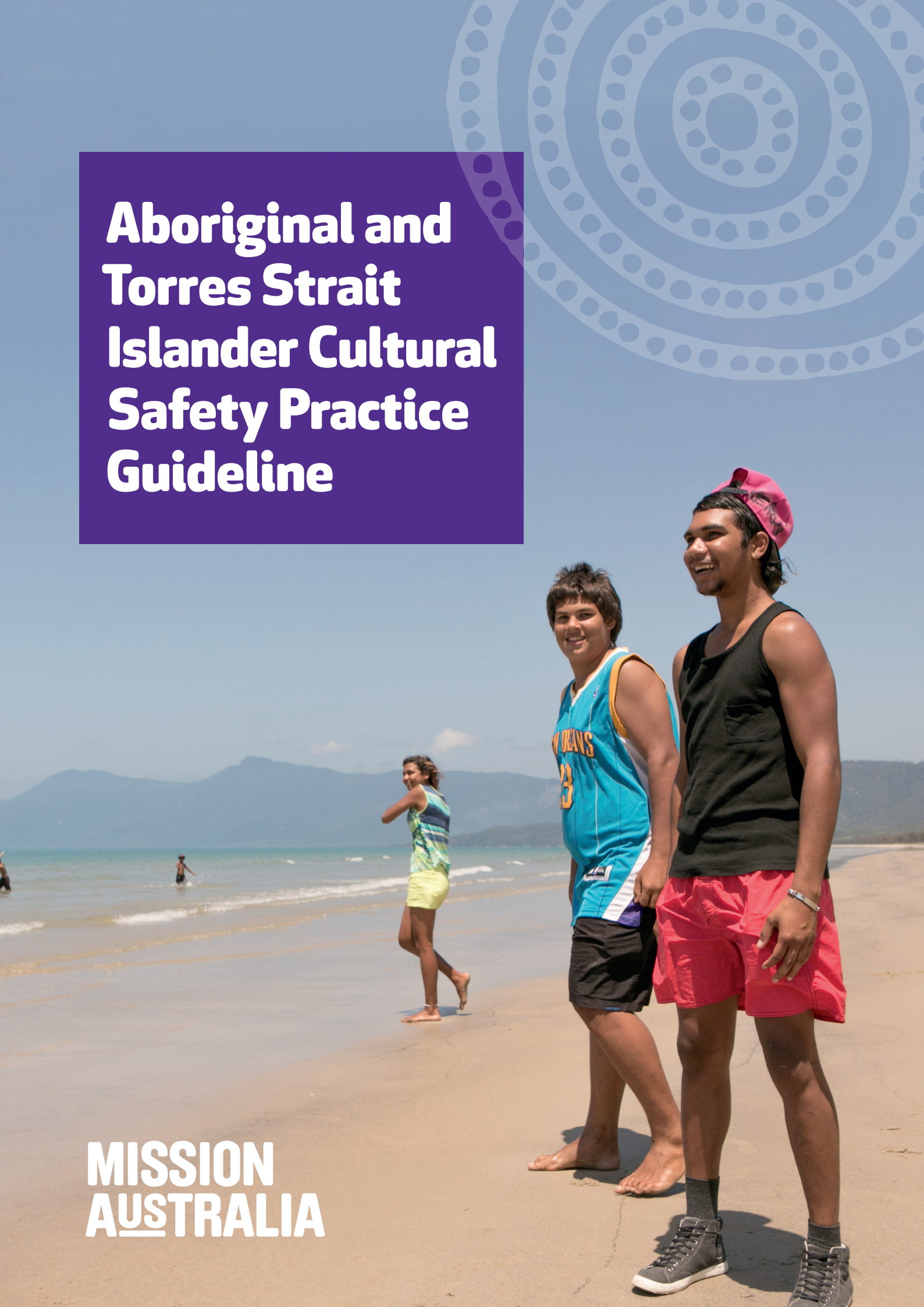


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Practice Guideline

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Practice Guideline

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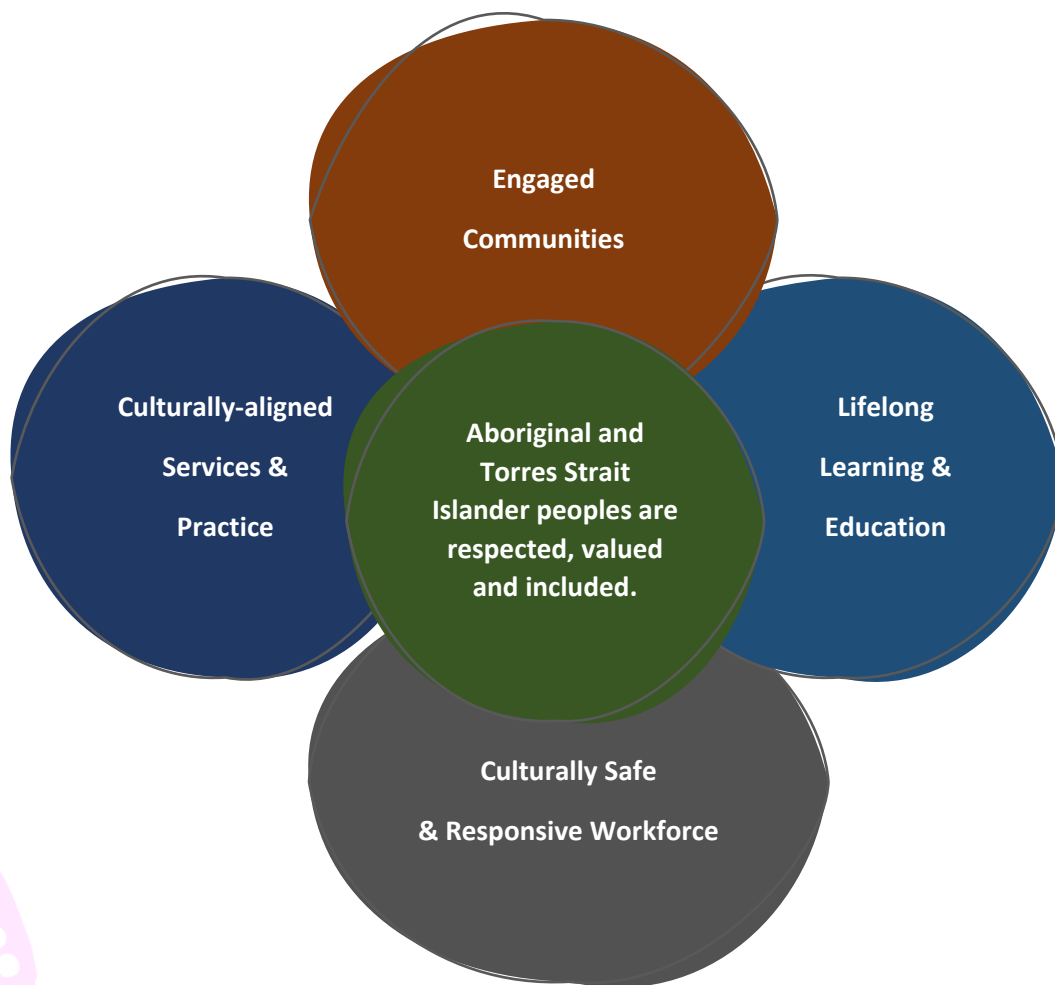
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A Culturally Safe Organisation

In a culturally safe organisation, all workers feel comfortable, supported and respected.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, a culturally safe organisation incorporates behaviours, practices, policies, structures and partnerships that create safe environments whereby workers and clients thrive, are safe in their identity, have a voice and are free to make decisions without fear or constraint.

