CHCDIV002
Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety

Release 1

Learner guide

aspire
learning resources

Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety

Release 1

Learner guide

Aspire version 1.4

Aspire
learning resources

Version	Release date	Modification
Release 1, version 1.1	April 2017	First release
Release 1, version 1.2	June 2017	Minor content changes as part of our continuous improvement program.
Release 1, version 1.3	November 2018	Updated URLs
Release 1, version 1.4	November 2019	Updated in line with changes to the Home and Community Care (HACC) program.

Aspire is committed to developing quality resources that meet the needs of our customers. However, occasionally Aspire finds, or is notified of, errors. Please refer to our website at www.aspirelr.com.au to see if there are any updates that may be relevant to you.

Every effort has been made to ensure the information in this book is accurate; however, the author and publisher accept no responsibility for any loss, damage or injury arising from such information.

Except where an information source is acknowledged, the names and details of individuals and organisations used in examples are fictitious and have been devised for learning purposes only. Any similarity to actual people or organisations is unintentional.

All websites referred to in this unit were accessed and deemed appropriate at time of publication.

Aspire Training & Consulting apologises unreservedly for any copyright infringement that may have occurred and invites copyright owners to contact Aspire so any violation may be rectified.

Contact details

Participant

Name: ....

Start date: ....

Phone number: ....

Email: ....

Work location

Name: ....

Address: ....

Postal address: ....

Workplace supervisor name: ....

Phone number: ....

Fax: ....

Email: ....

Registered Training Organisation (RTO)

Name: ....

Address: ....

Postal address (if different): ....

Phone number: ....

Fax: ....

RTO contact name: ....

Mobile: ....

Email: ....

Contents

Before you begin

This learner guide is based on the unit of competency *CHCDIV002 Promote Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety*, Release 1. Your trainer or training organisation must give you information about this unit of competency as part of your training program. You can access the unit of competency and assessment requirements at: www.training.gov.au.

How to work through this learner guide

This learner guide contains a number of features that will assist you in your learning. Your trainer will advise which parts of the learner guide you need to read, and which practice tasks and learning checkpoints you need to complete. The features of this learner guide are detailed in the following table.

Feature of the learner guide	How you can use each feature
Learning content	▶ Read each topic in this learner guide. If you come across content that is confusing, make a note and discuss it with your trainer. Your trainer is in the best position to offer assistance. It is very important that you take on some of the responsibility for the learning you will undertake.
Examples and case studies	▶ Examples of completed documents that may be used in a workplace are included in this learner guide. You can use these examples as models to help you complete practice tasks and learning checkpoints. ▶ Case studies highlight learning points and provide realistic examples of workplace situations.
Practice tasks	▶ Practice tasks give you the opportunity to put your skills and knowledge into action. Your trainer will tell you which practice tasks to complete.
Video clips	▶ Where QR codes appear, learners can use smartphones and other devices to access video clips relating to the content. For information about how to download a QR reader app or accessing video on your device, please visit our website: www.aspirelr.com.au/help
Summary	▶ Key learning points are provided at the end of each topic.
Learning checkpoints	▶ There is a learning checkpoint at the end of each topic. Your trainer will tell you which learning checkpoints to complete. These checkpoints give you an opportunity to check your progress and apply the skills and knowledge you have learnt.

Foundation skills

As you complete learning using this guide, you will be developing the foundation skills relevant for this unit. Foundation skills are the language, literacy and numeracy (LLN) skills and the employability skills required for participation in modern workplaces and contemporary life.

The following table outlines specific foundation skills noted for your learning in this learner guide.

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Learning	▶ Understanding your job role, organisational procedures and legal responsibilities ▶ Managing your work and seeing how well you are going and making goals for yourself at work ▶ Seeking professional development opportunities for continuous improvement
Reading	▶ Understanding how documents are presented and being able to navigate through documents ▶ Understanding industry- and job-specific terminology ▶ Interpreting key information in relevant documents ▶ Understanding routine workplace checklists and documentation
Writing	▶ Planning, drafting and writing reports and documents ▶ Communicating through written letters, email and online ▶ Recording progress; reporting incidents
Oral communication	▶ Clarifying instructions ▶ Providing information ▶ Supporting others through encouragement, negotiation and conflict resolution ▶ Using body language to model desired behaviour and responding to others' body language
Numeracy	▶ Calculating costs, weights, measurements of height and distance ▶ Interpreting measurements
Teamwork	▶ Working well with other people by cooperating, collaborating, encouraging and building rapport
Planning and organising	▶ Planning your workload and commitments ▶ Implementing tasks ▶ Completing work on time ▶ Knowing how to deal with hazards and risks
Making decisions	▶ Understanding and applying decision-making processes ▶ Reviewing the impact of your decisions
Problem-solving	▶ Identifying problems ▶ Working out how to fix a problem using problem-solving processes and reviewing the outcome
Innovation and creation	▶ Recognising opportunities to develop and apply new ideas ▶ Generating ideas by thinking of new ways to do something ▶ Making suggestions to improve work

Foundation skill area	Foundation skill description
Technology and digital literacy	▶ Efficiently using digitally based technologies and systems correctly and safely
	▶ Accessing, organising and presenting information
	▶ Using equipment correctly and safely

What do you already know?

Use the following table to identify what you may already know. This may assist you to work out what to focus on in your learning.

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 1 Identify cultural safety issues in the workplace	1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors on services delivery	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	1D Evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated in own work and workplace	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 2 Model cultural safety in own work	2A Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2C Use communication techniques and work practices that show respect	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic	Key outcomes	Rate your confidence in each section
Topic 3 Develop strategies for improved cultural safety	3A Support the development of effective partnerships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3B Identify and utilise resources to promote partnerships	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3C Devise and document ways to support the delivery of services and programs	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	3D Integrate strategies that encourage self-determination and community control	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
Topic 4 Evaluate cultural safety strategies	4A Agree on outcomes against which cultural safety strategies can be measured	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	4B Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in evaluations	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	4C Evaluate programs and services against desired outcomes	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident
	4D Revise strategies based on evaluation	☐ Confident ☐ Basic understanding ☐ Not confident

Topic 1

In this topic you will learn how to:

1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors on services delivery

1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication

1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation

1D Evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated in own work and workplace

Identify cultural safety issues in the workplace

Culture includes language, religion and beliefs, food and other shared characteristics of social or ethnic groups. Cultural awareness and knowledge provides community services workers with the ability to work effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds, and to meet their needs through understanding, empathy and an appreciation of the barriers they face. This topic focuses on the culture of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have distinct and complex cultures. To provide appropriate service delivery that meets Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's needs and concerns, or to be an effective co-worker of an Indigenous Australian, you need to fully understand their history and their culture. Learning as much as you can about Indigenous Australians, including their history, culture, traditions and beliefs, allows community services workers to design and implement appropriate service practices to meet Indigenous Australian people's needs in a culturally sensitive way.

1A Identify the potential impact of cultural factors on services delivery

Acknowledging the impact of events and issues throughout the history of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, particularly the impact of colonisation, gives non-Indigenous Australian people an insight into the contemporary physical, mental, social, economic and political situations of Indigenous Australian people. These events and issues provide an explanation for why it is so important to empower Indigenous Australian people, including co-workers, to advocate for self-determination, access, equity and social justice.

You may organise a professional development program for workers to learn about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people on an ongoing basis. This may include cultural awareness workshops led by key Indigenous Australian people or Elders in the community who can discuss Indigenous Australian cultures in the workplace.

Pre-colonisation history

Australian Aboriginal people have been living on the mainland for more than 40,000 years (around 35,000 years for Tasmanian Aboriginal people, possibly more), making them one of the oldest aboriginal groups in the world.

Here are some important points about their pre-colonial history.

Cultures and traditions

▶ Traditionally, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have a strong relationship with the land and a deep sense of spirituality, kinship, community life and reverence towards their ancestors. However, colonisation drastically changed the lives of many Indigenous Australian people. Practising their cultures and traditions was hindered by limited access to their sacred sites, especially when they were placed in mission compounds.

The land as 'mother'

▶ Many Indigenous Australian cultures consider the land as a 'mother' who nurtures and protects her people. The lives of many Indigenous Australian people have historically revolved around a deep connection to the land, and this knowledge has been passed down from one generation to another, dating back to ancestors from the Dreamtime or Dreaming. Many also believe that their spirituality lies within the cultural landscape, such as within sacred sites. These groups maintain their system of beliefs, law and culture through regular ceremonies that include music, song, dance and paintings.

Hunters and gatherers

▶ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were, and some still are, hunters and gatherers. In these groups, gender roles are clearly defined: women are the gatherers of food and carers of young children while the men are the hunters. Children are raised in an extended family network. Tribes move from one place to another in search of food, moving on once resources have been exhausted. They show reverence to the land, their ancestors and their Elders, who are the decision-makers of the community.

Impact of European settlement

When Europeans came, they saw no evidence of recognisable agriculture or civilisation, so they considered Indigenous Australian people to be savages. This view justified their notion of terra nullius – an empty land belonging to no one. Consequently Indigenous Australian people were deprived of their land and restricted in their ability to engage in their cultural practises and speak their languages. European settlement had a devastating effect on Indigenous Australian communities. Here is some information about the impact of European settlement.

Loss of land and culture

Once the European way of life was imposed, many Indigenous Australians were denied the right to practise their own culture, including their spiritual obligations to the Dreaming. They could no longer wander to search for food, nor could they practise their rites and ceremonies in sacred sites. The loss of their land and freedom to practise their culture meant the loss of many Indigenous Australian people's identity.

Labour exploitation

From the early colonial period onwards, Indigenous Australian people became a cheap source of labour for Europeans who saw them as inferior beings to be exploited. Indigenous Australian men worked on stations and farms as stockmen and on roads and railways as labourers, while women worked as domestic helpers. Pay, if it existed, was often food or alcohol or, at best, very low wages.

European settlement

Not only was the impact immediate, but it also continues to have an effect on people and their communities. Here is more information on the effects of European settlement on Indigenous Australian people.

Reserves and missions

Until relatively recently, many Indigenous Australian people were forced to live in church or government run settlements. Families were separated. Tribes who did not know each other, or had been at war, were forced to live together, causing further conflict. Strict rules were imposed and movement in and out of the reserves was restricted. Denying access to their traditional, spiritual life forced many people to escape the mission or reserve. Recapture brought punishment and further degradation.

Introduced diseases

In the wake of European settlement, right through until today, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people remain susceptible to diseases brought by Europeans. In the colonial period, many Indigenous Australian people died of influenza, smallpox, syphilis and gonorrhoea; stories abound of the impact of the common cold on the health of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. These exotic diseases had a devastating impact on a population lacking immunity to illnesses common to Europeans.

Change of diet

The balanced diet that traditional Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people sourced from hunting and gathering was soon replaced by European staples such as flour, tea, sugar and alcohol. The legacy of this dietary change persists in Indigenous Australian communities today: obesity resulting in heart disease, diabetes and other related diseases are common, as is alcoholism.

Legislation and policy

From the colonial period onwards there have been a number of significant legislative enactments used to manage Indigenous Australian people.

Legislation and policy

Here is further information on the management tactics used:

Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (NSW)

The *Aborigines Protection Act 1909* (NSW) gave the Aborigines Protection Board absolute control over the lives of Indigenous Australian people, including regulation of residence, employment, marriage, social life and other aspects of daily life.

The board also had the power to delegate to local 'guardians' the authority to:

▶ provide for the custody, maintenance and education of Indigenous Australian children

▶ exercise general supervision and care over all matters affecting the interests and welfare of Indigenous Australian people

▶ protect Indigenous Australian people against injustice, imposition and fraud.

Policy to remove children

Most Australian states from the mid-1800s established some kind of protectorate or policy that supported removing Indigenous Australian children from their families. The removal was motivated by supposed humanitarian policies and based on alleged parental neglect.

Compare this with the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle 2003, which has been adopted in most states and requires placement of Indigenous Australian children with Indigenous Australian families or in Indigenous Australian care where possible.
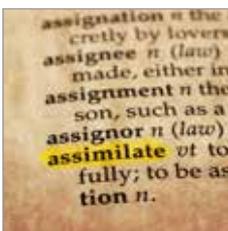
Policy to assimilate

Other paternalistic methods of controlling Indigenous Australian people were expressed in various policies that existed right up until the late 1960s. From the 1930s to the 1960s, the government assimilation policy promoted the fostering-out of mixed-race light-skinned Indigenous Australian children to white families. Indigenous Australian children were not allowed to speak their own languages or practise their own cultures and their names were changed to Anglo-Celtic names.

Citizen rights

After European settlement, all inhabitants, including Indigenous Australian people, were regarded as British subjects and had the right to vote. However, under the new Commonwealth of Australia (1901), Indigenous Australian people were not included as citizens of Australia and could therefore not vote. It was not until a 1967 referendum that citizen rights were returned to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Stolen generations

Another strategy used by Governments to try and eliminate Indigenous Australian cultures was separating children from their families. Here is further information of the strategy and its impact on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

The stolen generations
The term 'stolen generations' refers to 100,000 Indigenous Australian children who were forcibly removed from their families and raised by church organisations, fostered or adopted by non-Indigenous families, or given to state institutions. Because they were so young, many grew up not knowing their parents and had no access to their heritage or culture. This began in the 1930s, but peaked during the 1950s, and was part of a policy that mistakenly believed the children were better off in a non-Indigenous community.

Impact
The impact of the stolen generations on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their culture was enormous. Since then, there have been a number of significant steps towards reconciliation.
In 2003, the Aboriginal Child Placement Principle was adopted in most states. This required placement of Indigenous Australian children with Indigenous Australian families or in Indigenous Australian care. The only exception is when such an arrangement is not possible, in which case the placement must be approved by the Indigenous Australian community.
In 2007, the Australian Government formally apologised to the stolen generations and their families. This was a noteworthy step towards the social, economic and political inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society.

Deaths in custody

Death in custody is defined as 'the death of a person in prison custody, or police custody, or detention as a juvenile'. Here are a few significant facts about deaths in custody and the criminal justice system.

Facts about deaths in custody
The Royal Commission found that Indigenous Australians were significantly over-represented in deaths in custody when compared with the non-Indigenous population.
According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, there were 96 deaths in custody in the 12 months from 31 May 1989 to 31 May 1990.
While this dropped to 74 deaths in the 2007 calendar year, Indigenous Australian people remain more than twice as likely to die in custody as their non-Indigenous counterparts.
Indigenous Australian people remain proportionally over-represented in contact with the criminal justice system.
Statistics show that Indigenous Australian juveniles are around 20 times more likely than non-Indigenous juveniles to be detained.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the life expectancy of Indigenous Australian men is 10.6 years lower than for non-Indigenous men, while life expectancy of Indigenous Australian women is almost 10 years lower than for non-Indigenous women.

Indigenous Australian people are nearly twice as likely to be admitted to hospital as non-Indigenous people. There are social, economic and general lifestyle factors that may contribute to the overall poor state of health in Indigenous Australian populations.

Factors that contribute to poor Aboriginal health may include:

▶ poverty
▶ poor nutrition
▶ poor housing
▶ dispossession of their traditional lands
▶ low education level
▶ high unemployment
▶ hidden racism
▶ inability of politicians to address Indigenous Australian issues.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander quality of life

The 18th World Conference on Health Promotion and Health Education (2004) revealed that the quality of life of Australian Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is the second worst in the world. Indigenous Australian men die earlier from chronic diseases, such as cardiovascular disease, injury, respiratory disease, cancer and endocrine disease and have higher rates of suicide than non-Indigenous men.

Statistics from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare

▶ Approximately 45 per cent of Indigenous Australian men and 34 per cent of Indigenous Australian women die before the age of 45.

▶ 71 per cent of Indigenous Australian people die before they reach the age of 65.

▶ The life expectancy for Indigenous Australian men is estimated at 18 years less than non-Indigenous men on average (59 years versus 77 years).

