beliefs.

Recognised Elders are highly respected people within Aboriginal communities.[13]

In some instances, Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders. However, it is important to understand that in traditional Aboriginal culture, age alone does not necessarily mean that one is a recognised Elder.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

The use of Elder (upper case) is generally acceptable, but it is important to be aware of the differences in meaning outlined above.

When working with Aboriginal communities, it is important that Aboriginal Elders are involved as Elders are respected representatives of their community. This may occur indirectly – for example, an Aboriginal community controlled peak body such as the AH&MRC, or the local ACCHS may be willing to negotiate with Elders on your behalf.

Be aware that although negotiation with Elders is important, it should not replace negotiation with Aboriginal community organisations, such as an ACCHS.

Mob

Description

'Mob' is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

'Mob' is a term that is extremely important to Aboriginal people because it is used to identify who they are and where they are from. 'Mob' is generally used by Aboriginal people and between Aboriginal people. Therefore, it may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use this term.

Nation

Description

'Nation' refers to a culturally distinct group of people associated with a particular, culturally defined area of land or country. Each nation has boundaries that cannot be changed, and language is tied to that nation and its country.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) map of Aboriginal Australia sets out the location of Aboriginal nations within NSW.[14]

Please note that these locations are only approximate and may not be conclusive in the view of some Aboriginal people.

13 Jens Korff, C. (2018) Respect for Elders and Culture [online]. Creative Spirits Available at: https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/respect-for-elders-and-culture [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

14 Horton D. (1996) Indigenous map of Australia Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [Accessed 26 Nov, 2018]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Use 'nation' to refer to a culturally distinct Aboriginal group and its associated country.

Example (✓): The Gumbaynggirr nation is located around the Nambucca Heads area.

Sorry Business/Funerals

Description

'Sorry Business' is a term commonly used in Aboriginal communities to refer to the grieving process and cultural protocols surrounding the death of a person. These protocols will vary from community to community, therefore it is recommended that you consult a relevant local Aboriginal organisation about specific Sorry Business protocols in the community you work with.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Health professionals should take into consideration and be aware of the disruptions to health delivery and access that may arise from a death in the community. In some places, an entire community will shut down for 'Sorry Business.' It may also be inappropriate to visit particular places, or people, for a period of time following a death in the community.

For some Aboriginal communities, it is highly inappropriate and distressing for a non-Aboriginal person to notify family and next-of-kin of a death.

Some practices related to Sorry Business may include:

- Not using the name of the person who has passed away
- Not showing/displaying the photograph of the deceased person
- Aboriginal people staying inside their homes for an indeterminate period of time
- Aboriginal people not participating in particular non-bereavement activities
- Traveling to the funeral and staying an indeterminable time
- Printing images of the deceased on t-shirts
- Naming memorial sports teams after the deceased.

Traditional Owner/ Custodian (either term may be used)

Description

A 'traditional owner/ custodian(s)' is an Aboriginal person or group of Aboriginal people directly descended from the original Aboriginal inhabitants of a culturally defined area of land or country, and has a cultural association with this country that derives from the traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original Aboriginal inhabitants of the area.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Use 'traditional owner/ custodian(s)' to refer to an Aboriginal person or group of Aboriginal people as defined above.

Example (✓): In 1998, the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service handed back Mutawintji National Park to its traditional owners.

Tribe and kinship

Description

Like 'nation', a 'tribe' refers to a culturally distinct group of people associated with a particular, culturally defined area of land or country.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Be aware that 'tribe' has a specific meaning derived from non-Aboriginal societies, and therefore

may not necessarily be applicable to Aboriginal culture. Some Aboriginal people use the term and such usage should be respected. If unsure ask the local community for guidance.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Always check with the local Aboriginal community about using this type of terminology. There are many Aboriginal language groups within the above-mentioned areas and the use of such terms can be restrictive. For further information about the names of language groups, refer to Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia (Horton, 1994).[15]

Welcome to Country/Acknowledgment of Country

Description

The NSW Health *Aboriginal Cultural Activities Policy* outlines when it is appropriate to organise a Welcome to Country, and when to give an Acknowledgement to Country with suggested wording provided. This policy identifies a list of Aboriginal cultural practices to follow including minimum requirements for the ceremony.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Staff should become familiar with the *Aboriginal Cultural Activities Policy* for information on expectations and roles. Staff should be aware of all times when a Welcome to Country should occur and how to do an Acknowledgement of Country.