Creating a culturally safe organisation is everyone's responsibility and should be considered as an ongoing journey of discovery and change.



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Acknowledgement

Mission Australia acknowledges the traditional custodians of this Country, and we pay our respects to the Elders past and present for they hold the memories, the culture and dreams of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's first peoples and respect their cultural heritage, beliefs and continual relationship with the land, and we acknowledge the importance of the young people who are our future leaders.

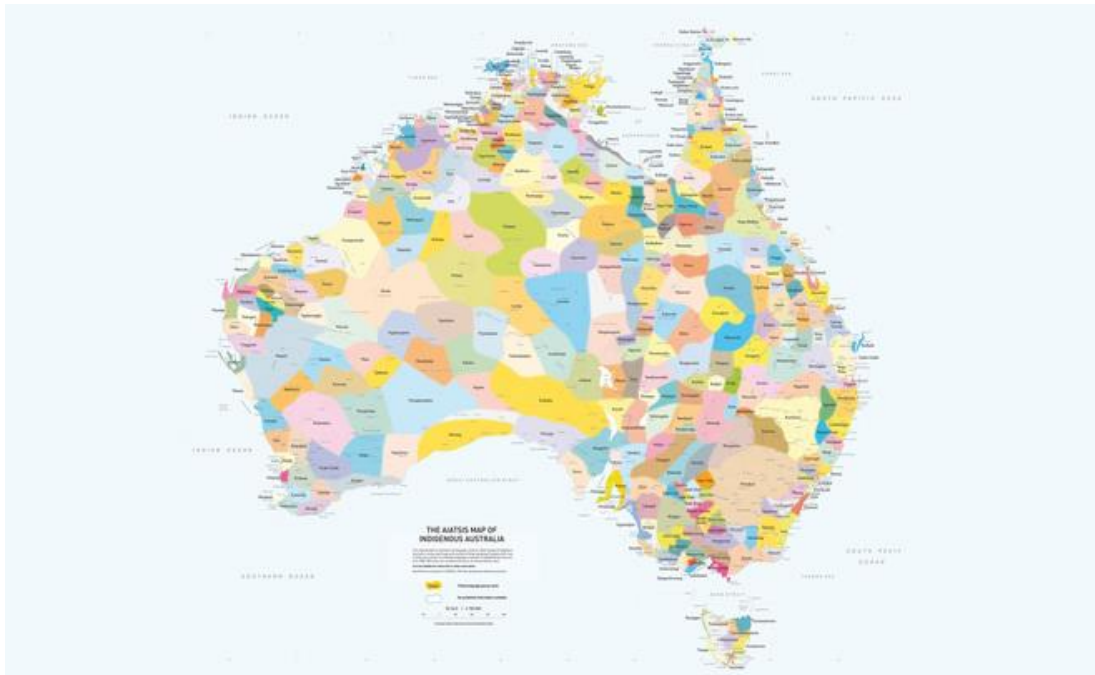
We embrace self-determination and reconciliation, and believe that the revival of language, lore and cultural knowledge will continue to strengthen the understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations' rich and diverse histories by all Australians.

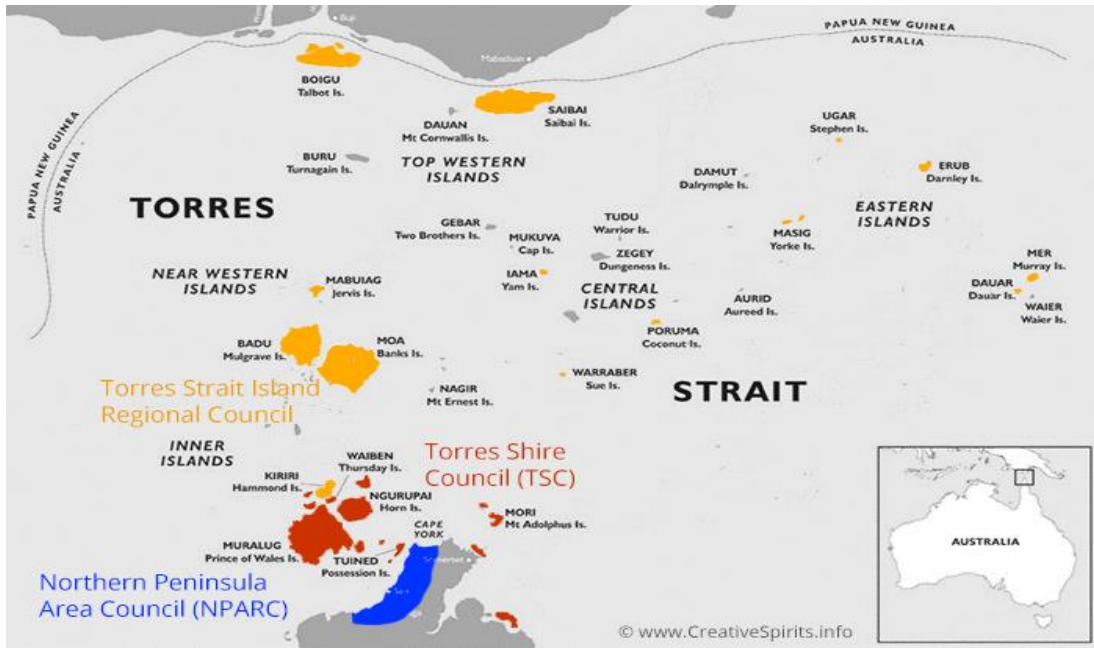


Cultural Maps

These maps demonstrate the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australia and reflects the language, social and nation groups.

Further information can be sourced using the links below.