▶ There is a six-year gap in life expectancy of Indigenous Australian men and Indigenous Australian women: 59 years and 65 years respectively.

A holistic view

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are often hesitant to seek advice from health services or health professionals. Perhaps this is because Indigenous Australian people view their health holistically. A holistic view takes into account the physical, spiritual, social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of individuals and communities. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander relationships within the community, as well as their spiritual link to the land and their ancestors, often feature when interpreting health issues.

Many Indigenous Australian people believe that illness is caused by evil spirits, or else that it is payback for behaviours such as disobeying certain cultural practices. Many also believe that the destruction of sacred sites where spirits live causes illness or natural disasters, such as floods and fires.

Diversity of Indigenous Australian cultures

Cultural diversity refers to the many differences in language, law, ceremony, lifestyle, customs and beliefs in a community. Indigenous Australian cultures have strong links to 'country' – the term refers to not only the land, but also to the people, animals, birds and plants that inhabit it, and the creation spirit that formed the world. The Dreamtime stories, songlines and ongoing Dreaming, which apply to Indigenous Australian families, can be fostered through the education and teaching of their children from a very young age.

In every population, there is a wide range of backgrounds, personalities, values and beliefs represented. The same is true in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander populations. For example, in the greater Sydney area alone there are 34 Aboriginal groups. Within these groups, there are four languages and a variety of cultural customs.

Whilst every community will have common ground and similarities within them, they will also have different issues and attitudes. No single Indigenous Australian person or group is the knowledge holder for the whole community. Hence, it is important to always recognise and acknowledge diversity and individual needs and approaches.

Diversity of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people

The cultures of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are complex and extremely diverse. Aboriginal people come from mainland Australia, Tasmania and other islands such as Stradbroke Island and Groote Eylandt. Torres Strait Islander people live between the top of Queensland and Papua New Guinea.

Locally, Aboriginal people use different words to describe themselves as Indigenous Australians.

The following information outlines these terms as they roughly refer to the area of Australia a group comes from.

Koori

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from coastal New South Wales.

Koorie

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Victoria.

Noongar

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from south-west Western Australia.

Nunga

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from South Australia.

Palawa

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Tasmania.

Murri

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Queensland and north-west New South Wales.

Torres Strait Islander people do not identify with the term 'Murri'.

Yolngu

Refers to Indigenous Australian people in and from Northern Territory (north-east Arnhem Land).

Anangu

Refers to Indigenous Australian in and from Central Australia.

Language diversity

Each area has a number of language groups, each with their own unique heritage that is based around their physical and spiritual connections to their local land and sea.

This website provides a map of Aboriginal Australia: http://aspirelr.link/map-aboriginal-australia

Here are some aspects of the diversity found in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's cultures.

Diversity across cultures	Diversity features
▶ Traditions	▶ Skills and knowledge
▶ Ceremonies	▶ Knowledge and stories
▶ Art	▶ Kinship groups

Land rights

The *Aboriginal Land Rights (Northern Territory) Act 1976* represents the first attempt by an Australian government to legally recognise the Indigenous Australian system of land ownership. The Act has provided a mechanism for some Indigenous Australian people in the Northern Territory to maintain or to re-establish their cultural identity.

Here are two landmark land rights cases.

Mabo

On 3 June 1992, the High Court of Australia gave Aboriginal land rights legal recognition with its famous Mabo decision. The case centred on the Murray Islands in the eastern part of the Torres Strait Islands between Australia and Papua New Guinea. The Meriam people, led by Eddie Mabo, took the action in the High Court to overturn the doctrine of terra nullius. The court found that under Australian law, Indigenous Australian people have native title rights to their land. The decisions ruled that these rights existed before colonisation and still exist under the common law.

Maralinga

Maralinga, in remote western South Australia, is the home of the Maralinga Tjarutja people. It was also the site of secret British nuclear tests conducted from the mid-1950s until the early 1960s. Many Indigenous Australian people were affected by the testing, as well as British and Australian servicemen and civilians.

It is claimed that contamination caused by the nuclear testing still affects the lives of Indigenous Australian people who live in that area. Despite clean-up efforts, zones of concentrated radiation remain. There have been anecdotal reports of unexplained birth deformities and a high incidence of cancer among the population.

Religion

A key feature of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander spirituality is to look after the land, an obligation that has been passed down for thousands of years. This is because their story of the Dreaming, which provides Indigenous Australian people with the laws to live by, is from the land.

The Dreaming
All life (human, animal, bird or fish) is part of an unchanging interconnected system that can be traced to the Ancestor Spirits of Dreaming.
These ancestors gave rise to living forms. Each founded a line of descendants made up of a living species and their human counterparts, linked as a Dreaming.
The Ancestor Spirits also connected particular groups of people with particular regions and languages.
All aspects of Indigenous Australian life revolve around the Laws of the Ancestor Spirits. The stories of these times are accepted as absolute truth.
Indigenous Australian people do not look back to the Dreaming; it never stopped. It is here and now, going on all around us.
During traditional ceremonies, Indigenous Australian people paint designs on their bodies from the Dreaming. By doing this, they keep the country and the Dreaming alive.

Apply cultural knowledge at work

Having a broad knowledge of the cultural factors that guide the behaviour of Indigenous Australians can help you in your daily interactions. Non-Indigenous practices can be quite at odds with the way Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people act and expect to be treated. Here are examples of why some systems and procedures may be found confronting and/or alienating.

Admission and discharge procedures
If you want to foster confidence in a community services organisation, practising cultural awareness and sensitivity at the point of entry and exit is essential. A welcoming, friendly face and a show of warmth helps Indigenous Australian people with support needs feel comfortable in seeking advice from a community services provider.
Past experiences of rejection, racism and discrimination can arouse suspicion of institutions, including those seeking to help Indigenous people. This can be exacerbated where the service is staffed wholly by non-Indigenous workers. There is a better chance of Indigenous Australian individuals returning and utilising the service if, at time of discharge, they are reminded that they and their people are welcome to use the service.

Referral protocols
Referring Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to other services may not be as straightforward as for non-Indigenous people due to their complex kinships. They may want to consult first with other members of the family regarding the referral and should be allowed the time to do this.

Reception and inquiry services

The reception or inquiry service should show empathy and positive communication when dealing with any information or service inquiry. An understanding of how family relationships and, skin systems work, and knowledge of practices surrounding death and dying, can help avoid misunderstandings. For example, refrain from mentioning a dead relative's name as this is taboo in Indigenous Australian culture.

Diagnostic services

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may not like their blood or urine being taken. They may find it shameful or embarrassing. If this is required, an interpreter or an Aboriginal liaison officer should be involved in explaining the necessity of taking specimens.

Cultural knowledge

Understanding Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures enables non-Indigenous workers to dismantle the traditional power relations between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous co-workers. Here are some more examples of why some systems and procedures may be found confronting and/or alienating.

Inpatient services

The Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander kinship systems emphasises that everyone is related to one another, so in most Indigenous affairs, including sickness, death and ceremonies, the whole community participates. The presence of extended family may assist an individual's recovery and wellness. If you work in a hospital setting, visiting rules may need to be flexible to accommodate the many relatives of the sick individual who may visit at different times.

Outpatient and community services

Learning about Indigenous Australians can deconstruct the negative stereotypes and assumptions that many people have about Indigenous Australians. An open mind can make a difference in your dealing with Indigenous outpatients receiving community services. For example, practise listening to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people rather than telling them what to do; show empathy and use effective communication skills to avoid conflict and misunderstanding.

Screening services

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may have personal barriers that make it difficult for them to participate in screening services such as breast, cervical, bowel or prostate scans and tests. Many Indigenous Australians, particularly women, do not like taking their clothes off in the presence of carers/workers.

Public health

Current strategies for Indigenous Australian public health focus on the community. They also recognise the need to staff services with Indigenous Australian health professionals and support workers.

Priorities include (but are not limited) to:

▶ reducing the mortality rates of children aged five and under

▶ closing the life expectancy gap by 2031

▶ ensuring all four year olds have access to early childhood education

▶ increasing literacy and numeracy skills

▶ increasing employment outcomes.

All of the above priorities will impact directly on the health and wellbeing.

Cultural knowledge at work

You can ensure that services are more culturally sensitive through continually researching programs and government incentives to address discriminating services. Here are two examples.

Non-government or agency

The participation of Indigenous Australian people in the delivery of privately provided services can be encouraged through consultation in policy and procedure development. Exclusion from participation in employment and decision-making potentially creates a sense of once again being 'managed' by non-Indigenous people.

Community settings

Indigenous Australian cultural practices are more prominent in remote and rural communities than among city dwellers. Non-Indigenous people who work with Indigenous Australians in these areas should respect their culture of performing rites and ceremonies such as sorry business, women's/men's business and initiation to adulthood. Refrain from interfering with cultural practices, especially where disputes need to be settled within the group.

Diversity of culture

Here are some important cultural factors you may find helpful when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Kinship

For many Indigenous Australians, interpersonal relationships and behaviour codes are governed by a complex kinship – or skin – system. Kinship is based on an expanded idea of family. Under kinship rules, everyone in a language group knows exactly where they stand in relation to everyone else in that group and to people outside it.

Kinship system avoidance rules illustrate the complexity of relationships. For example, when strictly applied, a man and his mother-in-law are not allowed to communicate with each other.

Skin system

The skin system – the law governing social interaction and marriage – is an essential part of traditional Aboriginal cultures. In skin systems, even people who are not actual blood relations are assigned a relationship. As a result, outsiders who have significant interaction with such groups may be given a skin name. For example, non-Indigenous people who work in a remote Aboriginal community are given skin names in order to belong to the community.

Language groups

Aboriginal language groups are similar to skin groups. The groups are made up of people sharing the same language, customs and general laws. The people of an Aboriginal group share a common bond in their own language group. Knowing that there are different language groups similar to skin groups can help you avoid uncomfortable or embarrassing situations.

Elders

Some senior male members of a traditional language group may become Elders. They are the link between past and present. Elders are initiated men who become ritual leaders because of their personal qualities and their knowledge of traditional law. Elders make decisions on behalf of the community and provide leadership in matters affecting the group. The wisdom of the Elders is rarely challenged.

Elders may also include grandmothers, who play a main role in the upbringing of children. Children look up to their grandmothers as a source of love and security.

'Uncle' and 'aunty' are used as terms of respect for older people in the community, even when they are not blood relations.

Family

Understanding the family structure of Indigenous Australians enables workers to understand the role of extended families, and the place of kinship in raising and educating children.

Here is a brief overview of these two important cultural views.

The extended family

▶ Indigenous Australian family structures have been fragmented since European settlement, largely because of interracial marriages, the effect of assimilation and the 'child protection' policy. However, the extended family remains a strong constant in the lives of Indigenous people.

Living arrangements

▶ Indigenous Australians rarely live alone, and families usually live in larger households than non-Indigenous families. Extended family share things such as food, clothing, money and housing with other family members and provide a support network, sharing the care of older people or sick relatives and children.

Raising and educating children

▶ Kinship also defines the roles and responsibilities family members have for raising and educating children in the community.

Children are not just the responsibility of their parents; they are the responsibility of the whole community. It is common for children to live or stay with family members other than their parents, sometimes for long periods.

Torres Strait Islander communities

▶ In Torres Strait Islander communities, traditional adoption – when a child is permanently transferred to another extended family member – is a widespread practice. This can be done for a number of reasons, such as to continue a family bloodline, to provide an infertile couple with a child, to strengthen family bonds or to meet the care needs of an older relative.

Other aspects of cultural life

Cultural awareness training should be part of the induction or orientation program of new staff and as ongoing training in the community services workforce.

Cultural life

Here is a brief overview of some other aspects of cultural life in an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community:

Birthing and 'women's business'

Birthing is 'women's business'; only women can be present. Although a male doctor may be acceptable for consultation and information sharing, it is good practice to ensure a female doctor is available to attend the birth. It is also a good idea to consult with an Indigenous Australian health liaison officer or staff for ethical and culturally appropriate advice.

Attitude to death

Indigenous Australians have a particular approach to death. To speak or use the name of a deceased person indicates lack of respect for the deceased and for their bereaved family. Accordingly, a deceased person may be mentioned only indirectly. The name of a dead person is never mentioned and photographs or videos of the deceased have to be destroyed. This can be important to know if you are working in a hospital or a nursing home.

Death ceremonies

Death ceremonies of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people can take up to two weeks or even longer, depending on the status of the dead person. People with support needs or co-workers may request extended leave to attend funerals. Give them time to practise what is called 'sorry business'; this is an important part of Aboriginal culture where everyone expresses their grief. Refrain from thinking about the notion of 'walkabout' when they haven't returned on the day they are supposed to. 'Walkabout' is an insult to Indigenous Australian people.

Time

Aboriginal observance of time and measurement may sometimes cause concern or conflict in the workplace because it is often in contrast to non-Indigenous attitude to time. Be sensitive to this especially in terms of scheduled meetings and appointments.

Understand culture

Indigenous Australians have distinct and complex cultural practices that must be understood by individuals who are working with Indigenous Australians.
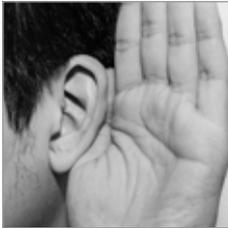
Communication

Communication with some Indigenous Australians may be difficult to understand at first. You may need to use an interpreter so that the person can express themselves in their chosen language.

Many Indigenous Australians are more likely to respond to an indirect question than a direct one. Blunt questions may make them feel suspicious, and they may not respond to a question where the answer is already known.

For some Indigenous Australians, looking a person directly in the eye is considered rude or disrespectful. Likewise, you should avoid pointing at a person when trying to emphasise something.

Nonverbal communication

Nonverbal communication is a natural part of communication for many Indigenous Australians. For example, silence does not mean an Indigenous person does not understand; instead, they may be listening, thinking, remaining non-committal or waiting for community support or input.

Time and trust may be required before people offer their opinion. They may also prefer to defer to an older or more authoritative person. It is also usual for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander meetings to be punctuated by long periods of silence and thought.

Art and religion

Indigenous Australians express their ceremonial and religious life through art, songs and dance. Art forms such as body painting, ground sculpture, bark painting, wood carving and rock painting and engraving can represent multiple meanings about ownership of the land and relationships to ancestral beings. Often these art forms are believed to be manifestations of original ancestors who possessed special powers.

Impact of cultural factors

To identify the potential impact of cultural factors on service delivery to Indigenous Australians, you need to examine Indigenous and non-Indigenous perceptions of cultural issues, particularly caring for sick family members and older people. It is also useful to understand their different attitudes to the ageing process.

Attitudes to ageing

In Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures, the process of ageing elevates the older person to a higher level in their community. They have knowledge and wisdom that brings respect and reverence. They hold valuable roles within their society, such as passing on cultural knowledge to younger generations and performing cultural functions within the community. They are also the decision-makers of their community.

By contrast, western culture does not always accord its older people the same degree of reverence. Age is perceived to bring with it physical and mental deterioration and reduced capacity to function as a community leader. Rather than being referred to as sources of wisdom and advice, older people in non-Indigenous communities may instead be subjected to ageism and prejudice.

Example

Example: impact of cultural factors on services delivery

A non-Indigenous community services worker needed to meet with an Aboriginal person with support needs to gather information to help prepare their needs assessment report due in two weeks' time. The worker sent the individual a letter explaining the purpose of the meeting as well as the time, date and location. When the individual received the letter, they felt anxious and suspicious. They remembered the trauma they experienced from the bad stories of the stolen generations. They did not understand the strange process of a needs assessment, and if they did attend they would like to bring family with them to the meeting. The individual did not keep the appointment and made no contact with the worker. The worker did not meet their deadline to complete the report, and there was a delay in assisting the individual.

Practice task 1

1. What caused the early European settlers to declare that Australia was terra nullius, an empty land?

2. Name some practices of the European settlers that influenced the loss of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's identity.

.

.

3. What are some aspects of the cultural life of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people that it is important for a community services worker to know about?