A 'Welcome to Country' is a ceremony where traditional owners, usually Elders, welcome people to their land.

An 'Acknowledgement of Country' can be done by everyone, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, to pay respect to the fact that one is on Aboriginal land.

Other important terms used in Aboriginal history

Assimilation

Description

In 1937 the Commonwealth Government convened a conference with the states where it was officially agreed that the aim for those Aboriginal people not of 'full-blood' should be their ultimate absorption into the wider population.

This policy, referred to as 'assimilation', was designed to solve the 'Aboriginal problem' by ensuring that Aboriginal people would lose their identity and culture within the wider community.

Under the Government's assimilation policy, thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their parents. Often, these children would be sent to 'training homes' where they were trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, or fostered out to non-Aboriginal families away from their community of origin. The personal and communal desolation resulting from the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was recognised at the 1996 hearings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which gave rise to the Bringing Them Home Report in May 1997.[16]

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15 Horton D. (1994). Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press for the Aboriginal Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.
16 Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (2018). *Bringing them home*. [online] Available at: https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/bringing-them-home [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

The Government's policy of assimilation was not officially abandoned until 1972 when, as a direct result of growing Aboriginal activism, it was officially replaced with a policy of self-determination – defined as 'Aboriginal communities deciding the pace and nature of their future development as significant components within a diverse Australia'.[17]

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

The history of abuse of Aboriginal peoples' human rights by Government authorities is important context for the health outcomes we currently see, including an ongoing mistrust of Government by some Aboriginal people.

Invasion / colonisation

Description

Colonisation of Australia began with invasion at the time of the landing of the First Fleet in 1788. Although there were between 300,000 and 1 million Aboriginal people living on the mainland at that time, the European people claimed land under the legal fiction of 'terra nullius', meaning it belonged to no one.

The colonisers claimed the land for their own purposes with no thought to the impact this would have on Aboriginal people and culture. This is referred to by Aboriginal people as the European invasion.

Following the invasion, settlement spread piecemeal across the country. This was accompanied by a drastic decline in the Aboriginal population as the invasion brought with it the introduction of diseases to which Aboriginal people had no immunity.

The traditional ways were destroyed as hunting grounds were taken over for grazing and agriculture, causing Aboriginal people to be treated as trespassers on their own land under European law.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

When discussing the colonisation of NSW, do not use the terminology 'European settlement' or 'European arrival'. The preferred and accepted terminology by Aboriginal people is 'European invasion' or 'European colonisation'.

Native Title

Description

The legal recognition in 1993 of the existence of native title in Australia reversed the concept of 'terra nullius', which held that land belonged to no one at the time of European invasion. Native title is the official recognition under federal Australian law of the traditional rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to land and water. To Aboriginal communities, land is not only about hunting and gathering, it is also the basis of spiritual life. The aim of the land rights movement is to counteract the land dispossession of Aboriginal people that occurred with European invasion.

In NSW, the Aboriginal Land Rights Act – legislated in 1983 and amended in 2001 – gave the right for NSW and local Aboriginal land councils to make claims to vacant land held under the Crown Lands Act 1989 (NSW). The Aboriginal Land Rights also gave power for Aboriginal people to seek agreements with any landowner on access rights to hunt, fish and gather.

17   Workingwithindigenousaustralians.info. (2018). *History: Assimilation: Working with Indigenous Australians*. [online] Available at: http://www.workingwithindigenousaustralians.info/content/History_5_Assimilation. html [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

When using the term 'native title', there are differences between land claimable under the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW) and that claimable under the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth). The operation of the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth) has created a range of concerns within some Aboriginal communities.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Do not confuse the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW) with the Native Title Act 1993 (Commonwealth).