For further information:

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>

Purpose of a Cultural Safety Practice Guideline

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Practice Guideline (Guideline) sits alongside the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework 2024-2029 (Framework) and provides guidance, advice and links to resources and tools for all Mission Australia staff to strengthen the cultural safety of their services and workplace and to assist Mission Australia's transition to a culturally safe organisation.

Mission Australia engaged the services of Yilabara Solutions, an Aboriginal owned consulting organisation to provide cultural guidance and lead the development of a suite of cultural safety tools including this Guideline, the Cultural Safety Framework, a Cultural Workforce Plan and a Cultural Learning Strategy.

These documents were developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, communities and service organisations.

Using the Guideline

The Guideline can be useful for individuals, in supervision settings or team meetings. It can help to induct new team members, identify training needs, focus discussions and improve practices and policies.

The Guideline presents information in three ways:

1. General information to build knowledge, understanding and awareness.
2. Checklists to assist staff with improving Cultural Safety.
3. Self-Assessment Tool to assess individual staff or Mission Australia's cultural capability.

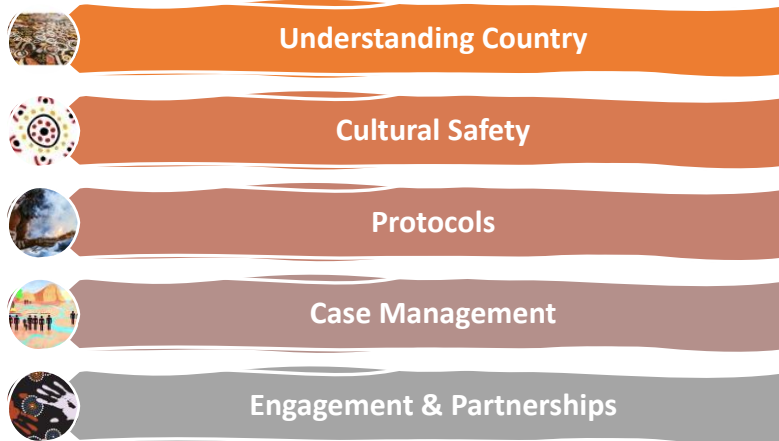
These resources will also support individuals to tailor their work and behaviours to ensure they meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, groups and communities.

Across Australia, we recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities share some histories and experiences, and also have some different histories and experiences, and that they hold diverse attitudes, beliefs and faiths. Mission Australia is committed to "meeting people where they are" and respecting diversity in individuals and communities.

The checklists and tools are an optional guide, which may be useful for teams and individuals to reflect on their cultural safety and identify improvement actions.

The Guideline takes a whole of organisation approach and provides information across five focus areas.

5 Focus Areas



1. Understanding Country

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, Country is a holistic concept. It refers to identity, family, community and culture. Its complex ecosystem incorporates beliefs about law/lore, customs, language, education and spirituality.



Cultural practices of welcoming visitors to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, recognising and respecting lore and customs of people and the land that is being visited are two significant and powerful ceremonies that have been practiced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities for thousands of years.

[Mission Australia's Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country Guide](#) outlines our approach to managing these two important cultural ceremonies.



Considerations

- Arrange Welcome to Country at significant or large community events, ceremonies, or formal meetings. It is not necessary for small meetings.
- Contact Local Land Councils or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisation to discuss Welcome to Country protocols and fee for service arrangements.
- Complete the [Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Cultural Profile](#) to identify Traditional Owners, Elders, language and protocols for your region or office.

2. Cultural Safety in the Workplace

Core Element How this looks in practice

Workplace Environment

- Expressions of respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel welcome in your workplace
- Employees have a deep understanding of cultural sensitivity
- People feel comfortable about expressing their cultural identity

Workplace Attitudes

- Proactively address racism and unconscious bias on the part of your employees
- Develop an understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history pre and post colonisation and the impact of government policies and social bias
- Embed ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness training

Workplace Policies & Governance

- All policies, processes and practices recognise and respond to cultural differences
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and key stakeholders are engaged in the co-design of these to reflect consideration and practices around cultural leave, bereavement leave, recruitment and interview processes, and tension between cultural responsibilities and workplace expectations
- All employees know about your cultural commitments. These include Mission Australia's Reconciliation Action Plan, Aboriginal cultural awareness training, leave policies (e.g., for Sorry Business) and support for the Uluru Statement from the Heart.

External Declarations

- External statements are known and supported by your stakeholders and regularly reviewed and reported

Relationships

- Observe and respect cultural engagement protocols and local practices
- Develop respectful relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and communities
- Actively listen to and acknowledge the advice of all cultural stakeholders
- Follow through on your commitments

Considerations

- Complete the Culturally Safe Work Environments Checklist for good practice tips.
- Complete the Cultural Safety Self-Assessment Tool to identify cultural safety strengths and improvement opportunities for your workplace.



3. Protocols

Ceremonies and protocols are an important part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and relationships. Different individuals, communities, groups and regions have different attitudes to which ceremonies and protocols they follow.

By incorporating cultural protocols¹ into organisational practices and official events, according to the local context and views of relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders, you will:

- recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and heritage;
- communicate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural practices to the broader community to promote respect and understanding;
- demonstrate that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are living through maintaining the practice of ceremonies and protocols; and
- demonstrate recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's unique position, which can assist in building relationships and partnerships.

Who to ask?

When planning an event, considering new business opportunities or scheduling a meeting, it is essential to learn who the appropriate traditional custodians or community Elders are, and to ensure cultural representatives are engaged at the beginning of any activity.

Giving all community members the opportunity to share their thoughts and voice concerns at community discussions is part of Aboriginal culture. This process may take some time, so factor sufficient time into your planning to facilitate traditional decision making.

In some locations, disputes on the identity of traditional custodians occur when people or groups have been dislocated or removed from lands and eventually return to the area. Their legitimacy of rights to traditional custodianship may not be accepted by some community members and may only be clarified through a formal application, extensive research and evidence of connection to land.

When there is a dispute or there is more than one cultural group representing the community, all efforts should be made to invite representatives from all relevant groups to discuss and decide on local protocols and who should be included in the activity and decision making.

Use your existing contacts, referral networks, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) and other agencies to identify appropriate people to contact.

Women's & Men's Business

These respectful traditional protocols are considered sensitive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and are generally not discussed and shared with the broader community.

¹ Victoria Public Sector Commission, Workforce Programs: Aboriginal Cultural Capability.

In traditional society, men and women had distinct but equally important roles. Women were responsible for gathering bush food and water, and men were responsible for making tools and hunting larger animals.

Women's and men's business can relate to health, upbringing, ceremonies and maintenance of culturally significant places and sacred sites. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, there are certain places and practices just for women or for men as part of ancestral law. The tradition of this lore has been passed down through generations to help protect sacred sites and ceremonial practices.²

For example, some sites are for men only because they are used for special initiation ceremonies to support young males to grow into men.

