



KOOLIN BALIT PROJECT 2015

A Guide to Culturally Aware and
Responsive Communication



Inner North West
PRIMARY CARE PARTNERSHIP

The following links are to resources used to develop this document and provide useful additional information:

http://nceta.flinders.edu.au/files/2713/5846/7255/communicating_positively.pdf

<http://www.yarrahealing.catholic.edu.au>

<http://www.melbourne.vic.gov.au/AboutMelbourne/indigenouisculture/Pages/IndigenousMelbourne.aspx>

<http://www.vu.edu.au/about-us/vision-mission/acknowledgement-of-country/the-kulin-nation>

<http://generationone.org.au/uploads/assets/WelcomeToCountry.pdf>

<http://www.shareourpride.org.au/sections/our-culture>

<http://www.abs.gov.au>

<http://www.creativespirits.info>

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Updated May 2016

Acknowledgements

The Inner North West Primary Care Partnership acknowledges the contributions of our partnering agencies in the development of this Guide. In particular we would like to acknowledge Nicole Cassar from the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organization (VACCHO), Liz Phillips from Merri Community Health Services, and Joanne Atkinson from the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service for their feedback and suggestions. We also acknowledge the Department of Health and Human Services as the funding body for the INWPCP Koolin Balit Project.

The Inner North West Primary Care Partnership acknowledges the people of the Kulin Nations as the traditional owners of the land on which we work. We acknowledge their strength, resilience, and rich cultural heritage which is fundamental to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health today. We also pay our respects to their Elders – past, present and emerging.



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Introduction

The cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples holds a distinct position as the world's oldest surviving cultures, rich in heritage, knowledge, beliefs and traditions. However for over 200 years Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have survived many appalling travesties instigated by colonisation including dispossession from traditional lands, loss of traditional languages, massacres, prejudice, assimilation and forced removal of children from their families. The use of derogative and discriminatory language when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities was one of many ways that European colonists practiced discrimination. Language was used to de-humanise, subordinate, and justify government policies that denied Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people of fundamental human rights. The use of appropriate and culturally responsive language is therefore critical to ensuring that service providers are not replicating the subjugation of the past and instead are demonstrating our commitment to providing a culturally aware and responsive service to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

This document is intended to provide the North West Melbourne Metropolitan Region (NWMM) Primary Care Partnerships (PCP'a) management and staff, and our member agencies, with guidance and understanding regarding the appropriate terminology to use when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities, or when developing written information such as submissions or program information. The information contained within this guide is based on literature reviews and consultations with our local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It should be noted however that the use of language is continually evolving and that there may be disparity across different communities and between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as to what is considered acceptable, insensitive or offensive.



Referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Australia

Australia has traditionally been inhabited by two distinct groups of peoples that are ethnically and culturally very different. While Torres Strait Islander people come from the islands of the Torres Strait, situated between Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea; Aboriginal people are comprised of diverse communities across mainland Australia and Tasmania. Each of these Aboriginal communities has their own name, language and traditions. It is these communities or nations that form the identity of most Aboriginal Australians.

There are approximately 630,000 Aboriginal people and 47,000 Torres Strait Islander people living in Australia. The majority of the Torres Strait Islander population live in the north of Queensland, particularly in Townsville and Cairns. In Victoria there is a population of approximately 38,000 Aboriginal people and approximately 3000 Torres Strait Islander people.

Europeans have formally used various terms such as ATSI, Aborigine, Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Indigenous to describe the diverse groups that inhabited Australia prior to, and post-colonisation. More recently governments have preferred use of the term 'Indigenous' to encompass both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. However critics of the term 'Indigenous' state that it is inappropriate as it doesn't recognise the distinction between Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islander people. Furthermore some community members see the term 'Indigenous' as associated with the perception that prior to the 1967 Referendum, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait people were treated as native flora and fauna, lacking in entitlement to basic human rights (as Indigenous is a term also used to refer to native plants and animals).

The preferred terminology is therefore to refer to 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people' in full and without abbreviation. Using the term 'peoples' (including the letter 's') is also appropriate as it recognises the diversity of Aboriginal nations across Victoria and Australia. Also acceptable is the use of the term 'First Peoples of Australia' or 'First Nations'. These terms are often used politically or strategically as they emphasize that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were the original inhabitants of Australia and here prior to colonisation – a fact yet to be recognised within the Australian Constitution.

Some organisations refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and other service users using umbrella terms such as 'Diversity'. Typically these terms are used to encompass all of the diverse cultural identities to which agencies need to be responsive. Caution should be taken however if referring to Aboriginal people using this term as 'Diversity' supports perceptions of 'Anglo' as the dominant culture and all other social identities as 'other'. For Aboriginal people this perception fails to recognise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as the original inhabitants of Australia for up to 60,000 years. Furthermore this grouping disregards the unique experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people as the colonised original inhabitants of Australia; an experience which is not comparable to the experience of any other cultural grouping in Australia.



Referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People in Victoria

Although Victoria is a state which has relatively few Torres Strait Islanders residing within, it is best practice to refer to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in full to ensure that both groups of peoples are respected and recognised.