There are fundamental differences between land rights and native title. By contrast, native title arises as a result of the recognition, under Australian common law, of pre-existing Indigenous rights and interests according to traditional laws and customs. Native title is not a grant or right created by governments.[18]

Mission

Description

Missions were first set up in the 19th century by Christian missionaries, ostensibly to attend to what missionaries considered being the spiritual and material welfare needs of Aboriginal people. In reality, these missions were largely about 'Christianising' Aboriginal people and teaching them what was considered 'habits of order, industry and subordination'.[19]

Examples of these early 19th century missions in NSW were Cummeragunja, Warangesda and Brewarrina. In the late 1880s, these and other places where Aboriginal people had settled were taken over by the colonial government and run as stations or reserves. By 1900, there were 133 reserves in Australia.[20]

Life on these missions or reserves was incredibly harsh, with poor living conditions, no access to education and little respect for the human rights, cultural needs and practices of Aboriginal people.

The human rights abuses and active attempts to destroy Aboriginal culture had deep and long-term effects on Aboriginal people that continue to be felt today.

Issues for consideration

The sensitive issues that have arisen in Aboriginal communities as a result of forced removal from their traditional lands onto missions and reserves, for example, the history of grief, loss and trauma.

The forced removal of Aboriginal people and placement on missions caused many conflicts. Often members of Aboriginal tribes / clans / nations were placed with Aboriginal people from other tribes / clans / nations who were traditional enemies. These issues were more prevalent within the top end not so much NSW, but still need to be considered when working in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities.

There are negative connotations associated with the expression 'mission manager'. Today, this term is sometimes used to refer to someone who is acting in a controlling, disempowering and/or degrading way towards Aboriginal people.

18 Ag.gov.au. (2018). *Native title | Attorney-General's Department*. [online] Available at: https://www.ag.gov.au/nativetitle [Accessed 26 Nov. 2018].
19 Parbury, N. and Lamberton, K. (2005). *Survival*. Surry Hills, NSW: NSW Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs.
20 Parbury, N. and Lamberton, K. (2005). *Survival*. Surry Hills, NSW: NSW Dept. of Aboriginal Affairs.

Protection Policy

Description

From the 1880s until the 1960s, the NSW Government adopted what is commonly referred to as a regime of 'protection' toward Aboriginal people.

In practice, this regime of 'protection' meant that the government controlled almost every aspect of the lives of Aboriginal people, dictating where Aboriginal people could live, work and travel, and controlling personal finances and child-rearing.

In 1883, the NSW Government established its first Aborigines Protection Board and in 1909, it passed the Aboriginal Protection Act.

It was under the NSW Aborigines Protection Board, later renamed the Aborigines Welfare Board, that thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their parents and institutionalised, sometimes for the rest of their lives.

The history of abuse of Aboriginal peoples' human rights by government authorities. This history has given rise to ongoing mistrust of government by Aboriginal people.

Self-determination

Description

Following the federal election in 1972, the assimilation policy that had dominated Aboriginal affairs for 20 years was replaced by a policy of self-determination.

Self-determination is about Aboriginal people being empowered to decide the pace and nature of their own future. This policy is based on the recognition that Aboriginal people should be actively involved in all decision-making that affects their lives. NSW Health is committed to self-determination.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

In line with the concept of self-determination, the active involvement of Aboriginal people in all decision making affecting Aboriginal health is fundamental.

Stolen Generations

Description

Under the Australian Government's protection and assimilation policies, protection boards throughout Australia oversaw the removal of thousands of Aboriginal children (known as the 'Stolen Generations') from their parents. The personal and communal desolation resulting from the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was recognised at the 1996 hearings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which gave rise to the Bringing Them Home Report in May 1997.

In NSW, under the *Aborigines Protection Act 1909*, the Aborigines Welfare Board had wide ranging control over the lives of Aboriginal people including the power to remove Aboriginal children from their families and place them into care under a policy of assimilation. Often, these children would be sent to 'training homes' where they were trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, or fostered out to non-Aboriginal families away from their community of origin.

Children were placed into Aboriginal Children's Homes such as Bomaderry Children's Home, Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Home and Cootamundra Girls Training Home, and also into other government and non-government homes, as well as placed into foster care, or adopted. These children are collectively known as the Stolen Generations.

The detailed NSW Government response and further information about its implementation can be found on the Aboriginal Affairs NSW website.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

Issues surrounding the Stolen Generations need to be considered when working in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities.

Be aware of the healing journey of members of the Stolen Generations, requirements for social, emotional and wellbeing services, queries about their community of origin and the impact of being fostered/adopted or raised in institutions.

Women's Business/Men's Business

Description

For Aboriginal communities there are strict protocols regarding what can and should be discussed or undertaken by men or women.