Women's business involves practices and sacred places to nurture young girls to become women, so they can provide the same role to the next generation of girls.

Men are not to know what happens in women's business and women are not to know what happens in men's business; this is the lore.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

Flying the Australian Aboriginal Flag or Torres Strait Islander Flag acknowledges the important role that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people play in our community.



The Australian Aboriginal flag

Key points:

- The colours of the flag represent the Aboriginal people of Australia and their connection to the land.
- The top half of the flag is black to symbolise Aboriginal people. The red in the lower half stands for the earth and the colour of ochre, which has ceremonial significance. The yellow circle in the centre of the flag represents the sun.
- The Australian Aboriginal flag was designed by artist Harold Thomas, a descendent of the Luritja people of Central Australia in 1970.
- It was first raised on 9 July 1971 at Victoria Square in Adelaide.
- It was also used at the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra in 1972.
- In 1995, the Aboriginal flag was recognised by the Australian Government as an official 'Flag of Australia' under the Flags Act 1953.
- The Australian Aboriginal Flag is displayed at Aboriginal centres and is well recognised as the flag of Aboriginal peoples of Australia.
- It is also flown:
 - during NAIDOC Week to celebrate and promote greater understanding of Indigenous peoples and culture,

² NSW Government, Aboriginal cultural protocols and practices: Women's and Men's business

- during National Reconciliation Week in recognition of 27 May as the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which removed clauses that discriminated against Indigenous Australians from the Constitution,
- on 3 June every year as the anniversary of the High Court decision in the Eddie Mabo land rights case of 1992.
- In January 2022, the Commonwealth of Australia acquired the copyright of the Aboriginal Flag.
- The Commonwealth allows the design of the Australian Aboriginal Flag to be freely reproduced by the public on all other mediums.

The Torres Strait Islander flag



Key points:

- The green panels at the top and bottom of the Torres Strait Islander flag represent the land and the central blue panel represents the sea. The black lines dividing the panels represent the Torres Strait Islander people.
- The centre of the flag shows a white dhari (dancer's headdress) and is a symbol for all Torres Strait Islander people.
- Underneath the dhari is a white five-pointed star. The points of the star represent the five major island groups in the Torres Strait and white symbolises peace. The star also represents navigation as a symbol of the seafaring culture of the Torres Straits.
- The Torres Strait Islander Flag was adopted in May 1992 during the Torres Strait Islands Cultural Festival and proclaimed on 14 July 1995.
- Permission is not required to fly the Torres Strait Islander flag; however, the Island Coordinating Council holds copyright to the Torres Strait Islander flag.
- The Torres Strait Islander Flag is flown during NAIDOC Week and Reconciliation Week.
- The design of the Torres Strait Islander Flag was the winning entry in a competition organised by the Island Coordinating Council.

The Australian National Flag takes precedence in Australia over all other flags when it is flown in company with other flags. Accordingly, when the Australian Aboriginal Flag or Torres Strait Islander Flag is to be flown along with the Australian National Flag, the Australian National Flag should be flown in the position of honour. More on flag protocols can be found in the [Australian Flags Booklet](#).

Smoking Ceremonies

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander smoking ceremonies are over 60,000 years old and are performed on many levels - physical, mental, emotional and spiritual.

Most indigenous cultures around the world also utilise 'smoking' to clear space, heal and provide safety and protection to individuals or groups.

- A smoking ceremony is an ancient cultural custom in Australia that involves burning various native plants to produce smoke, which has cleansing properties and the ability to

ward off bad spirits from the people and the land and make a pathway for a brighter future.³

- Certain traditional smoking ceremonies are also believed to be used for positive therapeutic outcomes dependant on what plants are available from region to region.
- It can also be used as a sign of respect for people and the passing of Elders.
- Smoking ceremonies are regularly used by Traditional Owners to deliver Welcome to Country at larger or important events.
- The main way a smoking ceremony takes place is for someone to carry a wooden dish holding coals and wet leaves around to everyone, or there may be a set smoking site for people to gather around so that they can walk through the smoke.
- When you see a smoking ceremony happening, it is a gift from the local Clan group to all people attending the event. You may go to the smoke and wave it over you and cleanse the past for a better future.



“You will see a vessel of smouldering leaves that have been culturally prepared. The effects of a Traditional Aboriginal Smoking Ceremony will be felt over coming days and weeks. Your workspace may begin to feel different. You may feel different. This is normal.” – NSW Metropolitan Land Council⁴

Consult the relevant local cultural representatives (traditional custodians or community Elders) to advise on whether a smoking ceremony is appropriate for any significant event, such as the opening of an MA facility, and if so, how it should be conducted.

Fees for Cultural Services

In providing cultural services such as *Welcome to Country*, artistic performances and ceremonies, Aboriginal people are using their own time and intellectual property.

³ Aboriginal Incursions, Special Aboriginal Ceremonial Events

⁴ NSW Metropolitan Land Council

As such, providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated. Appropriate remuneration and/or assistance should be negotiated between the cultural service provider and the agency hosting the event.

Additional information on paid participation can be accessed in Mission Australia's *CFCS - Paid Participation of People with Lived Experience Policy*.



Considerations

Explore these considerations when negotiating fee-for service arrangements:

- Speaker fees.
- Welcome to Country activity.
- Travel to and from the event.
- Public Profile of the event.
- Specific resources requested for the event.

Questions for Managers and workplaces in following cultural protocols:

1. Do you begin your meetings and community forums with an Acknowledgement of the Traditional Owners?
2. Do you ask Traditional Custodians or Elders from the local community to conduct a Welcome to Country to mark the opening of an event, new premises or new service?
3. Do you discuss a fee for service arrangement when seeking cultural advice/expertise from Elders and ACCOs?
4. Do you seek guidance or advice from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people on the correct cultural protocols for the region you work in?
5. Are you aware that it takes time to develop meaningful relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations?

Significant Dates & Events

There are a number of dates that are significant to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. You should be aware of these dates and encourage staff in your workplace to participate in them as relevant.