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

4. What are some of the consequences Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have experienced as a result of their loss of cultural identity?

.

.

.

.

.

.

5. What are some aspects of cultural diversity that you may encounter with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

Click to complete Practice task 1

1B Identify critical issues that influence relationships and communication

The history of European settlement and the loss of land and culture are key features behind many of the critical issues that influence relationships and communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Support workers and coordinators working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people need to understand the complexity cultural values and realise that interpretations of events can vary.

For example, while the majority of Indigenous Australians believe the world was created in the Dreaming by ancestral spirits, different tribes or language groups may have different Dreamtime stories. Many Indigenous Australian people believe non-adherence with their laws, culture, celebration of rites and ceremonies can cause illness, bad luck or natural disasters.

Past power relations

Workers need to understand the power relationship that exists between themselves/ the service they work for and Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. To do this, a worker requires some knowledge of historical, social, political and economic issues affecting Indigenous Australians' engagement with community services and health systems.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's way of being, their cultural identity, had existed for at least 60,000 years before European settlement and colonisation. The history of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians is complex; however, it is important in understanding the relationship today. Since colonisation, dispossession, disempowerment and paternalism have been central to the experience of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Colonial legislation imposed protectionism, segregation and assimilation, including the stolen generations. In most cases, these aspects of Australian history excluded Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from living the life of non-Indigenous Australians. For example, it affected their freedom to choose where they lived, how they were educated and their employment.

Present power relations

The Australian Government has taken steps to rectify the power imbalance. In 1972 it abolished the White Australia policy and introduced a policy of self-determination and recognition of land rights. In 2007, the Australian Government formally apologised to the stolen generations and their families. These steps went some way to include Indigenous Australians in non-Indigenous Australian society and provided them with the opportunity to make decisions in future legal, social and economic frameworks about matters that affected their own lives. However, the historical, social, political and economic issues continue to impact on Indigenous Australians' engagement with community services and health systems today. It has resulted in a mistrust of institutions and has created barriers to everyday living. As a result, their social and emotional wellbeing continues to be affected.

Ill health and common diseases

Misunderstandings of various cultural expectations and interpretations of events influence relationships and communication. This can happen in the way that health related events are understood and interpreted. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people often define illness in cultural terms. The early European model of viewing health issues did not include an understanding of the complexity of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's culture and their holistic approach to health.

This resulted in considerable trauma for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. The lack of recognition of their cultural traditions and beliefs around ill health resulted in loss of control and disempowerment, and remains distressing for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. It has affected their engagement with community services and health systems. The impacts can be seen on the individuals' ability to make decisions, communicate, understand and retain information. These factors contribute to many Indigenous Australians' ill health and susceptibility to common diseases.

Here are some examples of how Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people often define illness in cultural terms.

Suicide

▶ May be ascribed to being 'sung' (cursed)

Loss of mobility due to a stroke

▶ May be interpreted as a 'payback' for some kind of offence

Depression to an older person

▶ Could be 'sick for country', after being removed from their birthplace/Dreaming

Cultural differences in service delivery

Other cultural differences you may encounter when supporting Indigenous Australians, will require a shift in some of your approach to service delivery. Here are some examples.

Delivering services

1 **Interpersonal approach**

When dealing with older Indigenous Australians, support workers need to be mindful of the place of Elders in their community as well as the communication fundamentals of interacting with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

In addition to building rapport, showing empathy and taking a non-judgmental approach, workers need to be mindful of the verbal and nonverbal cultural norms of the people they are providing services to. You also need to allow for potential gender barriers confronting the people you are working with.

2 **Thinking and learning styles**

Indigenous Australians often think and learn differently to non-Indigenous Australians. Much of their teaching and learning occurs through story and art. Likewise, Indigenous Australians may have different concepts of time and family to non-Indigenous Australians.

Coordinators and support workers need to take factors such as these into account and be flexible in accommodating people's sense of time and the role of extended families in the treatment and wellness of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

3 **Expectations**

Non-Indigenous Australians and Indigenous Australians have different expectations about community services. Non-Indigenous Australians generally understand that community and health services are built on systems and processes, and they must follow a procedure to access these services.

On the other hand, the health and wellbeing of Indigenous Australians is a family and community affair. Indigenous Australians tend to prefer that service providers work collaboratively with the community to identify needs and not focus on predetermined issues or solutions. They expect their culture is to be taken seriously and that community and health services acknowledge that their needs may not be the same as other people in receipt of your services.

Provide services

Many service providers use an Indigenous Australian liaison officer to enable appropriate service delivery to Indigenous people. In addition, non-Indigenous staff should receive training to raise their level of cultural awareness. Here is more information you need to know when providing services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Responsibilities

It is the responsibility of coordinators, support workers and service providers to ensure that service delivery to Indigenous Australians is effective and appropriate.

Coordinators need to seek cultural advice and adapt their care provision models accordingly. Part of this approach is to acknowledge that Indigenous family members (or an extended family member, in some cases) should be consulted in relation to service provision to one of their family members.

Experience and working styles

Community support workers should understand that Indigenous Australians may be hesitant about accessing community services. Suspicion, lack of understanding and past negative experiences may make them reluctant to use certain models of service delivery.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander health care workers may also have a different approach to work. They and the people they support may prefer verbal or visual explanation or demonstration. For example, instructions for a resident with diabetes regarding meal routines may best be fully explained verbally, rather than providing written instructions. In dealing with people, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander workers may prefer to sit with the person and talk for much longer than other workers would.

Gender and kinship differences

In common with other cultures, many Indigenous Australians prefer a support worker of the same gender as their own to care for them, rather than the opposite gender – especially where hygiene issues, like bathing, are concerned.

In some communities, care and support may fall under the restrictions of women's business or men's business. These rules also affect whether Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander staff are able to care for a particular person.

Kinship is also important. Certain people who would, in the mainstream system, be regarded as a distant relative may have strong cultural responsibilities to a person or the person's family. Members have designated roles and responsibilities to perform within the kinship system. There may also be 'avoidance relationships'.

Example

Example: relationships and communication

Here are two examples of communication gone wrong. The first is an Aboriginal liaison officer's perspective on the most common difficulty faced by Indigenous Australian people when trying to deal with a non-Indigenous system. The second is a reminder that even with the best intentions, you must be careful not to be culturally insensitive.

Example 1

One of the most common complaints I get from Kooris is that they feel they are being talked down to when they go to an agency for information or help. So often, the people behind the counter treat my people like idiots when they don't know how to fill out a form. Despite all the cultural awareness training they supposedly get, a lot of people at service desks aren't good at recognising when support recipients need help to understand what the system wants from them.

So instead of asking for help at the point of service, people with support needs bring the forms here or to other Aboriginal organisations. I think that is humiliating too.

Example 2

Maria is very religious. She befriends a Torres Strait Islander co-worker, Lillian. Lillian is very accepting of Maria and appreciates her warm friendship, but is not interested in her religion.

Lillian feels Maria is turning their conversations more and more to religion: why it is good to believe in God, and how her church group is a wonderful social network. Maria also mentions that she thinks a lot of Lillian's beliefs are wrong.

Although she is uncomfortable with all of this, Lillian is too polite to say anything and just goes along with the conversation, not saying very much.

Eventually, Maria's persistence angers Lillian, who tells Maria the story of how Lillian's mother was taken from her family and placed in a church-run children's home. In tears, Lillian tells Maria how much she resents the people who took her mother away. 'They were people like you, Maria', she says.

Practice task 2

1. What are some cultural differences you may encounter when supporting Indigenous Australians in the delivery of services?

2. What are some of the significant cross-cultural issues that influence relationships with Indigenous Australian people with support needs and Indigenous Australian community services workers?

Click to complete Practice task 2

1C Establish key aspects of cultural safety in consultation

Successfully involving Indigenous Australian people with support needs and co-workers in service delivery may require addressing historical and cultural realities of Indigenous Australian life. Many of the spiritual and social problems confronting Indigenous Australian people today, including physical and mental health problems and contact with the justice system, arise out of the clash of European and Indigenous cultures.

Community services workers require an awareness of Indigenous Australian history and the impact of European contact to better understand the holistic nature of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's approach to health, wellbeing and education needs. The history of European contact has been one of conflict, domination and suppression, leaving many Indigenous Australians dispossessed and culturally bereft. Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people continue to suffer significant health, social and educational disadvantage.

Loss of culture, land, identity and Indigenous law

The loss of the culture that bound Indigenous Australian communities together and the breaking up of their complex kinship system has contributed to a loss of identity for many people.

The main factors contributing to this cultural crisis include:

▶ the dispossession of Indigenous Australian peoples from their land and their subsequent inability to practise rites and ceremonies (Indigenous Australian identity is closely tied to their traditional lands)

▶ the imposition of non-Indigenous law (some strict customs have been broken).

Loss of family links

The legacy of the stolen generations and subsequent family dislocation had serious impacts on Indigenous Australian families. Community services workers must be aware that some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with support needs may remember an unhappy mission life or may be victims of the stolen generations, either directly or indirectly through their parents or relatives.

Alcohol abuse, family violence and poor health are some of the potential outcomes of the loss of family connections.

Geographical remoteness

The remoteness of some Indigenous Australian communities results in people having fewer opportunities or less inclination to access services. A trip to a city or regional centre for health or welfare services, particularly if a period of separation from family or community is involved, can result in stress and further illness for the person or their relatives.

Lack of relevant and culturally appropriate education

Learning styles that are not based on oral, visual and demonstrative methods have left generations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with inadequate education. This presents a significant barrier to their ability to participate in health, welfare, education and community services, a problem exacerbated by information that relies on the written word and unfamiliar technical language.

Many Indigenous Australian families have bad memories of their school experiences. In many cases they were not allowed to speak their own language and they did not have opportunities to learn about their own culture in the classroom.

Oral and visual information can be used to provide information and advice in an accessible way to such families.

Lack of meaningful employment or occupation

Some Indigenous Australian perceptions of employment may be easily misunderstood by non-Indigenous people. Money and material possessions may not be integral to an Indigenous Australian person's life. Keeping their culture and maintaining relationships with family, the community and the land take precedence over work and earning a living. Likewise, sharing whatever possessions they have with each other is embedded in Indigenous Australian culture.

Sometimes, Indigenous people have problems keeping occupations that are not meaningful to them. They may avoid jobs that require a lot of paperwork, reading or conceptual thinking, or authoritative/bureaucratic positions in a hierarchal working environment.

For community services workers, this can help explain the attitudes of many Indigenous Australian people with health services needs and provide a basis for understanding the outlook of Indigenous Australian co-workers.

Health and education

Indigenous Australian people's health problems are characterised by high incidences of alcohol and substance abuse, poor diet and nutrition leading to obesity and diabetes, sexually transmitted disease and mental illness. A contributing factor to physical and mental illnesses experienced by Indigenous Australian people is a lack of knowledge about proper diet and nutrition and the effect of drugs, alcohol and other substance abuse. Government programs provide health and health services promotion activities among Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

The health of Indigenous Australian children is a concern for the nation. According to the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare – Australia's Health 2014, children of Indigenous Australian parents are two times more likely to die than children of non-Indigenous Australians, with 13 per cent of all infant deaths being Indigenous infants.

Factors that contribute to Indigenous Australian infant death include:

▶ poor access to health care

▶ lack of education of parents (particularly for mothers regarding the infant stage)

▶ poor access to food and advice on nutrition.

Maternal health

Indigenous Australian infant and child health is significantly poorer than that of non-Indigenous infants and children. Indigenous Australian mothers are twice as likely as non-Indigenous mothers to bear low-birthweight infants. On average, around twice as many Indigenous Australian infants die before their first birthday as non-Indigenous infants; in some areas, the Indigenous Australian infant mortality rate may be two times the non-Indigenous average.

While the exact reasons for these differences are not yet known, it appears that factors such as low self-esteem, smoking, drug and alcohol use during pregnancy, difficulty accessing maternal health services and a lack of culturally appropriate services play a significant part. Due to disharmony in many communities, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women may also be victims of abuse and violence.

Successful maternal care programs run by senior Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander women in their communities successfully use traditional cultural approaches to parenting, lifestyle and support, as well as educating pregnant women about diet and antenatal care.

Food and nutrition

Since colonisation, healthy Aboriginal 'bush tucker' has mostly been replaced by high fat, low fibre, high salt and high sugar foods of low nutritional value. As a result, obesity, diabetes and cardiovascular diseases are disproportionately common among Indigenous Australian communities.

Education, training and targeted promotion about diet and health are important factors in addressing health, food and nutrition issues. Community services workers have the capacity to play an important role in raising and maintaining awareness of what contributes to a healthy lifestyle.

Smoking, alcohol and substance abuse

Research indicates that the prevalence of smoking is much higher among poor and marginalised groups than mainstream society, and that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people feature as one of the heaviest smoker groups. The National Health Survey (2001) reported that 49 per cent of Indigenous respondents aged 18 years and over were smokers, compared with 24 per cent in the general population.

Statistics indicate that Indigenous Australian people, as a proportion of the Australian population, are as likely to consume alcohol as their non-Aboriginal counterparts, and those who do are more likely to consume harmful quantities. The Australian Bureau of Statistics findings in 2012–13 reported that:

▶ 72 per cent of Indigenous Australian respondents 15 years and over had consumed alcohol in the past year

▶ 54 per cent of Indigenous Australian respondents 15 years and over had consumed more than four standard drinks on a single occasion in the past year.

Causes of alcohol and substance abuse

The impact of European social and economic systems on traditional Indigenous culture has contributed to patterns of Aboriginal alcohol and substance abuse.

Some of the causes of these patterns of alcohol and substance abuse are:

▶ the breakdown of traditional social control mechanisms

▶ the loss of group identity

▶ the sharing ethos

▶ resistance to imposed controls on Indigenous Australian society

▶ boredom and dislocation.

Mental health

Although it is difficult to obtain reliable statistics detailing mental health in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities, indications are that mental health problems significantly affect around a third of Indigenous Australian people. Australian Bureau of Statistics data shows that in 2012–13, almost one third of Indigenous Australians were reported as having high to very high psychological distress levels. This was nearly three times higher than for non-Indigenous Australians.

Annually, more than 200,000 Australian people are hospitalised as a result of self-harm and around 2,000 Australians die by suicide. Statistically, Indigenous Australians have two times the rate of suicide deaths and self-harm occurrences than non-Indigenous Australians.

This means you may be needed to support a parent who is suffering from depression, or who needs a trustworthy person to talk to. You may suggest additional care for their child; for example, services or people they could make contact with such as a doctor or specialist. Alternatively, just give them time and respect while they work through their issues or feelings.

Feelings of isolation, vulnerability and being culturally unsafe

Many Indigenous Australian people feel isolated and vulnerable because of conflicting cultural beliefs, values, social and spiritual practices of non-Indigenous society. These cultural differences can leave them feeling vulnerable among non-Indigenous people, including when they use education and care services. Feelings of isolation and of being rejected by mainstream society arise from Indigenous Australian experiences of racism, segregation and discrimination.

It is now recognised that one way to help address these issues is to involve families and communities in making important decisions.

Violence

Violence in its many forms, such as assault, family violence and sexual abuse, is common in many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities. Some Indigenous Australian men may compensate for feelings that their traditional role and status is undermined by showing aggression towards women and children.

Indications are that violence in general, and family violence in particular, is often caused by:

▶ racism, marginalisation and dispossession

▶ the loss of land and traditional culture

▶ the breakdown of community kinship systems and traditional Aboriginal law

▶ entrenched poverty

▶ alcohol and drug abuse

▶ the effects of institutionalisation and forced removal policies.

Environmental health factors

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing is affected by environmental health factors that result in unhygienic conditions and the transmission of disease and illness. Seen predominantly in rural areas, these environmental factors include:

▶ poor housing conditions and overcrowding

▶ poor hygiene standards

▶ open sewerage and inadequate or poorly maintained sanitation facilities

▶ unreliable or unsafe water supply

▶ dogs and other animals living closely with humans.