In consideration of the small population of Torres Strait Islander people within Victoria, action research relating to the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community will sometimes choose to only use the term 'Aboriginal' for ethical purposes. This is because if reference is made in the research findings relating to Torres Strait Islander people – those persons might be identifiable due to the small size of the population. Where the term Aboriginal is used to refer to both Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people – this should be clearly stated at the beginning of the document.

There are also a number of other names that Aboriginal people commonly use to identify groups based on geography, including:

- Koori (or Koorie or Goori or Goorie) in New South Wales and Victoria
- Murri in southern Queensland
- Noongar in southern Western Australia
- Nunga in southern South Australia
- Palawah (or Pallawah) in Tasmania
- Anangu in northern South Australia, and neighbouring parts of Western Australia and Northern Territory
- Bama in north-east Queensland

These terms are often preferred by Aboriginal people as they do not have historically negative connotations in comparison to the terms used by Europeans post-colonisation; instead they are terms of cultural strength and identity. The terms are taken from the local Aboriginal language terms for 'person'. The term 'Koori', however only includes Aboriginal people born in Victoria or Southern NSW and excludes Aboriginal people who were born in other parts of Australia who are now living in Victoria. Service providers should be mindful of this if targeting services to the 'Koori' community, and regardless should not use this term without consultation with the local Aboriginal community.



Referring to Aboriginal People in Melbourne's North West Metropolitan Region

A 'nation' refers to a culturally distinct group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular, culturally defined area of land or country. Each nation has boundaries, and language is tied to that particular area of land and country.

The Kulin nation is an alliance of five Aboriginal nations in Central Victoria. The collective territory extends around Port Phillip and Western Port, up into the Great Dividing Range and the Loddon and Goulburn River valleys.

Due to a lack of consensus regarding some boundaries between the nations - when publicly referring to the Traditional Owners/Custodians in Melbourne's NW MR, best practice is to refer to 'the people of the Kulin nations' as the traditional custodians/owners of the land.

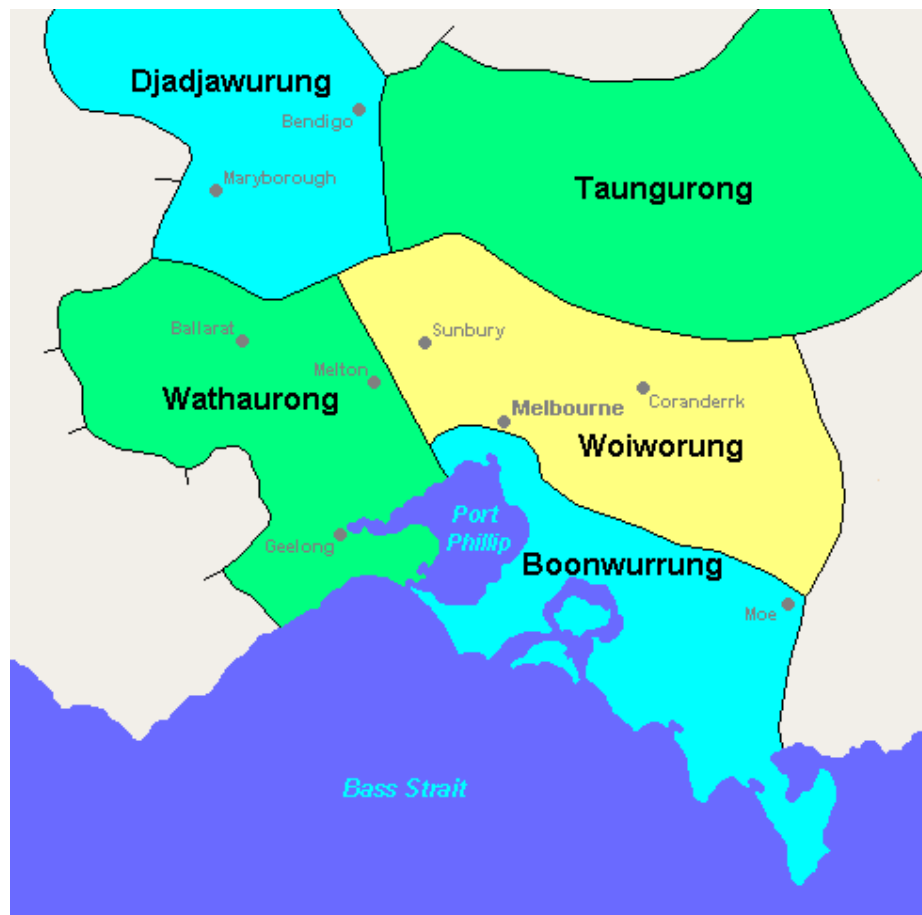


Figure 1: Source - http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wurundjeri#/media/File:Kulin_Map.PNG

Please note that Wurundjeri is now the common term for descendants of all the Woiwurrung clans.



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Identity

If a person identifies as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, it is offensive to question that identity. Terms such as mixed blood, half caste, full-blood, or part-Aboriginal, should never be used.