Date	Event and Significance
26 January	Day of Mourning/Survival/Invasion/Australia Day. On this day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities celebrate the survival of their cultures.
13 February	Apology Day anniversary of the 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations
3rd Thursday in March	Close the Gap Day is part of the Close the Gap campaign and raises awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues.
21 March	Harmony Day commenced in 1999 to coincide with the UN Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination and encourages tolerance between all Australians.
25 April	Coloured Diggers Anzac Day honours and recognising the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander war veterans.
26 May	National Sorry Day acknowledges the strength of Stolen Generation Survivors acknowledged in the Recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report (1998).
27 May	Marks the Anniversary of the 1967 Referendum when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were finally counted in the Census, requiring the Australian Government to make laws for them.
27 May - 3 June	Reconciliation Week begins with Sorry Day and ends with Mabo Day and celebrates significant milestones in the reconciliation journey with activities across Australia.
3 June	Mabo Day celebrates the National High Court decision (1992) in favour of Eddie Mabo and his descendants extinguishing the myth of Terra Nullius and recognised Native Title rights.
Sunday June Long Weekend	Myall Creek Massacre Memorial is important to the Kamilaroi/Gamilaroi/Gomeri people and surrounding nations in remembrance for the Wirrayaraay people who were killed on 10 June 1838 and the subsequent trial and hanging of the perpetrators. This date is both historically and legally significant in terms of reconciliation.
1 July	The Torres Strait Islander people commemorate the Coming of the Light Festival with religious and cultural ceremonies, the arrival of the London Missionary Society in 1871.
1st full week in July	NAIDOC Week celebrates the history, culture and achievements and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4 August	Children's Day celebrates Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and is themed to highlight a significant issue, concern or hope for the year.
9 August	United Nations International Day of Indigenous Peoples strengthens awareness of Human Rights, health, education, and development.

Mission Australia has an [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Annual Cultural Events calendar](#) to support staff to actively engage in local community days of celebrations.

Boards, Committees, Advisory Groups

Where Mission Australia requires advice in relation to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander cultural matters, representatives from Traditional Owners or community Elders should be included on relevant committees or advisory/working groups.

The representative/s will need to publicly acknowledge the Traditional Custodians and must be accepted by the relevant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community.

Where a board or committee needs general cultural representation, a representative from the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community should be sought.

Mission Australia's Knowledge Group is an internal cultural resource that may be asked for advice on cultural advice and guidance.

Other Ceremonies

In addition to events listed in this Guideline, other ceremonies and observations may occur in your local area.

Connect with your local Aboriginal Land Council or Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community group for details and how best to engage with and recognise these events.

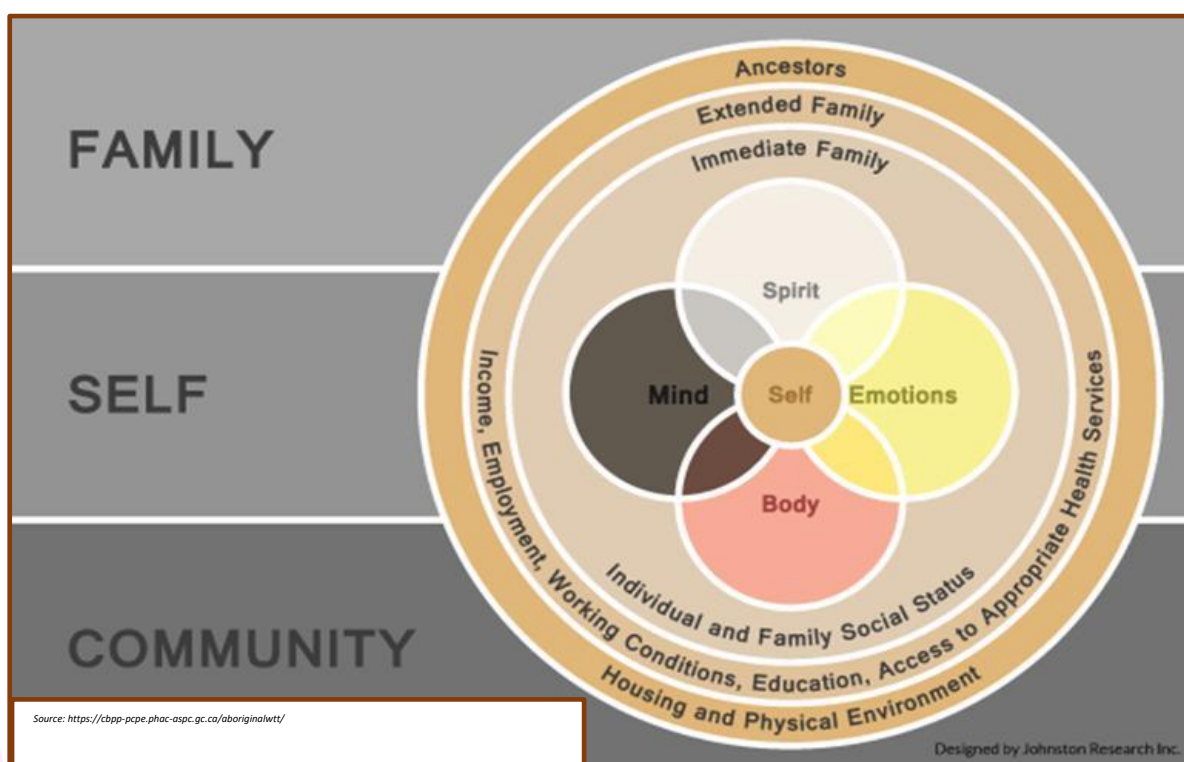
4. Case Management

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander case management is central to supporting families and children and recognises the importance of keeping clients and family culturally safe and connected to culture and community constructs.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and knowledge systems of caring for children are distinct. Extended family and community structures have a responsibility for the emotional, social, physical and cultural safety and development of the young people.

A useful resource for Cultural Case Management Practice (CCMP) has been developed by the NSW Department of Communities and Justice, within its *Aboriginal Case Management Policy*.⁵ Mission Australia endorses this, and it is a supplement to Mission Australia's *National Case Management Approach* as it reflects good practice case management principles for engaging and working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities.

The CCMP provides practical application of culturally responsive case management and improves engagement and safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.