All beliefs and stories of The Dreaming are individually owned by both men and women and kept secure by the individual member of a language group ensuring that they are protected for all people.

Some issues could be reproduction, sexual health and planning a ceremony.

Recommended usage/issues for consideration

There may be times when you will have to set up special meetings for Women's Business and Men's Business. These are groups set up for genders to discuss sensitive, gender specific or Aboriginal-specific issues.

When working with community members, find out whether a Women's group and a Men's group needs to be organised. Follow the advice of your Aboriginal colleagues.

Inappropriate and offensive terms

The following terminology is inappropriate or dated, and must be avoided at all times as it is offensive:

- ATSI
- Native
- Mixed blood
- Half-caste
- Quarter-caste
- Full-blood
- Part-Aboriginal
- 25%, 50% Aboriginal
- Them
- They

Example (X): involving **them** in policy making decisions…

Example (✓): involving members of the Aboriginal community in policy making decisions…

Example (X): an invitation inviting **those people** to attend the meeting will be sent out on…

Example (✓): an invitation inviting members of the Aboriginal community to attend the meeting will be sent out on…

Example (X): if you people need…

Example (✓): If the Aboriginal community needs…

The following terms are also offensive and should never be used:

- Coloured
- Nigger
- Gin
- Coon
- Savage
- Coconut
- Darky

- Primitive
- Lubra
- Abo
- Boong
- Jacki jacki
- Sooty
- Blacks

Being aware of racial stereotypes

When working with and communicating with Aboriginal people, reflecting on any stereotypes you may have held concerning Aboriginal people will improve your dialogue and working relationship with your local community.

Stereotypes are generalised assumptions about a particular group of people usually based on race. Negative racial stereotypes of Aboriginal people contribute to Aboriginal disadvantage by allowing racist attitudes about Aboriginal people to persist.

Many negative stereotypes are based in ignorance. For example, a person may hold a particular perception of Aboriginal people – based upon a commonly held stereotype – without ever having known an Aboriginal person or engaged in any meaningful way with an Aboriginal community.

Understanding what common negative racial stereotypes about Aboriginal people exist, and how they affect Aboriginal people is also important, as is remaining aware of when you may be responding or acting in way that is being influenced by a negative stereotype.

'Loaded words'

Some words can make relationships difficult. Please see below three examples of loaded words or phrases that staff should avoid:

- *Captain Cook 'discovered' Australia* disregards the presence of Aboriginal people in Australia prior to Captain Cook's arrival.
- *Australia was 'settled' by Europeans as opposed to 'invaded'.* For many Aboriginal people, the use of terms such as 'settled' in this context disregards the full impact of land dispossession and violence suffered by Aboriginal people during colonial history.
- *Aboriginal people were 'nomadic/nomads'* infers Aboriginal people had no consistent connection to land.

Non-verbal cues

Awareness of non-verbal cues such as body language, facial expressions and gestures, and respecting personal space play an important role in building positive communication with Aboriginal people.

Certain forms of non-verbal communication may have a very different meaning for an Aboriginal person than they do for a non-Aboriginal person. Some Aboriginal people for example, will find direct eye contact while speaking to be uncomfortable because averting eye contact while communicating is a sign of respect. With this in mind, staff should be mindful of their own body language and gestures.

Being observant of people in community can help staff to pick up on common non-verbal cues that are specific to that community. A local Aboriginal organisation or a local Aboriginal Health Worker can assist in helping you to identify and become more aware of local practices.

7 Further Reading

NSW Health policies and guidelines, further information on Aboriginal history

Koori Mail Newspaper www.koorimail.com

NSW Aboriginal Affairs www.aboriginalaffairs.nsw.gov.au

NSW Health *Aboriginal Cultural Activities Policy*
https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/Pages/doc.aspx?dn=PD2019_025

Aboriginal Health Impact Statement
https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2017_034.pdf

NSW Health Code of Conduct
https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2015_049.pdf

Goodall H. (1996). Invasion to Embassy – Land in Aboriginal Politics in NSW, 1770-1972.
Allen & Unwin in association with Black Books. Sydney.

Horton D (1994). Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia – Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Canberra.

Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (1997). Bringing Them Home Report.
Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families.

Parbury N. (1986). Survival – A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs NSW. Sydney