The Australian Government provides the following definition to determine if a person is of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander descent:

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he [or she] lives.

This definition is used when Aboriginal people apply for a Certificate of Aboriginality which is required for eligibility to some Aboriginal specific services. However this definition fails to consider the implications for Aboriginal people who are victims of policies that have forcibly removed Aboriginal children from their families and communities. In these instances it may be difficult to demonstrate a connection to community or acceptance by the community. It is therefore recommended that agencies never question a client's Aboriginality but accept that person based solely on self-identification.

Programs or services such as [Link Up](#) provide assistance and reunification support to Stolen Generations and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been fostered, adopted, institutionalized or separated from their families. This is often a complex and sensitive emotional journey and accordingly it is recommended that service providers never ask probing questions to Aboriginal clients about their cultural identity or community connections, unless this information is offered.

Most Aboriginal people self-identify according to their traditional language groups, which are also intrinsically tied to land, spiritual beliefs, and cultural obligations. For instance, an Aboriginal woman might refer to herself as a 'Taungurong' woman or a 'Wathaurong' woman. When publicly introducing an Aboriginal person it is also appropriate to introduce in this way... For example "I'd like to introduce Aunty Jane Smith to provide the Welcome to Country. Aunty Jane is a Wathaurong woman and a respected Aboriginal Elder...."



Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elders

Being an Elder is not always defined by age – but rather refers to a community member who has gained recognition within their community as a custodian of knowledge and lore. Recognised Elders are highly respected within Aboriginal communities and have important roles in relation to traditional ceremonies and decision-making. Not showing respect to Elders is one of the biggest mistakes non-Aboriginal people can make when interacting with the Aboriginal community.

When referring to an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Elder in written communication, always use the capital 'E'.

Titles such as 'Aunty' and 'Uncle' are used as marks of respect for Elders in the Aboriginal community. However non-Aboriginal people should not use this term unless you are personally familiar with the particular Elder or have been invited by the person to address them as such or advised by a member of the Aboriginal community. If unsure respectfully ask that person how they would prefer to be addressed or introduced.



INWPCP Recommendations for Aboriginal Cultural Communication Standards

When referring to Aboriginal people within Australia

- In verbal and written communication use the term 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people' in full rather than the term 'Indigenous' or 'ATSI'.

When referring to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Victoria

- In verbal and written communication it is preferable to use the term Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.
- Where the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people this should be clearly stated at the start of the document.
- Consult with the local Aboriginal community regarding whether it is appropriate to use the term 'Koori'
- Do not use the word 'Clan' instead refer to 'Family Groups' or 'Language Groups' or 'nations'

Capitalisation

- Always use capital letters when referring to 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' people or 'Aboriginal' people. Using the terms without capitals refers to aboriginal/indigenous peoples from all over the world, whereas when spelled with a capital they refer specifically to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people within Australia.

Use of Grammar

- Always use 'Aboriginal' or 'Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander' as an adjective and not a noun. For example, "This article addresses the health status of **Aboriginals**" should be written as "This article addresses the health status of **Aboriginal people**".
- Never refer to Aboriginal people as 'them', 'they', or 'those people' in verbal or written materials as this language is divisive. Alternatively refer to 'Aboriginal community members'.

Addressing Elders

- Only use 'Auntie' or 'Uncle' in conversation with an Elder if you are invited to address that person in that way. If in doubt always ask the person how they would prefer to be addressed.

References to Colonisation

- Use the terms 'pre-contact/post-contact' or 'pre-colonisation/post-colonisation' to describe the period before and after colonisation. Do not use the term 'pre-settlement or post-settlement'.

Describing Aboriginal communities

- Be aware that traditionally, and currently, Aboriginal cultures were and are many and varied.
- 'Country' is a term used to describe a culturally defined area of land associated with a particular language group or nation.
- Ensure that the use of the term Australian includes Aboriginal people. For example, the statement: 'Most Australians continue to see Aboriginal people...' infers that Aboriginal people are not Australian, which is incorrect. Instead use the following terminology. 'Most non-Aboriginal Australians continue to see Aboriginal people...'
- 'Mob' is a term identifying a group of Aboriginal people associated with a particular place or country. 'Mob' is generally used by and between Aboriginal people. Therefore it may not be appropriate for non-Aboriginal people to use this term unless this is known to be acceptable.
- The terms 'traditional owners' and 'traditional custodians' of the land are often used interchangeably – however the use of term 'custodians' reflects a cultural understanding that no one can own the land, but that the Aboriginal people of that land have particular obligations that include protecting and caring for the land.

Formal acknowledgement of traditional owners/custodians

- When acknowledging the Traditional Owners/Custodians for an event based in Melbourne's North West - refer to the 'People of the Kulin nations'.

Note: It is offensive to appropriate Aboriginal cultural symbols, art, and language without consultation and permission from the traditional owners/custodians.

For further information contact:

- Wurundjeri Council - 8673 0901
- Koorie Heritage Trust - 8622 2600