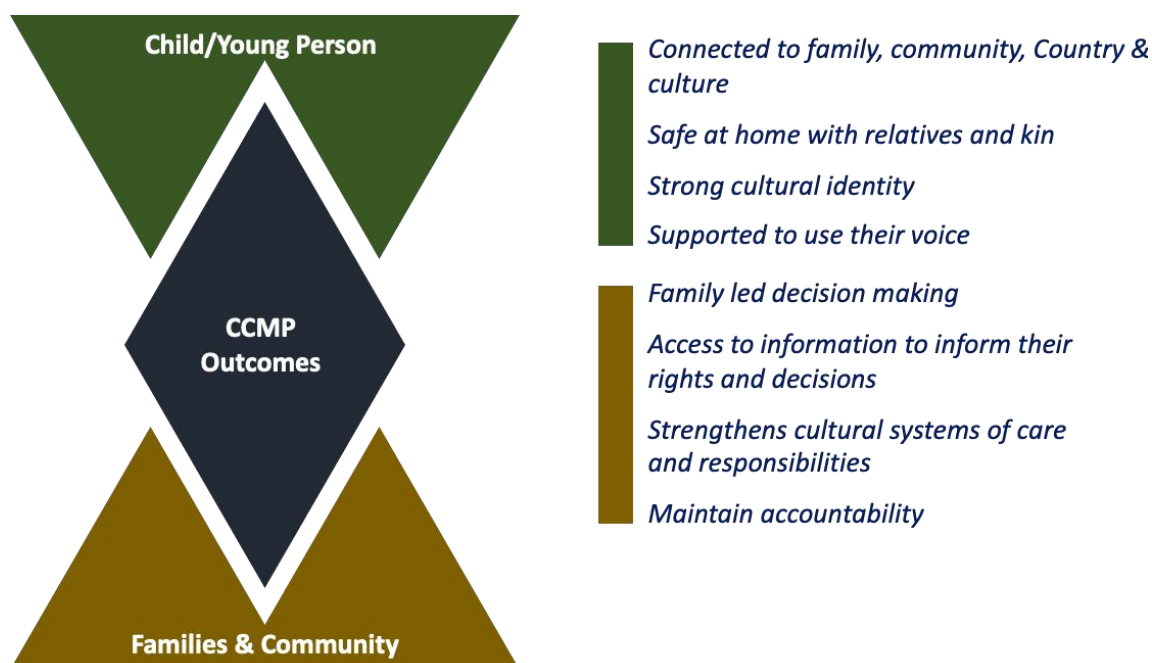


⁵ Department of Communities and Justice, Aboriginal Case Management

Mission Australia's adoption of the CCMP aims to:

- Encourage case management that provides holistic and flexible support to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, builds trust and promotes access to Mission Australia's services.
- Ensure services are culturally embedded and delivered by culturally competent staff.
- Support staff to establish and maintain meaningful and durable relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities.
- Encourage early engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families to empower family-centred, strength-based solutions and support for our clients.

The CCMP model spans the continuum of support for families and children where services are focused on providing support that is family aligned, and culturally respectful. The model aims to achieve outcomes for the young person, family and community:



The CCMP model is also aligned to key enabling foundations including the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the Declaration of Rights of Indigenous Peoples and AbSec's *Achieving a Holistic Aboriginal Service Systems for NSW*.

Good Practice Principles of Cultural Case Management Practice⁶

1. Client/Family Centred

- Cultural case management is client focused to promote the cultural safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and families.
- Trauma-informed approach that meets the emotional, cultural and spiritual needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Every opportunity is taken to embed family and community support and care to strengthen identity and connection to culture and Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
- Ensure the views and opinions of family, kin and community are sought and heard.

2. Holistic and Flexible Services

- A key point of contact is established early to help with communication and case coordination.
- The 'no wrong door' approach is in place to ensure relevant and culturally appropriate services are wrapped around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and families.
- Identified priorities incorporate local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and support systems.
- When appropriate, there is open and transparent sharing of information and referral pathways that deliver culturally safe services and outcome for clients and families.

3. Family-led Decision Making

- Understanding that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are critical to achieving the best outcomes and have a collective interest in the safety, welfare and wellbeing of our clients and families.
- Engaging families and community with risks or concerns early and throughout the support journey will help develop culturally safe solutions for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
- Build a 'network of care' that recognises the individual and collective experience and cultural knowledge and support of this network to help manage risks and maintain cultural safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients and families.

4. Community Involvement/Support

- Supporting self-determination principles will ensure families and communities are central to the development and implementation of culturally safe services and supports for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
- Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities are empowered to participate in and provide cultural insight in advocacy and decision making that impacts the outcomes of clients and families. This acknowledges and values the significant strengths of communities and their role in safeguarding rights of families and maintaining cultural safety.

⁶ Department of Communities and Justice, Aboriginal Case Management

5. Prevent Harm and Preserve Families

- Support families to address underlying causes of risk. This may include impacts of intergenerational trauma, marginalisation and disadvantage.
- Engage proactive efforts to strengthen families, minimise the incidence of harm and foster resilience for Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander clients and families.
- Minimise disruption and disconnection to family and community.

6. Culturally Embedded

- Understanding, respecting and valuing the perspectives, beliefs, lived experiences and values of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- Recognise the importance of culture and its central role in the lifelong safety and wellbeing of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.
- Cultural safety underpins systems, processes, practices and care and cultural support planning.



Cultural Case Management Practice: Home Visit Considerations.

These home visit considerations supplement Mission Australia's *WHS Home Visits Checklist*.

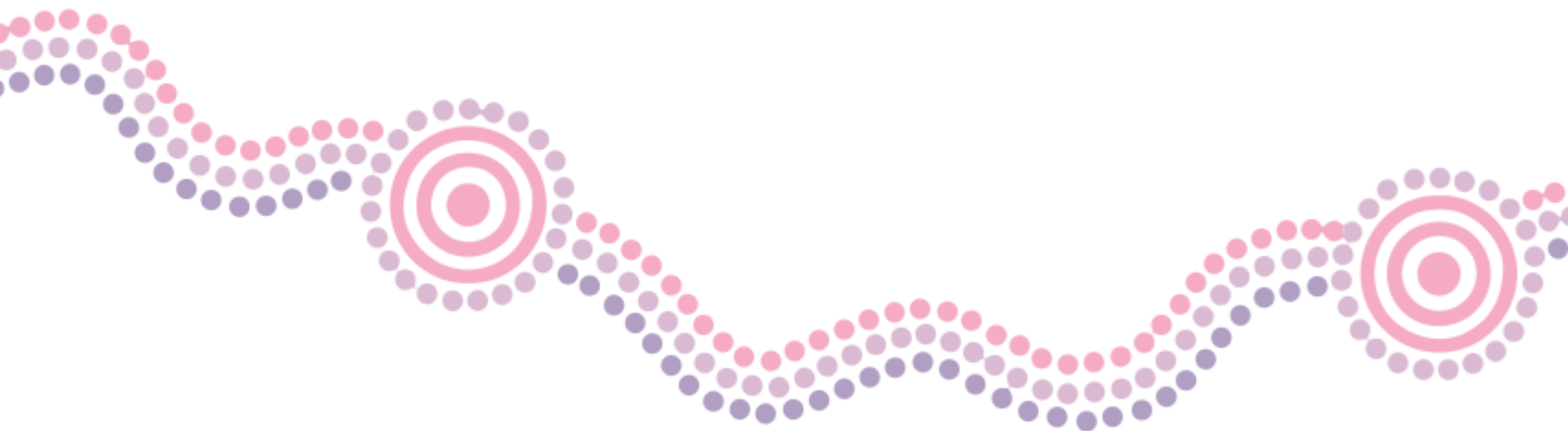
- Confirm relevant cultural practices and protocols that must be observed during the visit
- Confirm who you should contact and speak with during the visit
- Identify the appropriate staff who will be attending the home. Does this include an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander worker?
- Clarify decision making parameters
- Use appropriate and respectful language at all times

- Address the client and family members by their preferred name
- Ask for clarification if you are unsure how to pronounce cultural names
- If required, use the back of your hand not your palm if you are required to touch someone as this acknowledges cultural practice and respect
- The only time a flat hand or palm touch should be used is in a handshake
- When meeting families within the home environment, be mindful of where you sit, always wait to be seated or ask, "where would you like me to sit"?
- When meeting male and female clients be mindful of your own body language, how you are sitting and where you are sitting.



