

Aboriginal Health
Definitions and common terminology
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Aboriginal or Indigenous: used to define Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and written in upper case to differentiate people from aboriginal inhabitants all over the world (Creative Spirits, 2016).

Aboriginality: this definition is a three-part definition requiring all three parts to be established for Aboriginality to be recognised; 1) descent (the individual can prove that a parent is of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent), 2) self-identification (the individual identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander), and 3) community recognition (the individual is accepted as such by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community in which he/she lives) (NACCHO, 2014).

Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS): a health service funded principally to provide services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals. An AMS is not necessarily community controlled, and if an AMS is not community controlled it is a government health service run by a State or Territory government.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service: an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS) is a primary health care service initiated and operated by the local Aboriginal community to deliver holistic, comprehensive, and culturally appropriate health care to the community which controls it (through a locally elected Board of Management) (NACCHO, 2014).

Aboriginal definition of health: as defined within the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation Constitution (2011, page 5) and the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989, page 14), Aboriginal health is 'not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.

Aunty and Uncle:

Aunty has the same context in terms of family relationships to Western family constructs however, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it can also be a term of respect attributed to an individual and is often unrelated to age. Non-Indigenous people should seek permission from the individual or their family members before using this term even if introduced to them by others using this term of address.

Uncle has the same context in terms of family relationships to Western family constructs however, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it can also be a term of respect attributed to an individual and is often unrelated to age. Uncles are traditionally the educators of a kinship or family unit and it is common for others within the community to address non-related educators in this way. Non-Indigenous people should seek permission from the individual or their family members before using this term even if introduced to them by others using this term of address.

Blended healing: there are diverse initiatives in healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being developed throughout Australia. Most of these use a combination of traditional healing techniques and cultural practices and techniques drawn from Eastern or Western therapies, including psychotherapy, group therapy, empowerment strategies, massage and meditation (McKendrick, Brooks, Hudson, Thorpe & Bennett, 2013).

Closing the Gap: is a strategy that aims to reduce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander disadvantage with respect to life expectancy, child mortality, access to early childhood education, educational achievement and employment outcomes. The concept was initially taken up by the Council of Australian Governments in 2007 with a commitment to “close the gap” in life expectancy between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians, and later endorsed by the Australian Government in March 2008. *Closing the Gap* is a formal commitment developed in response to the call of the Social Justice Report (2005) to achieve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within 25 years.

Colonisation: refers to forced immigration where a population becomes integrated into a community, having resisted initial local extinction.

Community control: the process which allows the local Aboriginal community to be involved in its affairs, in accordance with whatever protocols or procedures are determined by the community (NACCHO, 2014).

Country: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have diverse relationships with, connections to and understandings of, the Australian environment. Some of these relationships are based on the traditional knowledge and practice that have been passed down from generation to generation, while others have resulted from the various impacts of colonisation. Relationships to country are complex and interrelated. The term ‘country’ is often used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to describe family origins and associations with particular parts of Australia (Queensland Department of Health, 2011).

Cultural awareness: having knowledge and understanding of Aboriginal people’s histories, values, belief systems, experience and lifestyles. It is not about becoming an expert on Aboriginal culture. (Drysdale, M. pers comm 2013)

Cultural safety: an environment that is safe for people where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and experience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011). Cultural safety is based on the experience of the recipient of care, rather than from the perspective of the medical practitioner. (Australian Indigenous Doctors Association & the Royal Australian College of Physicians).