Health issues and treatment

It is not unusual for sick Indigenous Australian people to present themselves for treatment in hospitals or health clinics when their illness is already in an advanced state. Because of the delay in seeking treatment, the prognosis is generally not favourable; treatment is likely to be complex, with a greater chance of failure or reduced life expectancy.

The causes of late presentation are likely to include:

▶ poor education in health matters

▶ reduced access to suitable healthcare facilities

▶ a reluctance to use centres that are predominantly non-Indigenous.

Key aspects of cultural safety

In your workplace, you develop relationships with various groups of people including:

▶ your co-workers, supervisors and management

▶ individuals in your care and their family members

▶ visitors to your service or program

▶ health professionals, case managers or service coordination staff

▶ other services providers or care services.

The way you work with people from each of these groups is important, as the relationships you develop with them are a reflection on you professionally, as well as on your workplace or organisation. Think about how you speak, interact and behave when dealing with others and be considerate of their views, values and backgrounds.

There are many ways to actively build good workplace relationships with others. This often depends in part on who the person is, as well as your role in interacting with them. Two fundamental requirements are mutual respect and tolerance of diversity.

Mutual respect

Mutual respect is an important factor in a relationship or partnership, especially in the workforce. Any effort made towards mutual understanding, respect and trust lays the foundation for a culturally safe workplace. Mutual respect allows families and educators to establish common ground. By contrast, fear, stereotyping and a lack of understanding contribute to environments where there is a real possibility of discrimination and bias.

There are many strategies and techniques that can be used in a workplace to foster a respectful environment. These include having good workplace policies and procedures in place that provide culturally sensitive support for everyone.

Other opportunities for a culturally safe environment may include:

▶ providing a welcoming environment

▶ encouraging diversity by sharing cultural experiences

▶ supporting cross-cultural teams

▶ having a positive attitude

▶ being willing to learn about how and why people act the way they do and learning about their culture

▶ avoiding making judgments based on looks or culture; your job is to care for and help people, not to judge people, their actions or their culture

▶ consulting people when decisions that affect them need to be made, to ensure processes are culturally suitable.

Tolerance of diversity

Valuing cultural diversity involves recognising, respecting, utilising and benefiting from what another culture can offer your own. Diversity can be much broader than culture alone, and includes race or ethnic background, religion, sexuality, disability and political views. Accepting and valuing differences and diversity is empowering for individuals and organisations.

Cultural safety is a broad concept that fundamentally describes an environment that is characterised by acceptance and is free of discrimination. Characteristics of a culturally safe workplace are shown below (adapted from 'Cultural safety – what does it mean for our work practice?', published by UTAS Centre for Rural Health).

A culturally safe workplace:

▶ treats everyone with dignity

▶ respects people's culture, language, knowledge, experience and obligations to each other

▶ allows no assault on a person's identity

▶ provides pathways to empowerment and self-determination

▶ allows people the right to promote, develop and maintain their own institutional structures, distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices

▶ acknowledges individual differences

▶ works with people where they are at, not where it is assumed they should be.

Example

Example: cultural safety and consultation

A community services organisation gained funding to provide assistance in helping young mothers develop confidence in their parenting. Jenny was tasked with the management of developing and delivering the program. She wanted to make sure that the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the community felt included and welcomed into the program.

The first step Jenny took was to meet with her organisation's liaison officer for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to discuss the program and ask for their assistance in beginning a consultation process with the local Indigenous community. The liaison person knew who would be the right person to contact in the community. Jenny wanted to know the parenting needs of the local Indigenous community and knew that it was important to base the program on their shared needs and local experiences.

The liaison officer suggested he would work towards holding a workshop with people from the community where decisions would be made about program content and the protocols around who would deliver the content and how it would be delivered. The strategy of consultation where needs, local experiences and decision making were shared contributed to self-empowerment and self-determination for local community members who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Practice task 3

1. Give an example that would show that a community services worker has consulted with an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individual when a decision is being made.

2. What are some strategies to build effective workplace relationships with others?

3. List some work practices that could be adopted in a work environment that is culturally safe for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Click to complete Practice task 3

1D Evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated in own work and workplace

To deliver effective services to people from diverse cultural backgrounds, negotiating and implementing policies, procedures and strategies to accommodate cultural differences in the workplace is essential.

Some ways that community services workers can create an inclusive environment are:

▶ acknowledging religious practices and beliefs

▶ catering for dietary requirements, such as avoiding forbidden foods

▶ promoting awareness of cultural issues

▶ acknowledging gender roles

▶ building rapport, showing empathy and being non-judgmental

▶ using cross-cultural communication strategies such as appropriate body language

▶ recognising the involvement of families in children's education and wellbeing

▶ consulting the Inclusion and Professional Support Program (IPSP) when necessary.

Strategies to accommodate cultural differences

There are a number of strategies that can be used to accommodate cultural differences in the workplace.

These strategies include:

▶ workplace induction programs

▶ understanding your own culture and history

▶ understanding the impact of Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander culture and history on education and care issues

▶ identifying common ground.

Workplace induction programs

A sound, inclusive workplace induction program provides new employees with information and resources about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures to help them adjust their work practices to ensure that cultural safety is integrated into their own work practices. Organisational policy should provide the means for the service coordinator to properly induct workers into required work practices.

Guidelines should be provided so that:

▶ care and education is delivered to meet the individual's preferences and cultural needs

▶ individuals' problems are dealt with in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner.

Understand culture and history

Understanding your own culture and history helps you understand other people's cultures better. You need to be able to recognise and acknowledge your own values, expectations, beliefs and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict.

Features of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and history that contribute to current education and care issues are shown below.

Relevant features of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures and history include:

▶ the dispossession of Indigenous peoples from their land

▶ the legacy of the stolen generations and loss of identity

▶ discrimination

▶ social, political and economic inequality

▶ geographic and social isolation

▶ poor access to services or culturally inappropriate services

▶ past experiences of education systems that do not meet their needs.

Reconciliation Action Plans

Many services are now developing a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) to demonstrate their respect for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples and their willingness to welcome them into their environment.

A RAP outlines the vision, commitment and any strategies that your service wishes to put into place to develop relationships of mutual respect and awareness between Indigenous Australians and those within the service. Although a RAP is not compulsory, respect and inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples is embedded into the National Quality Framework.

A RAP should be developed with all stakeholders involved, including any local Indigenous Australian community representatives. The RAP might start from some discussion in a staff meeting, some research and shared learning, professional development activities or even through the training you complete using this resource.

To assist with writing the RAP, you might use the resources found on the Reconciliation Australia website at http://aspirelr.link/rap-hub. There are many templates and guides that your service can use to create a RAP that reflects your service and its unique community. You might also reflect on the RAPs that other services have developed and identify parts that are important to you.

Legislation, codes of practice and workplace policy

Workplaces are obliged to establish and follow policies, procedures and practices that are consistent with legislation, regulations and codes of practice.

There are international and Australian laws that ensure all people are treated equally and all cultures are respected.

The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), for example, states that racial discrimination is against the law. Its aim is to ensure that all people are treated equally regardless of their race, colour, descent, national origin or ethnic origin.

Australia is also a signatory to the *United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*.

You do not need to read all the legislation regarding culture and discrimination; the important thing is that you understand the laws are there to ensure people are treated equally and with respect, regardless of differences in age, culture, physical characteristics and capabilities.

Australian legislation includes:

▶ *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (Cth)

▶ *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth)

▶ *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth)

▶ *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth)

▶ States and territories also have their own anti-discrimination laws; for example, the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001* (Vic.) and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991* (Qld).

Identify and use resources for effective service delivery

Effective service delivery relies on the right kind of resources being available to those who work with and care for Indigenous Australian people. Cross-cultural awareness is essential for effective service delivery; one of the most important resources is people who understand Indigenous Australian culture and their sense of family and community. At an organisational level, policies and procedures provide direction for educators dealing with Indigenous Australian people with support needs, and how to modify the physical environment to enhance service delivery.

People with appropriate cultural knowledge

Identifying employees, professionals and community members who have knowledge of Australian and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures enables organisations to provide more effective services to people with support needs and create a culturally sensitive and inclusive workplace. For example, without adequate cultural knowledge it is possible for a community services worker to misinterpret an Indigenous Australian individual's silence and avoidance of eye contact as a refusal to cooperate, when other cultural factors may be at play.

In a community services setting, the following human resources may be drawn on for their cultural knowledge:

▶ Community leaders, spokespeople and Elders

▶ Designated individuals and family through ancestral rights

▶ Inclusion and Professional Support Programs and Professional Support Coordinators

▶ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters

▶ An appropriately trained Indigenous Australian staff member

Consult with appropriate people

The most important point to consider when consulting with people about the cultural needs of a child is not to have any preconceptions of the type of information you might gather. Ensure any discussion is open; use open questions that permit the person to provide you with extended answers and opinions.

Open questions are phrased in a way so the respondent cannot give a 'yes' or 'no' answer; they must give more detail. For example, instead of asking, 'Does Jasper's family observe cultural traditions at home?', you could ask, 'What cultural traditions does Jasper's family observe at home?'

Before implementing any information you receive during a discussion with family members, Elders, councils or other service representatives, you should always consult with your supervisor and read any policies your organisation may have that dictate the types of actions you can take to support Indigenous Australian children.

Check with your supervisor if you don't know where to access your centre's policies.

Reference groups

Reference groups can be a useful way of gathering information and ideas and resolving problems with service delivery. A reference group relevant to delivering Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander services may include community leaders and/or Elders, Indigenous Australian health professionals, non-Indigenous professionals with the right kind of expertise, Indigenous Australian liaison officers, professional support coordinators and representatives from funding bodies, service providers or government departments.

Reference groups can:

▶ provide advice about community or cultural needs

▶ discuss and evaluate issues facing Indigenous Australian individuals and provide advice to the organisation or funding agencies about Indigenous Australian matters

▶ suggest funding or service delivery options

▶ keep other community services groups informed about Indigenous Australian issues

▶ work collaboratively with the local community to provide information and advice that supports culturally appropriate service delivery

▶ provide strategic advice on policy options and their implications for community services providers.

Apply knowledge of your own and others' cultures

It is important to acknowledge the reality of your own culture as well as your knowledge and understanding of an individual's culture in your work practices. Consider some of the common work practices you may encounter in childcare services. Keep in mind the historical and cultural perspectives of many Indigenous Australian people and their experience of Australian government and non-government services. Take a non-judgmental approach and use empathy to build a rapport with individuals. Ask yourself, 'Am I able to engage with Indigenous Australian people as effectively as I am able to engage with non- Indigenous people?'

How do your work practices reflect a cross-cultural context? You can look at:

▶ administrative processes

▶ referral protocols

▶ inquiry services

▶ illness

▶ health promotion

▶ access to services.

Administrative processes

Think about how individuals feel when dealing with administrative processes in your service setting. For some it may be a confusing or intimidating experience because they are dealing with unfamiliar processes. Now consider what it may be like for a person who may experience language and literacy difficulties as well as fear or suspicion of a system they do not understand. In all likelihood, it can be a threatening, perhaps even an overwhelming experience. This is a common scenario for many Indigenous Australian parents.

Protocols

There are a number of protocols that can be observed to show respect to Indigenous Australians:

▶ A 'welcome to country' is usually conducted when a centre is new or is under new management. This ceremony allows the traditional custodians to welcome visitors to the land. In addition, acknowledging the traditional custodians should occur at the start of each semester and when guests are visiting in an official capacity.

▶ An 'acknowledgement of country' can be presented by an Indigenous or non-Indigenous Australian to pay respect to the traditional owners of the area.

▶ It is also important to recognise that the Dreaming is an ongoing feature of many Indigenous Australian people's lives. It is not an ancient myth observed as a religion; rather, it is an integral part of the land, the people, animals, birds and sea life that make up the country.

▶ Many Indigenous Australian people refrain from using the names or viewing photographs or images of deceased people during the mourning period. This period may extend indefinitely. Always warn a group that includes Indigenous Australian people if images or recordings of deceased people may be shown.

▶ Men are usually greeted before women, but this varies in more modern contexts. For this and any other specific protocols, you should ask community Elders or local families to ensure you are following the appropriate rules.
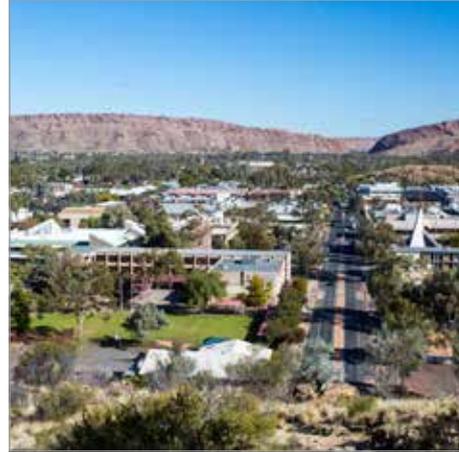
Example

Example: correct protocols

When starting the new year at Little Rock Health Centre in outback South Australia, the centre director invites families and local Indigenous Australian representatives to celebrate another year and to remember the special place that the land plays in the hearts of the local Aboriginal people and those working at the centre.

Before doing so, the director contacts the local Elders group to ask if they will perform a 'welcome to country' ceremony and allow the centre to recognise their people as the traditional owners of the land. The Elders group agrees and also offers to organise a welcome dance ritual and song.

The ceremony is conducted with all the children and many parents in attendance, and serves to strengthen the bond between the centre operators, workers, families and the local Indigenous community.

Inquiry services

Effective interpersonal and communication skills are important in responding to inquiries.

Indigenous Australian individuals may be anxious and not assertive when making inquiries for themselves or for their relatives. Often at this point it may be more effective to focus on recognising cultural protocols, breaking down cultural barriers and opening lines of communication as a first step towards dealing with an inquiry. Recognise that these individuals may be sensitive to your body language and will have different approaches to seeking assistance.

Illness and health promotion

In times of sickness requiring hospitalisation, some Indigenous Australian people with support needs may have concerns relating to Western medicine and the presence of spirits of the dead in the hospital. Both of these concerns can be addressed with the support of a traditional healer who can work in conjunction with health professionals to care for the sick person's spirit. While many community services providers and government agencies produce a range of printed and visual health promotion material, passive resources are often not the best method of reaching an Indigenous Australian audience. Demonstrative educational tools, such as drama, role-play and using Aboriginal arts to promote health, intervention and treatment, may be more effective.

Public health, non-government or agency services

Regardless of the service or setting, some Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people will feel more comfortable using services if there are Indigenous Australian workers employed in these services. While cultural awareness can help bridge cultural gaps, the presence of workers with shared cultural experiences makes a service setting more welcoming.

Examples of practices that a services coordinator can employ are listed below. In addition, services providers should maintain good networks with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander organisations and workers, as well as keeping informed of how Indigenous Australian cultural activities in their area can be supported.

Coordinators

Among the practices a coordinator can employ are:

▶ acknowledging family and kinship expectations of Indigenous Australian individuals and staff

▶ developing routines and practices that are appropriate for Indigenous Australian individuals and staff

▶ modifying the organisation's policies and procedures to acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural needs

▶ ensuring the organisation's staff have the skills and knowledge necessary to provide appropriate services to Indigenous Australian individuals.

Workers

Workers need to be able to:

▶ understand the emotional impact on some Indigenous Australian people of their own experiences and their family's experiences

▶ be aware of what is culturally appropriate for the services being provided

▶ understand the historical reasons for the lack of trust some Indigenous Australian people have of institutions and how to build bridges between Indigenous Australian people and service providers

▶ make their management practices appropriate to all Indigenous Australian individuals.

Urban, rural and remote community settings

Access to education, health and community services for Indigenous Australian people living in remote and rural areas is often difficult.

Although Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people living in urban centres have better access to a wider range of services, their uptake of those services is not necessarily higher than in remote communities. Cultural barriers and discrimination remain.