Considerations

- Do not mention the name or show photographs of deceased Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander persons unless approval is granted by the relevant family.
- Culturally appropriate 'Sorry Business' is observed for the period of mourning of a deceased Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community member.
- There is recognition and support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and clients to participate in cultural ceremonies and practices.



5. Engagement & Partnerships

The process of engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and organisations can be complex and takes time.

Knowing **who** to engage with, **when** and **how** often to engage and **what** opportunities Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people have in decisions and outcomes are critical elements to building trusted partnerships.

Additional information on developing and strengthening culturally appropriate partnerships can be obtained in Mission Australia's

- *Partnerships Kit: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships*
- *Principles for Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities*

Tips for Engagement & Partnerships

Early engagement

- Identify networks and connections that already exist within Mission Australia, and externally between other service providers or ACCOs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This can help limit consultation fatigue.
- Establish contact early once relevant communities and individuals have been identified.
- Before holding meetings with the broader community, work with appropriate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to plan and organise an introductory meeting to seek advice on how meetings should be run. This demonstrates respect for cultural protocols, a commitment to listening and that the community has ownership over the engagement.
- Seek out, value and embed cultural knowledge, expertise and diverse community perspectives.
- Engage with community and find out how you can participate in significant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander events.
- Ensure communities are informed and receive timely information about all engagement activities.

Manage Expectations

- Be clear and upfront about the purpose and expectations of the engagement/partnership:
 - What Mission Australia can deliver as well as limitations.
 - Identify the needs and considerations of the community and what skill and knowledge they will contribute to the process.
 - This is critical to developing honest and trusted relationships and providing equitable participation, and shared authority and decision-making.
-

Tips for Engagement & Partnerships

Respecting Cultural Protocols

- Cultural protocol may require men and women to sit, meet or discuss separately.⁷
- Clan groups (refer to common cultural terms).

Time

- In Western culture, time relates to schedules and meeting deadlines.
- Time is perceived differently in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, as more value is placed on family responsibilities and community relationships.
- Some community representatives may have difficulty in making on the spot decisions and may want time to seek guidance from Elders or their community.
- Recognise these cultural protocols when developing your meeting schedule and timeframes.
- Allocate flexible consultation times and be prepared to rearrange consultations due to sensitive or cultural issues.
- Clearly explain any time constraints or decision milestones.

Cultural Issues

- Be aware and respectful of cultural issues such as initiations, deaths, funerals and mourning. This may mean that it is not appropriate for a consultation to take place at that time.
- Sustained contact with the community will enhance the likelihood of awareness of any issues within the community that may affect the consultation process.⁸

Communication

- Try to avoid lengthy speeches/presentations when meeting with communities and family.
- Incorporate 'yarning' time where community members can talk amongst themselves and ask questions in small groups.
- If you must deliver a presentation, consider a PowerPoint presentation that highlights key points instead of pages of written text.
- Be comfortable with extended periods of silence during conversations. This is valued and considered the 'norm' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Silent pauses are used to listen, show respect or consensus. Be respectful and provide people with adequate time.

⁷ CSYW: Respect for Cultural Protocols and Practice

⁸ AIHW: Engaging with Indigenous Australia

Tips for Engagement & Partnerships

Language

- Be aware that English may not be the first spoken language of the community.
- Avoid the use of acronyms and jargon.
- Consider arranging for a community interpreter to attend meetings. This should be done in advance and at the time of your initial planning and scheduling of the meeting.
- Provide clear explanation when responding to questions, limit 'yes' or 'no' responses. This will help with understanding and encourage participation.
- Respectful and inclusive language is an essential component of strengthening relationships.

Body Language

- For some Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, avoidance of eye contact is a gesture of respect. Making direct eye contact can be viewed as being rude, disrespectful, or even aggressive.
- Avoid cross-gender eye contact unless the person initiates it and is comfortable.
- For some communities, direct eye contact implies respect, however, if you are yet to obtain this, it can be viewed as threatening.
- In some places, direct eye contact, particularly with elderly male members of the community is viewed as highly inappropriate. To convey polite respect, the appropriate approach would be to avert or lower your eyes in conversation.⁹

Visiting Country

- Research to identify the Traditional Owners of the Country you are entering.
 - Acknowledge the Traditional Owners and pay respect to their Elders, past and present.
 - It is important to ask community members where you can and cannot walk. For example, visitors may be restricted to walking on footpaths and driving on sealed roads only, or there may be men's areas and women's areas.
 - Always seek permission before walking around and taking photos of the community. Respectfully follow protocols and instructions.
 - Seek permission from Traditional Owners before taking any memento from Country.
-

⁹ DSDSATIP: Tracks to Treaty



Considerations

- Develop some level of cultural literacy before engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Try to limit consultation burden by reviewing findings of recent meetings/consultations as a starting point.
- Seek clarity on whether remunerating a community member is required for their participation.
- Share meeting outcomes and notes with the community in a timely manner.