Cultural competence: - defined as a set of congruent behaviours, attitudes, and policies that come together in a system, agency, or among professionals and enables that system, agency, or those professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. (Cross, T. et al 1989)

Dreaming/dreamtime: ‘dreamtime’ or ‘dreaming’ has never been a direct translation of an Aboriginal word. The English language does not know an equivalent to express the complex Aboriginal spiritual concepts to white people. Aboriginal spirituality does not consider the ‘dreamtime’ as a time past, in fact not as a time at all. Time refers to past, present and future but the ‘dreamtime’ is none of these. The dreamtime is the environment that the Aboriginal lived in, and it still exists today. It is important to note that the dreaming always also comprises the significance of place. Hence, if we try to use an English word, we should avoid the term ‘dreamtime’ and use the word ‘dreaming’ instead. It expresses better the timeless concept of moving from ‘dream’ to reality, which in itself is an act of creation and the basis of many Aboriginal creation myths. None of the hundreds of Aboriginal languages contain a word for time (Creative Spirits, 2016).

Elder: the traditional meaning of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 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 and Torres Strait Islander communities and age alone does not necessarily mean that one is a recognised Elder (Queensland Department of Health, 2011).

Family and kinship: Aboriginal kinship and family structures bind Aboriginal people together in all parts of Australia. Aboriginal family obligations, often seen as nepotism by other Australians, may be reflecting cultural values, involving kinship responsibilities (see 'skin' definition below) (Dudgeon, Milroy & Walker, 2014).

First Australians: Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples inclusively.

Health and wellbeing: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health, with the land being central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that while the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill health will persist (Purdie, Dudgeon & Walker (2010: p. xxvii).

Inside knowledge: traditional knowledge which is only shared amongst initiates and/or kinship and skin group.

Outside knowledge: layered traditional knowledge that can be shared (usually under various general or specific criteria) outside a particular kinship or skin group.

Lore: the First Australians had a complex system of law long before the establishment of British law in Australia, their system of law is often referred to as "traditional law", and is also referred to as "the lore". There were no formal courts under traditional law, instead matters regarding traditional law were conducted by Elders and enforced by appointed 'lawmen'.

Men's business/Women's business: these terms are used to describe the divided responsibilities and obligations of both men and women within First Australian communities.

Reconciliation: unity and respect between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and non-Indigenous Australians. It is about respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage and valuing justice and equity for all Australians. (Australian Government)

Skin: subsections of kinships or "skins" are named groups of persons related by specific kinship connections. For example, the children of a woman of one particular skin will always be of another specific skin. There are very precise rules that govern which skin groups are allowed to marry and which are not, for example one can never marry a person who is of the same skin as a parent (Northern Land Council, 2014), depending on whether following a patrilineal or matrilineal line.

Sorry Business: this term is used to describe a death in the community or funeral service for a community member. In some cases the local Aboriginal staff and community members associated with the health service will need to pay respect to the immediate family of the deceased. This can occur in different ways, such as:

- Closing the health service for a short period to allow staff (who could be immediate extended family members) to attend the funeral service of the deceased family and/or community member.
- Absence of staff taking extended leave to commence with Sorry Business duties required of family representation and protocols.

Traditional communities: traditional communities are seen as those First Australian communities, which most closely retain their pre-colonial lifestyle and cultural practices. There are many different perspectives on what a 'community' is. In defining a particular 'community', consideration should be given to stolen generations, where a community may comprise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from many areas of Australia whereas Traditional Owners of the land are a particular group of people (Queensland Department of Health, 2011).

Traditional healing (ethnomedicine): long-established methods passed down from one healer to another to treat a person suffering from various illnesses, many of which have psychological underpinnings. Traditional healing Aboriginal traditional healers still practice in most regions of Australia, although they are more visible in remote regions. Many Aboriginal people will consult traditional healers at the same time as being treated by a Western physician (McCoy, 2006).

Traditional health beliefs: pre-colonial holistic and interrelated understandings about health and wellbeing which informed and/or continue to inform First Australian health behaviour and practices.

Traditional Owners: the official term used to refer to and recognise local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family descendants and ancestors connected to family, land and waters and culture, which has been acknowledged by the Federal Native Title Tribunal. Most Traditional Owners are required to prove their connection to country by oral history knowledge (apical ancestry must be correct) that recognises the local lore's and cultural practices of the local tribe and/or language group.

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