Regardless of location, suspicion of institutions is common among the Indigenous Australian population.

Cultural competence

Cultural competence grows out of cultural awareness. It refers to the ability to interact effectively with people of different cultures and socioeconomic backgrounds. This is something that every organisation wants to demonstrate, both on an organisational level and through the individual actions of its staff.

Organisational level

At an organisational level, cultural competence should be:

▶ embedded in the philosophy, mission statement, policies and key objectives of the organisation

▶ demonstrated through culturally and linguistically diverse staff

▶ promoted through training in cultural competence at the start of employment

▶ supported by resources on cultural competence and ethno-specific information which are readily available to all staff.

A culturally competent organisation is likely to have:

▶ a strong understanding of the cultural profile of your local community

▶ employees who seek information on specific cultural behaviours or understandings so that their interactions with other people with support needs and co-workers are sensitive to cultural differences

▶ people in higher management who actively promote the benefits of cultural competence

▶ quick access to essential services, such as translating and interpreting, if required

▶ a system of reward for initiatives in the workplace which are culturally competent.

Individual level

At an individual level, cultural competence involves becoming culturally aware. It is the ability to:

▶ identify and challenge one's own assumptions, values and beliefs

▶ develop empathy for other people and cultures

▶ see the world from a different point of view.

A culturally competent individual is likely to have:

▶ a strong knowledge of how one's own culture shapes attitudes, perceptions and behaviours

▶ a willingness to learn about other people's cultures

▶ specific knowledge of the language, customs and values of particular cultures

▶ the skills to feel comfortable and communicate effectively with people from diverse cultural backgrounds

▶ an unwillingness to stereotype individuals from certain cultures or ethnicities.

Cultural safety

Cultural safety is the result of cultural competence. It describes an environment that accepts all people and is free of discrimination. It is a vital part of every organisation, at every level, in every work role.

A culturally safe workplace:

▶ treats everyone with dignity

▶ respects people's culture, language, knowledge, experience and obligations to each other

▶ allows no assault on a person's identity

▶ provides pathways to empowerment and self-determination

▶ allows people to promote, develop and maintain their distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices

▶ acknowledges individual differences

▶ works with people where they are, not where someone thinks they should be.

Cultural safety integration

Here are some ways to evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated into your own work.

Evaluation

Questions to assess the extent that cultural safety is integrated into your work.

Do you demonstrate a willingness to explore and recognise your own values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes, ways of communicating and dealing with conflict?

Do you understand how Indigenous culture and history shapes Indigenous Australian people's interaction with non-Indigenous society?

Do you show you are prepared to re-shape your own values and perceptions to accommodate the needs of Indigenous Australian individuals and co-workers?

Do you regularly reflect on situations you encounter in your work practice as a way to develop your own cultural safety practices?

A culturally safe organisation

At an organisational level, in consultation with Indigenous Australian community leaders and workers, services providers should develop culturally appropriate policies and procedures that provide direction for workers dealing with Indigenous Australian individuals. At the same time, the physical environment can be modified to enhance service delivery.

Here are some indicators of a culturally safe workplace.

A culturally safe organisation:

▶ acknowledges cultural diversity among its staff and support recipients with appropriate policies and procedures

▶ analyses the extent to which it can respond to the cultural needs of Indigenous Australian individuals and workers

▶ includes cultural knowledge and awareness in all aspects of the planning, delivery and evaluation of its services.

Cultural safety evaluation

To evaluate the extent to which cultural safety is integrated in your own work and in your workplace it is a good idea to put yourself in the shoes of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual and ask questions similar to those in the following information.

Questions an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual may ask themselves
▶ Is the environment welcoming and friendly?
▶ Is my family welcome here?
▶ Is there a safe place available to talk?
▶ Are there Indigenous Australian workers available?
▶ Does it value Indigenous Australian people with support needs? For example, are there posters, art work and flag around?
▶ Is there information available on Indigenous Australian events happening in the community?

Signs of concern

Here are some signs that would indicate the workplace is not culturally safe.

Some indicators of a culturally unsafe service include:

▶ denial of suggestions there is a problem

▶ low levels of service use

▶ low levels of people with support needs following through with referrals made for them

▶ people with support needs attending but not engaging with workers

▶ low self-worth

▶ anger.

Example

Example: evaluate cultural safety in own work

Here are two examples of how the worker would know that the cultural needs of people with support needs are addressed.

Adapt the physical environment

A residential care facility in a regional Western Australia centre provides an important cultural connection for its Indigenous Australian individuals with a designated area offering space for a campfire, meetings and cultural activities in bush surroundings. Local Aboriginal people bring bush tucker to the centre on a regular basis to be prepared and shared with Aboriginal residents in the traditional way.

Maintain family connections

The coordinator of a residential aged care facility observes that several of the Indigenous Australian support recipients stay with their families for days at a time. Some have dementia and others experience mobility difficulties, but what they have in common is a need to maintain their connection with their heritage and values. Yet the process of getting their older relatives to the community and looking after them is quite an exercise.

To help families overcome transportation, care and accommodation difficulties, the centre seeks and obtains funding to provide a bus service to the remote community. This enables the older people to participate in family gatherings and significant community events without having to stay for long periods.

Practice task 4

1. What is likely to happen if a workplace is not seen as culturally safe?

2. What are some signs that would tell an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual that the service was culturally safe?

3. What signs would tell you at an organisational level that a community service is working towards culturally safety?

Click to complete Practice task 4

Summary

1. The impact of colonisation on cultural practices, together with the experiences of Indigenous Australian individuals of western institutions, can have a significant impact on the way Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people participate in service delivery.

2. It is important to understand and respect the impact of events and issues in Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history, such as post-colonisation history, legislation, health and land rights, as these factors help shape the lives of Indigenous Australian people today.

3. The effects of the stolen generations remain with many Indigenous Australian people even today, so it is necessary to practise sensitivity and acknowledge the emotional, mental and social effects on the victims of this part of Australian history.

4. The history of white occupation is a key feature behind many of the critical issues that influence workplace relationships and communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

5. It is important that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander elders and community leaders are consulted and work in collaboration to develop and maintain cultural safety in the organisation.

6. Cultural safety is a broad concept that describes an environment that is accepting of all people and is free of discrimination. Cultural safety allows people to promote, develop and maintain distinctive customs, traditions, procedures and practices.

7. Community services organisations and their workers need to evaluate their cultural safety work practice on a continual basis.

Learning checkpoint 1
Identify cultural safety issues in the workplace

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in identifying cultural safety issues in the workplace.

Part A

1. Provide an explanation in your own words of the significance of each of the following terms:

   ▶ Terra nullius

   ▶ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

   ▶ Dreamtime

   ▶ Kinship/skin system

   ▶ Stolen generation

   ▶ Assimilation

   ▶ Mabo case

.

.

.

.

.

.

.

2. In what ways did European settlement impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

.

.

.

.

3. Explain what it means when we say that Indigenous Australian people have a holistic view of their health.

.

.

4. Name some of the legislation and policies that have been used since European settlement to manage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

.

.

.

.

5. What are some strategies you can use to ensure the cultural safety of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander individual?

Part B

A Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) can assist all health care workers in your service to work toward developing strong cross-cultural relationships. Access your service's RAP and answer the following questions. If you do not have access to one, complete an internet search using 'health services reconciliation action plan' as your search term, then choose one to refer to.

1. Summarise how the RAP expresses the importance of effective and equitable relationships between cultures as a demonstration of culturally safe work practices. Explain how you think the RAP helps to facilitate effective service delivery in a cross-cultural context.

2. Explain how you think acknowledging the potential impact of cultural factors and cross-cultural realities helps to facilitate full participation in service delivery.

3. How does the RAP provide opportunities to show respect and identify ways to improve? List the opportunities.

4. Reflect on your own actions and choose one of the opportunities you listed in question 3. Explain how you could act on this opportunity.

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

Part C

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

> ## Case study
>
> Jacquie is a four-year-old Aboriginal girl who lives in a rural town with her mother, father and three siblings. She has just started attending a childcare service with her older sister Tasha. Tasha is playing on the climbing frame when she slips and falls to the ground. Her ankle breaks.
>
> When the paramedics come to assist with the injury, Jacquie witnesses Tasha crying when they move her into the ambulance. The only other time Jacquie has had contact with paramedics was when her grandmother died. She has negative associations with paramedics and is afraid that Tasha will be taken away and will not come back.
>
> Anna, the service director, contacts the girls' mother to notify her of the incident and asks her to collect Jacquie. Jacquie is very distressed and is hiding in the book closet, as she is afraid that the paramedics will come and take her away too.
>
> Jacquie's mother arrives with Jacquie's grandmother, three aunties and four cousins to pick her up on their way to the hospital. Anna, however, feels overwhelmed by the number of visitors in the service and asks that only Jacquie's mother comes inside to collect Jacquie. Jacquie's grandmother feels hurt and disrespected that she isn't allowed in to help console Jacquie.
>
> Jacquie's mother coaxes Jacquie out of the cupboard and assures her that it's okay and that she will take her to visit Tasha in the hospital.

1. What important cultural aspect did Anna overlook when she asked Jacquie's grandmother to wait outside the service?

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

.   ...

2. How could Anna have helped Jacquie overcome her fear and distrust of the paramedics?

3. What aspects of Jacquie's environment may have contributed to her fear?

4. What cultural aspect of Indigenous Australians applies to Jacquie's extended family that would have helped Anna respond more sensitively had she understood this?

Part D

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Sondra, an Indigenous Australian woman, comes into your service for the first time to inquire about a health related issue. As you hand her some forms to fill out, she appears uncomfortable and unsure of what to do.

1. Briefly discuss two ways you could make Sondra feel welcome and more relaxed in your service.

2. What body language could you use to help Sondra feel more comfortable?

Topic 2

In this topic you will learn how to:

2A Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness

2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices

2C Use communication techniques and work practices that show respect

2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues

Model cultural safety in own work

Cultural safety includes creating and maintaining a work environment that is socially, emotionally and spiritually safe for people who have a cultural identity that is different to your own. It is about acknowledging and respecting cultural differences. It is important to acknowledge how your own culture, as well as your knowledge and understanding of your support recipient's culture, can influence the work practices of your service and yourself. When you model cultural safety in your own work practices you are contributing to promoting the cultural safety of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

2A Ensure work practices are grounded in awareness

We form our own ideas of other cultures from information we gather from direct contact with people from other cultures, from the media and from other people's experiences and perceptions. From these sources it is easy to make general assumptions about other cultural groups. We may then become biased about how we see them. This is known as cultural bias.

Cultural bias

Cultural bias leads to negative stereotyping and discrimination. For example, 'Indigenous Australians people are violent and do not listen to their Elders' is a stereotype held by some non-Indigenous people. It's not always easy to understand how our own culture can influence how we think, feel and behave. Developing an awareness of our cultural biases takes us a step closer to providing an effective and culturally safe work environment for Indigenous Australian people.

For example, consider how cultural awareness, rather than cultural bias, around attitudes towards older people can influence how we practise.

Indigenous Australian experiences and non-Indigenous Australian experiences are often in contrast to one another, as shown in the following information.

Indigenous older person

▶ Has full responsibility for passing on traditions to the next the generation

▶ Is respected and revered by younger family and community members

▶ Is a decision-maker, including discipline, punishment and settling disputes within the family and community

▶ Is a leader in performing rites and ceremonies (e.g. initiation of young boys and girls)

▶ Is a carer of children and adviser to young people
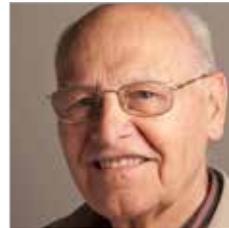
Non-Indigenous older person

▶ Tells stories about the 'old days'

▶ Can be a burden to family, especially when offspring have work and/or family commitments

▶ Has 'old' ideas that are not very helpful in dealing with the modern generation

▶ May have a role as a church elder, but their involvement in family activities may be seen as interfering

▶ Can be a ready and useful source of child care

Cultural safety in community services context

Practising cultural safety requires the worker and the organisation to send a clear message to the community that they are non-judgemental and respectful of the needs and expectations of people from other cultures. It requires building a relationship of trust and sharing information. Cultural safety means that people can retain their own cultural identity and their way of doing things.

Community service organisations should have policies and procedures that foster an understanding of cultural safety. This is fundamental to building effective cross-cultural relationships in the workplace, and to providing an environment that enhances the empowerment and self-determination of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with support needs.

Cultural competence in community services

Cultural competence requires a commitment from the whole organisation. The focus of cultural competence is to integrate culture into all aspects of the delivery of the service to increase effective outcomes.

Factors that contribute to cultural competence

▶ Having an awareness of other cultures

▶ Knowing how aspects of your culture may limit the effectiveness of the work you do with people from other cultures (for example, cultural bias)

▶ Knowledge of cultural safety

Policies and procedures

Cultural competence means that community services organisations have structures, systems, policies and procedures in place to eliminate the barriers that prevent Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people from accessing the services.

Here are some examples of elements that contribute to effective policies and procedures.

Policies and procedures ensure cultural competence by:

▶ providing cultural awareness and cultural safety training to staff

▶ outlining steps to ensure all assessments and referrals are culturally appropriate

▶ having a mission statement and values that include aspects of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's cultures.

Impact of western systems on service delivery

All aspects of Indigenous Australian ways of being remain affected by European settlement and subsequent government policies. Until 1967, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people were not counted in the Australian census. A paternalistic and westernised approach to meeting their needs has been a common theme until recently.

In 2007, the Australian government formally apologised to Indigenous Australian people for past government legislation and policies, including the stolen generations. The speech was a noteworthy step towards the social, economic and political inclusion of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in Australian society, and government agencies and organisations are now reaching out to Indigenous Australian people.

This means that western systems of service delivery have needed to adapt their approach to meet the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people while taking into account the legacies from past government laws. This is a complex task that requires many changes in their approach. For example, many of the towns and communities that Indigenous Australian people live in were established by the government and churches without their consent. Their distinct cultural and language groups were not recognised and they had to live in a single community.

A community services organisation will need to have strategies, systems, policies and procedures that are accepted by members of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community.

Strategies to develop effective relationships

People who receive and those who provide services in community services, all have a role to play and are responsible for developing and maintaining effective relationships.

There are many ways to actively build good workplace relationships with others. This depends on who the person is and your role and interaction with them. You may need to behave and speak in different ways for different people, remembering that there are many distinct cultures within Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander groups.

How to build good relationships with others

▶ Think about your words and actions and think about different ways the things you say and do may be interpreted; put things into a cultural context.

▶ Avoid using terms that may not be understood by others.

▶ Remember that many Indigenous Australian people may regard western institutions with suspicion and distrust.

▶ Be aware of laws against discrimination and racism that apply in Australia and avoid comments that may be seen as discriminatory, racist or biased.

▶ Look for opportunities to make positive, helpful comments about others.

▶ Always be professional when carrying out your work tasks and model appropriate behaviour in front of other workers.

Establish constructive relationships

Once trust and respect is established, a truly constructive relationship is possible. A constructive relationship is one where ideas, decisions and outcomes are achieved through collaborative approaches to tasks. Depending on your level of involvement at the service, the amount of your collaboration may vary.

Good relationships need maintenance. Once the effort has been made to create a relationship, it would be unfortunate to lose that trust and respect due to a lack of attention or poor communication.

Things you must consider to maintain a constructive relationship

▶ Ensuring regular and open communication

▶ Asking questions, not just giving answers

▶ Setting and re-evaluating goals

▶ Scheduling regular contact

▶ Keeping communication at an appropriate level (matching, as best you can, the level of literacy and language displayed by the other person)

▶ Regularly demonstrating the elements of trust

Share power through shared decision-making

Always involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals and co-workers when making decisions. By negotiating and discussing issues in this way, the power can be shared.

The outcomes of discussion-based approach for Indigenous Australian individuals and co-workers include:

▶ respect for people in receipt of services and co-workers

▶ the chance to participate in decision-making about issues affecting them

▶ cooperation with workers

▶ equal access to services and resources

▶ knowing their rights as service recipients.