State contacts

Engage with your local and state Aboriginal Land Council or groups to access important information and contacts on Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Communities in your area:

NSW & ACT	https://alc.org.au
NT	https://nt.gov.au/property/land/aboriginal-land-management/aboriginal-land-and-permits/land-council-roles-and-contacts
QLD	https://www.qld.gov.au/firstnations https://nqlc.com.au
WA	https://www.wa.gov.au/organisation/department-of-the-premier-and-cabinet/aboriginal-advisory-council-of-western-australia
VIC	https://www.firstpeoplesrelations.vic.gov.au https://www.aboriginalheritagecouncil.vic.gov.au
SA	https://www.sa.gov.au/topics/care-and-support/resources-for-aboriginal-people https://www.agd.sa.gov.au/aboriginal-affairs-and-reconciliation/south-australian-aboriginal-advisory-council https://www.anangu.com.au/
TAS	https://www.aboriginalheritage.tas.gov.au/council-site http://tacinc.com.au Home Circular Head Aboriginal Corporation (chac.com.au) Reconciliation Collective - Reconciliation Tasmania (rectas.com.au)





Common Cultural Terms

Term	Description
Aboriginal Land Council	Groups that represent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander affairs at regional, state or territory level. They aim to protect the interest and advance the aspirations of communities and in some locations are responsible for submitting land right claims.
Acknowledgement of Country	Is a statement of recognition of the traditional custodians of the land and recognises custodians past and present. The statement can be given by anyone so long as Protocols relating to Acknowledgment of Country are adhered to.
Aunty/Uncle	Cultural terms used as a sign of respect and acceptance to a custodian or Elder of knowledge or lore. It is not a genetic relationship and non-Indigenous people should check before using the term Aunty or Uncle.
Clan/Language Group	Indigenous nations cover wide geographical areas and have distinct borders. Within these nations there are clan groups. Clans are larger than a family but based on family links through a common ancestry. Clan groups share a common language and kinship system, which is based on either patrilineal or matrilineal lines of descent. A clan is a subset of a language group. For example, the Yorta Yorta nation has several clans including Bangerang, Moira and Ulupna.
Country	Country is the term often used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to describe the lands, waterways and seas to which they are connected. The term contains complex ideas about law, place, custom, language, spiritual belief, cultural practice, material sustenance, family and identity. It's life, its family, it's connection.
Culture	The collective social, economic and creative manifestations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities which encompass ideas, customs and languages specific to these groups.
Dreaming	The Dreaming explains how things came to be and is the stories and beliefs behind creation. In the Dreamtime, the natural world—animals, trees, plants, hills, rocks, waterholes, rivers—were created by spiritual beings/ancestors. The stories of their creation are the basis of Aboriginal lore and culture and set out the rules and obligations Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are expected to live by, within their culture. ¹⁰
Elder	An Elder is an identified and respected community member who has the trust, knowledge and understanding of their culture and the permission to speak about it.

¹⁰ <https://www.aboriginalcontemporary.com.au/pages/what-is-the-dreamtime-and-dreaming>



Common Cultural Terms

Term	Description
Kinship	<p>Kinship determines how everyone relates to one another, as well as their roles and responsibilities within community, the environment and ceremony. Kinship networks are based on relationships of blood, marriage, association and spiritual significance.</p> <p>The value of the kinship system is that it structures people's relationships, obligations and behaviours towards each other. It will influence who will look after children if a parent dies, who can marry whom, who is responsible for another person's debts or misdeeds, and who will care for the sick and old.¹¹</p>
Knowledge	<p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge refers to the understandings, skills and philosophies developed by societies with long histories of interaction with their natural surroundings. Local knowledge informs decision-making about fundamental aspects of day-to-day life.</p> <p>Cultural knowledge is intergenerational, and it mostly belongs to the group or community, not an individual.</p> <p>Traditional knowledge relates to traditional practices, cultural values, beliefs and community law regarding connection and management of land, plants and waterways.</p> <p>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities think in systems, they see how interrelated parts of an ecosystem or set of knowledges relate to one another and are continuously shaped by these interrelationships.¹²</p>
Mob	<p>A colloquial term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country. It is used to connect and identify who an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is and where they are from. Mob can represent your family group, clan group or wider Aboriginal community group.</p>
Racism & Discrimination	<p>Believing that some people are inferior because they belong to a particular racial or ethnic group devalues people's culture and identity. Racism destroys community cohesion and creates divisions in society. Racism prevents people from enjoying their human rights and their fundamental and basic freedoms. Racism is the opposite of equality and the right of all people to be treated fairly.</p> <p>Freedom from racism and racial discrimination is a fundamental human right.</p> <p>In Australia, the Racial Discrimination Act 1975 made it unlawful to commit a racist act.</p>

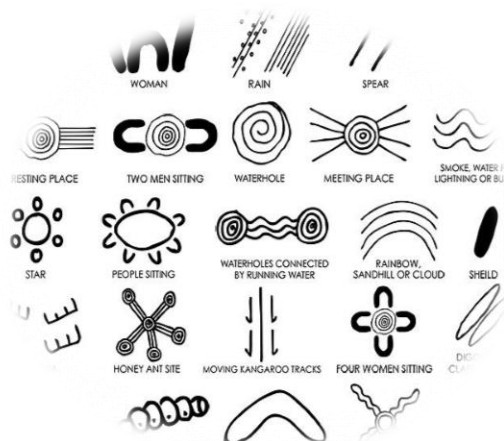
¹¹ <https://cspm.csyw.qld.gov.au/practice-kits/safe-care-and-connection/working-with-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander/seeing-and-understanding/the-meaning-of-family-in-aboriginal-and-torres-str>

¹² <https://en.unesco.org/links>



Common Cultural Terms

Term	Description
Self-determination	Self-determination is an 'ongoing process of choice' to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities can meet their social, cultural and economic needs. It is not about creating a separate Indigenous 'state'. ¹³
Songlines	<p>Songlines have been a central feature of First Nations cultures for over 80,000 years. Songlines carry Law and stories that First Nations people live by.</p> <p>Songlines trace astronomy and geographical elements from ancient stories and describe how these things have helped shape the landscape as it is now. They were first used by communities as a form of communication across the continent and a way of mapping Country.¹⁴</p>
Stolen Generation	<p>The Stolen Generations are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were taken away from their families and communities as the result of past government policies.</p> <p>The removal of children broke important cultural, spiritual and family ties and has left a lasting and inter-generational impact on the lives and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.¹⁵</p>
The National Apology to the Stolen Generations	<p>13th February 2008, Prime Rudd delivered an apology to the Stolen Generations as a result of recommendations from The National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal Children from their Families.</p> <p>Watch the National Apology to The Stolen Generations</p>
Traditional Owner	A local descendant group who has a common spiritual affiliation to a site on the land and are entitled by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island traditions to forage as a right over that land.



¹³ <https://humanrights.gov.au/our-work/rights-and-freedoms/right-self-determination>

¹⁴ <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/songlines>

¹⁵ Victoria Public Sector Commission

Resources

The following resources have been developed to support embedding this Guideline into practice and are located on the [MA Internal Policy Hub](#).

Operational - CFCS

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Profile
Culturally Safe Work Environments Checklist
Cultural Safety Self-Assessment Tool
CFCS - Paid Participation of People with Lived Experience Policy

Frameworks

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework 2024-2029
National Case Management Approach
Partnerships Kit: Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Partnerships
Principles for Partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities

Work Health and Safety

Home Visits Checklist



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