Negotiate roles and responsibilities in the workplace

Community services workers need to be mindful of the value of involving Indigenous Australian people with support needs and co-workers in making decisions through negotiation and discussion.

The outcomes of sharing decision-making about roles and responsibilities with Indigenous Australian individuals are shown below, along with things that need to be acknowledged when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander co-workers.

Outcomes include:

▶ respect for support recipients and fellow workers

▶ the chance to participate in decision-making about issues affecting them

▶ cooperation with workers

▶ ensuring that they have equal access to services and resources

▶ knowing their rights as customers of the service.

Indigenous co-workers:

▶ have a cultural perspective that has a major influence on how they approach their work and people with support needs

▶ should be included in decision-making about how they can contribute to an effective workplace

▶ should be able to advocate for Indigenous Australian people with support needs

▶ have a duty of care to work in a manner that is not harmful to individuals' health and safety.

Culturally safe work practices

One of the most important strategies in developing and maintaining effective workplace relationships is to establish culturally safe work practices.

A culturally safe environment is one where there is no denial of a person's identity and no challenge to who they are or what they need. When applied to Indigenous Australian individuals, community services workers and communities, it is very much about sharing knowledge and experience.

Culturally safe work practices require that you:

▶ establish rapport

▶ be sensitive to what culture means for service recipients, educators and communities

▶ use interpersonal skills that acknowledge the integrity and worth of service recipients, educators and communities

▶ show respect and empathy

▶ be supportive and non-judgmental

▶ listen rather than talk.

Identify and consult with key contact people

Interaction with some Indigenous Australian people with support needs and co-workers can be enhanced if you identify appropriate key people such as Elders, other people acknowledged as having cultural knowledge, interpreters and Professional Support Coordinators (PSCs).

PSCs can play a vital role in bridging the gap between Indigenous Australian people and non-Indigenous institutions and cultural practices as shown below.

For example, a PSC can:

▶ involve an Indigenous Professional Support Unit (IPSU)

▶ provide emotional, social and cultural support to support recipients, their families and community

▶ advocate and liaise on behalf of a person with support needs or their family

▶ provide information about early childcare and education services

▶ assist with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

Display empathy and be flexible

Empathy – the ability to share and understand another person's emotions and feelings – must be part of all dealings with Indigenous Australian individuals and co-workers. Empathy is fundamental to providing a sense of cultural safety. It allows educators and coordinators to share the experiences of support recipients and Indigenous Australian co-workers.

A culturally safe workplace will acknowledge that not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and community services workers fit neatly into non-Indigenous work patterns. For example, a workplace may need to acknowledge Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's responsibilities if there is a death in their extended family.

In both instances, service providers, coordinators and community services workers need to take a flexible approach to workplace arrangements. This may require collaboration to develop strategies that provide flexibility in:

▶ work hours, breaks and leave arrangements

▶ consultation and participation

▶ dietary requirements.

Example

Example: ensure work practices are grounded in awareness

Susan, a midwife in a large public hospital, decides to join a health service in a remote town in the north of Western Australia. She is excited about this position since it allows her to apply her years of experience in a different cultural setting.

Susan's first couple of weeks in the town are an awakening. As expected, many of the people with support needs are Indigenous Australian people. She finds that many are reluctant to talk to her or look her in the eye. It is very hard to get information from them, even though they attend the clinic of their own choice. She expected the women to be more open with her than they are. The men also have very little to say about themselves or their health issues.

Susan finds all this hard to reconcile with the happy, laughing people she sees outside the clinic and begins to question her competence as a nurse.

One of the other issues that troubles Susan is where she fits into the community. Susan can feel the subtle divide between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, but she is not sure where she fits in and is feeling quite alone and isolated.

Practice task 5

1. Name some sources of information we use to form our own ideas of other cultures.

2. Explain the meaning of the term 'cultural bias'.

3. What are some signs that would indicate that a worker is promoting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural safety in the workplace?

65

4. What is the focus of cultural competence in an organisation?

5. What are some factors that contribute to an organisation's cultural competence?

6. What are three strategies for developing effective relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

Click to complete Practice task 5

2B Reflect awareness of own and other cultures in work practices

When you work in a care environment, you need to recognise and respect diversity and understand that everyone must be treated with courtesy and respect regardless of their race, religion, gender, beliefs or culture. People have a right to be different and everyone must be treated equally. You need to recognise and understand different cultures and how cultural differences can affect your work.

Keeping a reflective journal is a good way to examine your personal experiences of working with culturally diverse groups of people, and to reflect on your own social and cultural bias.

Here is a reflective cycle that is commonly used to help people think about and make sense of their personal experiences.

Description

What happened?

Action

If it happened again, what would you do?

Feelings

What were you thinking and feeling?

Reflective cycle

Conclusion

What can you conclude from this situation and your reaction to it?

Evaluation

What was good and bad about the experience?

Analysis

What sense can you make of the situation? What else could you have done?
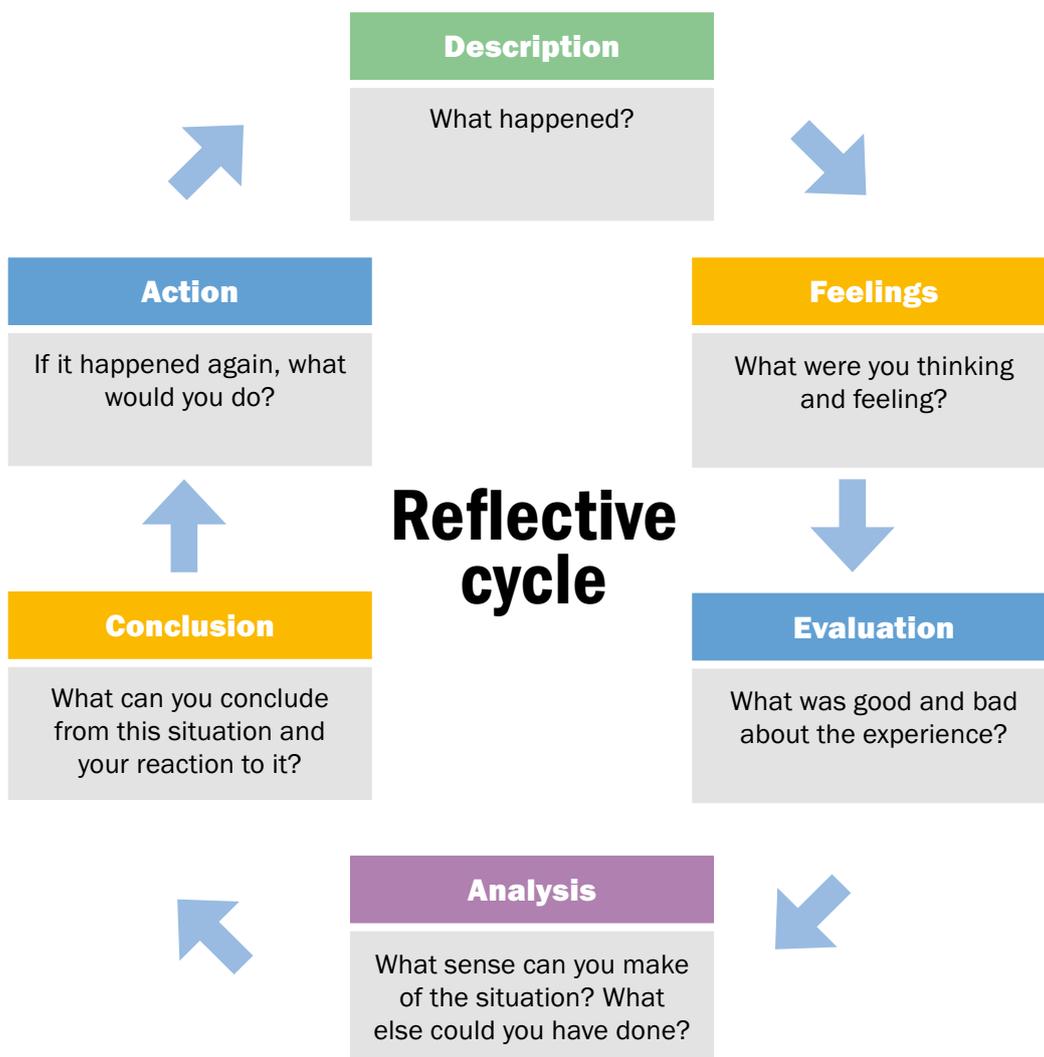
Based on Gibbs' Reflective Cycle (1988)

Use the reflective cycle

To use the reflective cycle to examine your own social and cultural bias, follow these steps. Write each response in your journal.

Using the reflective cycle

1 **Description**
Think of a recent incident where you were working with a socially and/or culturally diverse person or group of people. What happened?

2 **Feelings**
What did you already know about the background of about this person or group of people? What did you think and feel at the time?

3 **Evaluation**
Were these good or bad thoughts and feelings? Why?

4 **Analysis**
Were these thoughts and feelings realistic? On what do you base this opinion? Do you think you could have reacted in another way?

5 **Conclusion**
What do you conclude about this situation and your reaction to it?

6 **Action**
If it happened again, what might you do differently? Why?

Become culturally aware

Building cultural awareness is the first step towards changing your perspective and breaking down any social and cultural bias.

Cultural awareness involves the ability to stand back from yourself and become aware of your cultural values, beliefs and perceptions. Why do you do things in that way? Why do you react in that particular way?

Cultural awareness is essential if you interact with people from other social and cultural backgrounds. People see, interpret and evaluate things in different ways. Misunderstandings can easily arise if you try to use your own view of the world to try and make sense of somebody else's reality.

Degrees of cultural awareness

For most people, cultural awareness does not happen overnight. It is something that must be worked on and cultivated as you live and work with people from different social and cultural backgrounds to your own.

There are several levels of cultural awareness outlined below (adapted from Quappe and Cantatore, 2007, *What is Cultural Awareness, anyway? How do I build it?* which can be found at: http://aspirelr.link/cultural-awareness).

Levels of social awareness
My way is the only way People are aware of their way of doing things, and their way is the only way. They ignore the impact of cultural differences.
I know their way, but my way is better People are aware of other ways of doing things, but still consider that their way is best. Cultural differences are seen as a problem and usually ignored or downplayed.
My way and their way People are aware of both ways of doing things. They realise that cultural differences can lead to both problems and benefits and use diversity to create new solutions.
Our way People from different backgrounds come together to create a shared culture. They talk with others to create a new solution to meet the needs of a particular situation.

Have the right attitude

You may not know everything about the socially or culturally diverse individuals in your care, but you can still build bridges by having the right attitude. It is well known that the right attitude can form a strong link between people of different backgrounds, not matter what your work role.

Here are some useful suggestions (adapted from Quappe and Cantatore, 2007, *What is Cultural Awareness, anyway? How do I build it?* which can be found at: http://aspirelr.link/cultural-awareness).

Admit that you don't know
▶ Admit that you don't know everything. This is part of the process of becoming culturally aware. Assume differences, not similarities.

Suspend judgment
▶ Suspend your judgment. Collect as much information as possible so you can describe the situation accurately before evaluating it.

Have empathy
▶ Have empathy. Try standing in another person's shoes. This is the best way to learn more about how other people would like to be treated.

Don't assume

▶ Don't assume. Ask your colleagues for feedback. Constantly check your views to make sure that you clearly understand the situation.

Don't seek to control

▶ Don't seek to control. Assume that other people are as resourceful as you are and that their way may well add to what you know.

Celebrate diversity

▶ Celebrate diversity within your organisation. Find ways to share the different cultures of support recipients and co-workers. There is much to learn from other people and their diverse ways of life.

Example

Example: become culturally aware

Rohini has just started working in a diverse care environment. Although she is aware of her own cultural background, she has little understanding of the other cultures represented in the facility and how they might impact on the behaviour of the people now in her care. To improve her cultural awareness, she asked her manager if there were any resources on Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural information available for her to read. She was pleased to find out that not only were there resources, but she was also about to complete some cultural competence training as part of her induction.

v1702

Context of awareness

When working in community services with Indigenous Australian people, it is important that you are aware of your own cultural beliefs, attitudes and values. This awareness prevents you from thinking that a person is doing something for the same reasons that you would. For example, a western person would consider a lack of eye contact to be disrespectful, whereas an Indigenous Australian person would think direct eye contact is disrespectful. Your culture is so much a part your existence, that you may not realise it is there because your thoughts and behaviours have become automatic. This can affect the way you practise. When you reflect on you own attitudes and beliefs it helps you to develop strategies to manage your work with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

WHO ARE YOU

Systems, structures and engagement with services

Many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people have had a negative experience with government and private health, welfare and community services agencies. Because of this, they may consider many service providers to be part of a non-Indigenous system with a one-size-fits-all approach to service delivery.

Successfully working in partnership with Indigenous Australian people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Service providers should be more flexible when dealing with Indigenous Australian people as their culture does not always accommodate a structured, highly-organised system.

Programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are those where:

▶ the partnership is based on the concerns of the whole community and is not imposed from outside

▶ the arrangement meets the whole community's needs

▶ the community owns the service and the way it is delivered

▶ communication is effective and information is freely available.

Example

Example: work practices that reflect awareness

Here are two examples that reflect cultural awareness.

Respecting cultural preferences

A community services worker in a regional Victorian centre recently ran an eight-week course designed for young mothers under 25. The course, based on competencies from the Certificate III in Children's Services, has attracted around 25 per cent of its participants from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander backgrounds because of its focus on sharing knowledge in an inclusive environment.

Exploring cultural connections

During Reconciliation Week, Quercus Beechworth features paintings and crafts by Indigenous Australian prisoners at Beechworth Correctional Centre. These art forms help the men explore their culture and reconnect with lost or missing traditional aspects of their lives. As a result, these Indigenous Australian men are able to take steps towards improving their self-esteem and connecting with their communities.

Practice task 6

1. Why is it important that a worker is aware of their own cultural beliefs, attitudes and values?

2. Until recently, how would you describe the Australian government's approach to meeting the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

3. What are some characteristics of the Australian government's current approach to meeting the needs and expectations of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

4. What are some features of programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

Click to complete Practice task 6

2C Use communication techniques and work practices that show respect

It is important to demonstrate a respect for existing cultural differences when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. You can do this by using a range of effective communication techniques and work practices. Some of these techniques are provided in the following information.

Effective communication techniques and work practices
Become self-aware of own cultural influences
Reflect on professional practices
Identify and consult with appropriate key people in the community
Display empathy appropriately
Identify and remove communication barriers
Use culturally appropriate visual resources

Identify and consult with key contacts

Interaction with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and co-workers can be enhanced if you identify appropriate key people to contact. These people may include Elders, other people acknowledged as having cultural knowledge, interpreters and Aboriginal liaison officers.

Aboriginal liaison officers can play a vital role in bridging the gap between Indigenous Australian people and non-Indigenous institutions and cultural practices.

Aboriginal liaison officers can:
▶ provide emotional, social and cultural support to people, families and community
▶ advocate and liaise on behalf of a person or their family
▶ provide information about community services
▶ assist with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

Display empathy

Empathy, the ability to share and understand another person's emotions and feelings, must be part of all dealings with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals and co-workers. Here is some information for further consideration.

Empathy

Displaying empathy in all dealings:

Cultural safety

Empathy is vital if you want to provide a sense of cultural safety. It allows community service workers and coordinators to share the experiences of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals and co-workers.

Interactions

Empathy is important as many Indigenous Australian people feel insecure in their interactions with health, welfare and community services systems.

Barriers to effective communication

It is important to identify the barriers to effective cross-cultural communication in your workplace. These barriers may include:

▶ lack of understanding of kinship relationships

▶ differences in nonverbal communication (for example, avoiding eye contact is a mark of respect in some Indigenous Australian cultural groups)

▶ use of direct questioning that discourages a narrative-style answer

▶ difficulty for Indigenous Australian people to express numbers, time or distance, as traditional languages do not provide a means for quantifying information

▶ language differences (Indigenous Australian people do not always understand jargon or certain western concepts).

Strategies for better communication

While there are many strategies for better communication with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander co-workers and people with support needs, the effectiveness of each method is determined by its cultural relevance.

Communication strategies

Consider these suggestions:

Gestures and nonverbal techniques

Nonverbal communication through gesture, touch, eye contact and body language is an essential part of Indigenous Australian communication. A person's feeling and thinking, as well as their satisfaction or dissatisfaction, can be determined by gestures.

Non-judgmental approach

Positive regard, honesty and respect foster positive, effective communication. One way to show this is to remain calm; a raised voice, impatience or exasperation can leave people feeling frightened, confused or angry.

In much the same way, refraining from judging or criticising fosters an atmosphere of mutual respect. Remember that Indigenous Australian people have suffered much because of assumptions about their culture and way of life made by non-Indigenous people.

Ongoing interpersonal skill development

Regular exposure to training and workshops that provide cultural awareness and interpersonal skill development helps to enhance and maintain worker performance and contribution in the workplace.

Coordinators and support workers can benefit from developing leadership and influencing skills, networking to share ideas and resources, and teamwork training to share skills and experience.

Monitoring and reflection

Reflecting and examining your own actions, the way you do and say things, and your perceptions and expectations adds to your self-understanding. This reflection provides a valuable insight into where your values lie and the extent to which you impose them on others. Part of being empathetic and non-judgmental is having this personal awareness and trusting Indigenous Australian people with support needs and co-workers to do what is right for them.

Monitoring and reflection

Reflecting and examining your own actions, the way you do and say things, and your perceptions and expectations adds to your self-understanding. This reflection provides a valuable insight into where your values lie and the extent to which you impose them on others. Part of being empathetic and non-judgmental is having this personal awareness and trusting Indigenous Australian people with support needs and co-workers to do what is right for them.

Use appropriate communication strategies

Effective communication is the result of understanding that a person's cultural background and experiences may influence how that person interacts with others. Be aware that what is normal to you may not be normal for someone from a different cultural background, and this may present communication barriers.

Be aware of potential communication barriers. Speak clearly, observe individuals' body language and facial expressions, and stay alert for signs that they may not understand. You may need to repeat information, phrase things differently or invite the client to ask questions. It may help if you speak a little slower than usual, but it is important to never speak to people in a condescending way.

Take turns

Effective relationships in a cross-cultural workplace involve being able to stand back and wait for your turn to speak or do things, rather than being pushy and impatient. For example, in communication with Indigenous Australian people, respond slowly and carefully. A conversation may take time and be punctuated by long silences while the person considers all angles. Be prepared to withdraw from a situation, step back and reflect on what is going on before you act or say something.

Example

Example: other communication techniques

Visual/iconic strategies and media technologies can also be considered in order to provide clear communication with some Indigenous Australian people with support needs. Here are a couple of points to consider before using these techniques.

Visual/iconic strategies

Visual strategies may be useful, but only when they have cultural meaning. What is relevant to people one culture may not be meaningful to others because of different cultural expressions, interpretations and understanding of diagrams, tables, graphs or pictures.

Visual strategies are more relevant to Indigenous Australian people when the material reflects Indigenous modes of expression; for example, images that relate to their arts, environment, land and people.

Likewise, video material should reflect the language and culture of the audience and respect cultural sensitivities if it is to be useful.

Computer technology and other media

Although using computer technology and other media is an excellent method of communicating, do not assume it will always be appropriate. A percentage of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people are not computer literate or comfortable with the place of technology in their lives.

Given the significance that Indigenous Australian people assign to personal interaction, many computer or other media-based strategies that are acceptable in western culture may be inappropriate when dealing with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities.

Practice task 7

1. List the key groups of people in the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities that may need to be consulted as part of a communication strategy.

2. List some barriers that may prevent effective communication when working with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Click to complete Practice task 7

2D Engage with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters and colleagues

The introduction of Indigenous Australian interpreters and liaison officers in education, health and community services delivery has had a positive influence on professional relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with support needs and co-workers. Indigenous Australian liaison officers are a vital resource for bridging cultural gaps. They provide cultural, emotional and social support to Indigenous Australian individuals in the workplace. For example, Aboriginal hospital liaison officers advocate and liaise on behalf of individuals and families, provide information about hospital services and help with referrals to Indigenous and non-Indigenous organisations.

Interpreters help break down the language barriers frequently faced by Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people when dealing with health, social welfare and legal systems.

You need to be discerning when using a family member to interpret. They may only tell you what they want you to hear, not what the person actually says or means.

An official service, however, employs registered interpreters who are bound by a professional code of ethics. They are required to maintain strict confidentiality, interpret accurately and impartially, and act professionally at all times.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters can improve communication with people who may be service recipients or colleagues. One example is the Aboriginal Interpreter Service (AIS) in the Northern Territory. The AIS has more than 400 registered interpreters and covers over 100 languages and dialects.

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreters provide:

▶ Aboriginal interpreter service
▶ face-to-face interpreting interviews
▶ telephone interpreting
▶ interpreting at community meetings
▶ regular rostered sessions (e.g. at court, hospitals)
▶ audio recordings.

Use an interpreter

If you plan on using an interpreter, here are a few basic rules to follow.

Before the session

▶ You need to provide the interpreter or the interpreter service with information about the support recipient such as their name and skin name, their age, language and community of origin. You also need to brief them on the purpose of the interview.

The interpreter advises you on seating arrangements and any cultural issues they want to address.

At the start of the session

▶ Explain the role of the interpreter to the support recipient. Many Indigenous Australian people have never worked with an interpreter. They need to understand that the interpreter only interprets what you are saying; they do not advocate or give advice, or tell anyone outside the meeting what was said.

During the session

▶ Act in a culturally appropriate manner, following nonverbal protocols such as eye contact and facial expressions. Use short statements, preferably in plain English, and speak directly to the support recipient. Do not ask the interpreter for their opinion; they must remain impartial.

Multilingual people not related to the person

▶ In some cases, you may be able to use a multilingual person, such as a staff member, who can speak a support recipient's language or dialect and act as an interpreter for you. Some services ensure a multilingual staff member is always on hand to deal with problems that arise.

Healthcare workers

Health professionals, allied health professionals and healthcare workers can also help bridge a communication gap, especially if there are concerns relating to health care. In some instances, a healthcare worker may have a long-term relationship with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and can help with trust and understanding.

Cultural brokers

As well as using the services of an interpreter, Indigenous Australian liaison officer or a colleague with specialised skills, there are other professionals and specialists who can help you meet your duty-of-care responsibilities to service recipients. People such as healthcare workers, teachers, community workers and your colleagues can act as effective culture brokers, bridging the gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultural practices and western culture.

Role of culture brokers

A cultural broker is a person who mediates between people of different cultural backgrounds for a particular purpose, such as reducing conflict or producing some kind of change.

Nurses and teachers are sometimes thought of as useful cultural brokers

▶ They have experience in dealing with conflict situations between cultural groups.

▶ They are often seen as having an affinity with/understanding of the two cultures.

▶ They can cultivate varied social relationships and mediate between people/ systems or act as a go-between.

▶ They can translate interests and messages between groups.

Example

Example: interpreters and cultural brokers

Carrie Parker is a sexual health coordinator at a Perth medical centre and works with young women at risk.

As an Aboriginal person and trained nurse, Carrie's role is to provide a bridge between the health system and support recipients who find it difficult and confusing to deal with health professionals.

If tests reveal complications needing medical treatment, Carrie accompanies support recipients to hospital.

'They don't understand the language of doctors and nurses, so I'm liaison-person for the women. When the doctor's talking, I go through the medical language and put it into community language that the girls can understand.'

v1703

Practice task 8

1. What is the role of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter?

2. What are some situations where the services of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter can be used?

3. Other than an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander interpreter, name some other professionals who can bridge the gap between Indigenous Australian cultural practices and western culture.

4. In what ways can a cultural broker be useful?

Click to complete Practice task 8

Summary

1. It is important to reflect an awareness of your own culture in your work practices. By doing this, you can avoid making assumptions, lessen the chances of misinterpretations occurring and avoid cultural bias.

2. It is equally as important to reflect other cultural realities in your work practices. By doing this, you work towards creating a culturally safe work environment.

3. A culturally safe environment is one where people can live and work together with dignity. People are acknowledged and accepted for who they are and what they need. It is an environment based on mutual respect, shared meaning and shared knowledge and experience.

4. A culturally safe environment provides pathways to empowerment and self-determination.

5. An organisation can be seen as being culturally competent when all aspects of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures are integrated into service delivery.

6. This means an organisation and its workers need to develop a range of strategies to develop and maintain effective relationships that respect existing cultural differences. Strategies include sharing power in decision making, demonstrating flexibility to acknowledge obligations that go beyond those from western cultures, and appropriate communication to overcome barriers.

7. The legacy of a paternalistic approach by western service delivery systems needs to be replaced. Organisations need to adapt their systems, policies and procedures to be culturally inclusive of the needs and expectations of their local community.

8. Aboriginal liaison officers, interpreters, health workers and other professionals are important resources who can contribute to bridging the cultural and language gap between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people with support needs and non-Indigenous health and community services.

Learning checkpoint 2
Model cultural safety in own work

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in modelling cultural safety in your own work.

Part A

Look on the internet or in the employment sections of newspapers and locate a job advertisement for an Aboriginal liaison officer. You may wish to obtain the position description for the role.

1. Identify the role and responsibilities for the position, then discuss and give examples that show you understand what is required of the position.

2. What skills and knowledge are required to communicate effectively?

83

3. Describe how you think an individual in this role acts as a cultural broker, assisting education, care or health workers to meet their duty of care and provide a culturally safe environment.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

> ## Case study
>
> Eric is an older Aboriginal man who recently moved to the city to be with his daughter, Sandra, and her family. He lives in a self-contained bungalow at the back Sandra's house. Until his retirement he was a plant operator with a rural shire council. He has lived in the country all his life, but now he wants to be with his family. Eric is also finding it increasingly difficult to look after himself and often forgets to take his medication or attend medical appointments for diabetes and deteriorating eyesight.
>
> Sandra and her husband both work. They have two teenage children who attend the local secondary school and both play sport. The children largely ignore Eric and he is disappointed by this. Eric was hoping he'd be able to pass on stories about his childhood and the traditions he grew up with.
>
> Sandra understands the situation and is quite regretful her family isn't able to spend more of their time with her father. She is also conscious that she can't provide the kind of personal support her dad needs. Sandra contacts her local council and makes an appointment with the local Commonwealth Home Support Programme (CHSP) coordinator. Together they formulate a care plan for Eric.
>
> When Eric's care worker, Kerry, arrives he's surprised to learn she's non-Indigenous. She tells Eric her job is to help him bathe, clean his room and get him to his medical appointment. But she has to do this in the next three hours as she then has another client to visit. Eric refuses to let her assist him with bathing and becomes very agitated when she starts moving his possessions to clean the bungalow. He also insists he won't go to the doctor with Kerry.
>
> Kerry is quite worried about Eric, telling her coordinator she believes he may be unstable. She questions the suitability of Eric's family to look after him and expresses concern about his living arrangements. She also tells her coordinator she found Eric very difficult to understand; his sentences didn't make sense to her.

1. What are the inappropriate or ineffective communication practices being used in this case study?

2. Suggest how Sandra, the CHSP coordinator and Kerry may have consulted with Eric on his care plan.

3. Outline how you would ensure effective communication with Eric to meet his needs.

4. What steps would you take to provide Eric with the support he needs and what resources would you use?

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

<div style="display: flex;">

Topic 3

In this topic you will learn how to:

3A **Support the development of effective partnerships**

3B **Identify and utilise resources to promote partnerships**

3C **Devise and document ways to support the delivery of services and programs**

3D **Integrate strategies that encourage self-determination and community control**

</div>

Develop strategies for improved cultural safety

It is now recognised that the way forward in community services and programs is through culturally safe practices that offer community control and self-determination through a partnership approach. Successfully working in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Services providers should be more flexible when dealing with Indigenous Australian people as many of their cultural practices do not readily accommodate a structured, highly-organised system.

3A Support the development of effective partnerships

Successfully working in partnership with Indigenous Australian people requires their full participation, consultation and involvement in decision-making about issues affecting them. Participation in decision-making at a community level, with a focus on self-determination, is the focus of many service delivery programs.

Develop and implement strategies to increase participation

Consultation and negotiation are central to effectively delivering services to Indigenous Australian people. Establishing the level of involvement of the relevant Indigenous Australian people is an important part of the early negotiation process.

Identify early who the decision-makers are and how consultation is to occur; Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people generally want to recognise their community obligations and kinship relationships; their involvement should be meaningful. Develop trust and credibility, allowing time for the decision-making process.

Consultation with community representatives

Consultation with Elders and leaders in Indigenous Australian communities is essential in developing strategies to increase participation of Indigenous Australian people in education, health and community services delivery. Observing appropriate protocols when working with Indigenous Australian people, including Elders and wider communities, is critical to establishing positive and respectful relationships. Consultation should always be seen as a two-way process, with both parties learning together and from each other.

Providing Indigenous Australian people with the opportunity to become involved in education, health, community services, justice and housing programs gives ownership to local communities and is consistent with their decision-making processes.

Community participation in decision-making processes

To increase the participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in education, health and community services programs, it is important to promote and allow for community participation in decision-making processes. Although many communities defer to their Elders or designated leaders, these groups may also consult with their family members before settling on a decision. This means that service recipients have to be consulted at all times on a wide range of matters.

A services provider's consultation should also include Indigenous Australian employees and Aboriginal liaison officers or Professional Service Coordinators, as these people can offer valuable insights into how to effectively engage with a community and its leaders.

Culturally safe and appropriate care, services and practices

Education and healthcare services and practices must be culturally appropriate to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander individuals' needs, particularly to overcome any suspicions many Indigenous Australian people have of non-Indigenous education systems and medicines. Well-informed coordinators can contribute to providing effective education and health care by ensuring adequate training of workers about culturally appropriate services, responsibilities and practices. Workplace policies, procedures and strategies should likewise be tailored to meet the holistic needs of Indigenous Australian people with support needs.

Other strategies to increase participation

Other important issues to identify when developing strategies to increase participation are outlined below.

Cultural obligations

Culturally appropriate practices and strategies for delivering education and health services make allowances for individual and family cultural obligations. In rural and remote communities, language may be a barrier and jargon or complex words should be avoided; communication will be far more effective if plain English is used.

Kinship

Remember that Indigenous Australian service recipients may have kinship requirements. For example, if an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander client needs treatment that requires a consent form, proper kin should be consulted. This can be done through consultation with members of the family or an Aboriginal liaison officer. As consent must be given by the parent/guardian, you may need to allow for permission to be sought from proper kin and have the parent sign the form on behalf of the family.

Family involvement

Culturally safe service to Indigenous Australian children and their parents must acknowledge their extended families; contact with the extended family may play a significant part in wellbeing.

Provide a service that caters for health issues

Although poor access to health care is a major issue for Indigenous Australian people, better education for young mothers and children is possibly the most critical factor in reducing health issues. You should be aware of the following common child health issues in Indigenous Australian children:

▶ Underweight newborns

▶ Middle ear infections, causing speech delay and hearing disability if untreated

▶ Diseases of the chest and throat

▶ Injuries from accidents

Gender issues

Women's and men's business in the traditional cultural life of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is generally taken seriously. Services therefore need to provide policy guidance that observes traditional customs, particularly in relation to gender.

Examples of policy guidelines
An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person may prefer to be attended to by a healthcare worker of the same gender as there may be taboos about being seen naked by someone outside the kinship system.
There may be cultural barriers to allowing men in the same room as women.
Don't assume that women have attended antenatal classes or seen a doctor during their pregnancy; they may have little idea about what is to take place during birth.
Indigenous Australian people may feel more comfortable seeing an Indigenous Australian health worker than a non-Indigenous worker at first contact.

Access to services

It is vital that your rapport with each family helps them to access health services relevant to their needs. If your service refers families to an external service, ensure you pass on necessary information. Be sure not to pass on confidential information – unless permission is given – but you should include details of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander customs or languages.

The external services that may be most suited will be linked to an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS), which is governed by an Aboriginal body. An ACCHS is different to an Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) in that an AMS will be funded to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, but not all AMSs are community controlled.

Services that you may help families access are shown below.

You might tell families about (or refer them to):

▶ hospital or other facility/services; for example, admission, entry and discharge processes

▶ referral protocols

▶ reception and inquiry services

▶ diagnostic services

▶ inpatient services

▶ outpatient and community services

▶ screening services

▶ health promotion

▶ public health

▶ non-government agency.

Example

Example: effective partnerships

In the mid-1980s, the Nganampa Health Council introduced a strategy to improve antenatal care for women in Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara lands, South Australia.

The strategy involved developing a care record system for antenatal patients to be used in all Nganampa Health Council clinics. It introduced standard protocols for antenatal care, birthing and child health care.

When performance information from 1984 to 1996 was reviewed, the success of the strategy was revealed by a decrease in perinatal mortality and the proportion of low-birthweight babies but an increase in the mean birthweight recorded.

Practice task 9

1. Make a list of potential health issues that you think an educator should be aware of when caring for children from Indigenous Australian families.

2. Make a list of the cultural issues an educator should be aware of when working with families to address the health needs of children in their care.

Click to complete Practice task 9

3B Identify and utilise resources to promote partnerships

Strong community partnerships are fundamental to effective service delivery and self-determination. Facilitating this kind of relationship may require some level of formal structure, such as forming reference groups, determining a clear communication process or establishing a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between a provider and its community. Although you will not be required to initiate this kind of formal structure, it is useful to be aware of the processes outlined in this section.
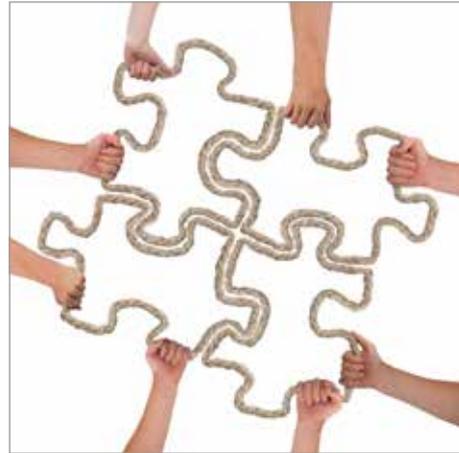
Form reference groups

Reference groups can be a useful way of gathering information, ideas and resolving problems with the delivery of a service. For example, health related reference groups can provide community views and advice in relation to community health issues.

Reference groups need to acknowledge cultural considerations such as the place of Elders or community-designated leaders, gender, customs, taboos, and traditional practices and kinships. Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous education and health professionals and Aboriginal liaison officers are also relevant personnel to consider contacting when forming reference groups.

Reference groups assist in understanding Indigenous Australian views and needs

They provide advice about community or Indigenous cultural needs.

They discuss and evaluate issues facing Indigenous Australian people with support needs in the community.

They work collaboratively with the community to provide information and advice that supports the achievement of effective, responsive and culturally appropriate services.

Memorandums of understanding

A memorandum of understanding (MOU) between an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community and its local education, healthcare or community service can provide a formal mechanism for the two groups to work collectively to improve Indigenous Australian people's education, health and wellbeing.

A memorandum of understanding with a community services organisation may provide for:

▶ meeting the basic needs of the community such as food, clothing and accommodation

▶ ensuring the safety of children, women, family and the community as a whole

▶ protecting the family from violence as a result of alcohol, drugs and substance abuse

▶ identifying and proposing solutions to underlying issues causing family problems

▶ taking a collaborative approach to helping single parents, older people, people with mental health problems and people with disabilities.

Mutual respect

Mutual respect is an important factor in any relationship or partnership, especially at work. It helps lay the foundation for a culturally safe workplace and allows service recipients and service staff to establish common ground.

Strategies to foster an environment of mutual respect
▶ Consult people when making decisions about new procedures to ensure they are culturally suitable.
▶ Make a welcoming environment.
▶ Encourage diversity by sharing cultural experiences.
▶ Support cross-cultural teams.
▶ Have a positive attitude.
▶ Be willing to learn about how and why people act the way they do and learn about their culture.
▶ Avoid making judgments based on people's looks or culture; your job is to care for and help people, not to judge.

Support the development of effective partnerships to facilitate quality services

There are ways that services providers and other organisations providing education, health and welfare services can establish effective partnerships that increase uptake of services by people with support needs in Indigenous Australian communities.

These partnerships address:

▶ accessibility

▶ affordability

▶ accountability

▶ sharing information and resources

▶ appropriate services.

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

Accessibility

Proportionally more Indigenous Australian people live in remote areas than non-Indigenous Australians. It can be difficult to access service programs in remote areas, simply because there are fewer services available and because of distance and travel time. Even transport can be a significant issue for people who do not have access to concession public transport fares or who live in remote areas.

Affordability

Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are generally in a poorer economic position than non-Indigenous Australian communities. Affordability of services is therefore an important issue, particularly for Indigenous Australian people on low incomes. With limited economic means, access to all but the most basic health, welfare, education and community services is often denied. The cost of medication can also be a deterrent to participation in health programs. Affordability can be an important factor influencing preschool access for children from Indigenous Australian families.

Some ways the Aboriginal-specific preschool sector in New South Wales has responded to access and affordability issues are through:

▶ low fees

▶ a bus service to promote access and participation.

(Source: Aboriginal Early Childhood Support & Learning Inc. Information Sheet, August 2013)

Accountability

Fundamental to the success of any partnership arrangement for delivering services to Indigenous Australian people with support needs is the accountability of all parties for the service.

A coordinator can support the development of effective partnerships by helping to establish accountability between Indigenous Australian communities, the reference group and other partners to the service. Accountability relates to maintaining aims and objectives, ensuring that financial requirements are met and following project plans and reporting on activities.

Acceptability of appropriate care and workplace service

Services and programs that are developed in partnership with provider staff, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities should meet cultural acceptability requirements.

Partnerships are about working collaboratively in an environment of respect, trust and equality. Programs and services that most benefit Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities are likely to be those that connect health and education service delivery with projects of community concern and that build community capacity.

Capacity-building can be enhanced when:

▶ the partnership evolves from the concerns of the whole community and is not imposed from outside

▶ there is community ownership of a service and the way it is delivered, from planning and development through to implementation and evaluation

▶ communication is effective and information freely available so the arrangement meets the whole community's needs.

Two way communication

To maintain effective partnerships, there needs to be a two-way flow of information and resources between the community and various other parties in the relationship. It is important that Indigenous Australian voices are well-represented and clearly heard throughout the process to ensure cultural needs are met and the objectives of the partnership are achieved.

Use effective strategies to maintain relationships and resolve misunderstandings

Much about the relationships between Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous people and institutions can be explained through the history of Indigenous Australian dispossession.

Some of the effects of the history of European settlement for Indigenous Australian people living in contemporary Australian society are listed below. Services providers can respond with strategies that build trust and confidence in the service being offered.

Some effects of the history of European settlement
This emotional and cultural experience shapes the outlook of many Indigenous Australian people and the way they interact with non-Indigenous communities and institutions.
Barriers and stereotypes exist that impede access to services and the ability of an Indigenous Australian person to develop their skills.
Many Indigenous Australian people do not trust institutions.

Develop and maintain relationships

Providing a culturally safe environment and implementing strategies that reflect an understanding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander history and place are essential.

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

Services providers should:

▶ foster an understanding of spiritual relationships, the Dreaming and Indigenous Australian history

▶ be aware of family relationships, kinships and the place of Elders as decision-makers

▶ be flexible enough to support different cultural values and beliefs

▶ take a holistic approach to service, recognising all aspects of an Indigenous Australian person's life

▶ provide culturally appropriate care and educational programs and acknowledge individual differences

▶ maintain effective networks to ensure appropriate referrals can be made.

Acknowledge barriers

The way service providers interact with Indigenous Australian staff and service recipients needs to take into account the barriers Indigenous Australian people face. Some of the strategies to help overcome these barriers are shown below.

It is useful for an organisation to have strategies in place that allow it to:

▶ assess people individually, ignoring stereotypes

▶ understand what identity can mean for each Indigenous Australian person

▶ acknowledge the effects of the stolen generations and the difficulty some Indigenous Australian people have as a result of the clash of cultures

▶ be flexible and allow for different concepts of time

▶ identify and deal with issues of bias or race

▶ take into account language and literacy differences.

Trust of institutions

Because of many Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people's experiences, either directly or indirectly through family members, some may be reluctant to use education and health services. Some strategies that can be used to personalise the services are shown below.

Some strategies to personalise the service

▶ Make sure educators are aware of trust issues and the reasons for them.

▶ Make services welcoming and help Indigenous Australian people with support needs become comfortable with the service.

▶ Reassure service recipients that their information is treated confidentially and if they seem uncomfortable, explain why you need to collect it.

▶ Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people or organisations in strategy development.

Example

Example: cultural misunderstanding

Rowena, a nurse in charge of a busy outpatient clinic in a metropolitan hospital, decides on a lifestyle change. When the opportunity arises, she applies for and is appointed to a job on an Aboriginal reserve. Rowena anticipates that most of her work will be much like what she sees in the outpatient clinic, so she decides to organise her clinic in the same efficient way.

On her first day, Rowena arrives at work on time and in a new, crisp uniform. She makes her way through a small crowd of waiting people and, taking her place behind her desk, calls for the first patient.

Rowena tells Bertie to take a seat, asks for his name, then finds his card. She then starts asking him questions about his health and what is wrong with him.

Bertie provides unclear answers to Rowena's questions and is unable to give concrete information about his pain. At the end of the interview Rowena finds herself at a loss. She asks Bertie to make another appointment if the pain comes back.

To Rowena's confusion and dismay, most of her patients that day seem to react in much the same way; they don't say much and seem to be quite aloof.

Resolve difficulties, differences and misunderstandings

It is important to develop good relationships in order to avoid difficulties and misunderstandings in the workplace. To establish good relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander families and co-workers, your services need to implement culturally appropriate practices. This includes:

▶ negotiating culturally appropriate guidelines

▶ identifying appropriate mediators

▶ negotiating a workplace code of practice.

Example

Example: resources

Josie is a health worker employed by a local community health service. Her role is to try to bridge the gap and enhance the communication between health professionals who work at the service and the local Indigenous Australian community. Josie has developed a range of programs and resources that will encourage increased participation and an improved partnership between the community and the health service.

One idea is to have visual images showing Indigenous Australian people being welcomed to the community health service. She hopes that these images will make people feel welcome. Josie will also be travelling around the community in a small bus speaking to the Elders and other community leaders about using the free bus service to travel to and from the health service.

Practice task 10

1. What are some of the functions of reference groups in assisting and understanding Indigenous Australian people's views and needs?

2. What are some of the functions of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between a service agency and the Indigenous Australian community?

3. Why is accountability fundamental to any community service partnership with people in an Indigenous Australian community?

4. Casey is a health care worker. She is aware of the affordability issue that affects the Indigenous Australian people in the community, particularly the access to health services. Casey has been asked to develop a relationship with the local community and start a program to make health services more affordable and to improve attendance. Outline the strategies Casey needs to consider.

Click to complete Practice task 10

3C Devise and document ways to support the delivery of services and programs

It is important to work in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people to create and record culturally safe strategies for service delivery and programs. This will encourage an increase in participation of the service and appropriate referrals.

Here are some strategies that can be documented.

Providing a workplace induction program

▶ A sound, inclusive workplace induction program provides new employees with the information and resources about Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander culture to help them adjust work practices to meet client needs.

Developing guidelines for appropriate behaviour

▶ Guidelines should support appropriate behaviour and work practices to ensure that:

– care is delivered to meet individual preferences and cultural needs

– people with support needs have access to culturally appropriate resources; for example, Indigenous Australian music, art or TV programs

– individuals' problems are dealt with in an ethical and culturally appropriate manner

– Aboriginal liaison officers are used as required.

Understanding your own culture and history

▶ To understand other cultures better, you must be aware of your own culture and history and how this influences the way you think and act. This involves acknowledging your own values, expectations and beliefs. It also involves recognising the cultural influences on your day-to-day behaviour; for example, the way you communicate or deal with conflict.

Understanding the contributing factors

▶ It also helps to understand the contributing factors to an issue. For instance, the main factors that contribute to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's current health issues are:

– the dispossession of Indigenous Australian people from their land

– the legacy of the stolen generations and loss of identity

– discrimination

– social, political and economic inequality

– geographic and social isolation

– poor access to services or culturally inappropriate services.

Understanding cultural terms

▶ Understanding cultural terms is also important if you are trying to accommodate the cultural differences of people with support needs. For instance, Indigenous Australian people often define illness in cultural terms:

– Suicide may be ascribed to being 'sung' (cursed).

– Loss of mobility due to a stroke may be interpreted as a 'payback' for some kind of offence.

– Depression could be 'sick for country', after being removed from their birthplace/Dreaming.

Finding similarities and common ground

▶ While there may be marked differences between Indigenous Australian and non-Indigenous cultural beliefs and practices, workers and support recipients may also share cultural similarities. Common ground can be achieved through observance of religious practices, gender roles, interest in sport and recreation, and art and music, among other things.

Legislative context

Organisations within Australia must comply with a variety of federal acts and national standards. National anti-discrimination legislation has a number of aspects as is shown below.

Age Discrimination

The *Age Discrimination Act 2004* (Cth) is a relatively new law which is especially important with regard to Australia's ageing population. It protects people who are discriminated against because of their age and states that, regardless of age, everyone has the same right to equality before the law.

The Act also allows appropriate benefits to be given to people of a certain age, particularly younger and older people, according to their circumstances. Objectives of the Act also include removing barriers to older people participating in society and changing negative stereotypes about older people.

Exemptions include stipulations regarding youth wages, health care and voluntary work.

Disability

The *Disability Discrimination Act 1992* (Cth) gives a broad definition of disability and prohibits direct or indirect discrimination based on disability. It also prohibits discrimination against people associated with people who have disabilities; these may be friends, relatives, carers and co-workers. The Act makes it unlawful to discriminate in the areas of:

▶ employment

▶ education

▶ access to public premises

▶ purchase of house and land

▶ provision of goods, services and facilities

▶ administration of Commonwealth Government laws and programs.

Exemptions to the *Disability Discrimination Act* include when a potential employer would be placed under unjustifiable hardship in order to employ a person with a disability, although the employer is expected to make reasonable adjustments. An example of an unjustifiable hardship might be the cost of extensive renovations to allow for wheelchair access to and throughout a small, second floor studio owned by a small business.

Racial Discrimination

The *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth) covers all of Australia and prohibits racial discrimination and offensive behaviour based on racial hatred. It covers discrimination based on race, colour, descent and national or ethnic origin. It also protects those who may be discriminated against based on their association with people of a particular ethnicity. The Act applies to everyone in Australia and all organisations.

The *Racial Hatred Act 1995* (Cth) was added to the Racial Discrimination Act in 1995 and provides an avenue for people to complain about racist behaviour that offends, insults, humiliates or intimidates others in public. Exceptions to the law include when the behaviour is a matter of public interest (such as a newspaper report on racially-based violence), or is part of an academic discussion which is not malicious or spiteful. These exceptions often involve rights to free speech.

Sex Discrimination

The *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) explains that it is unlawful to discriminate against someone based on their sex, marital status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy. It sets out laws against sexual harassment as well as dismissal from work based on family duties including pregnancy.

According to the Act, it is unlawful to refuse to provide goods or services, education or employment based on a person's sex. The Act also covers discrimination within awards and enterprise bargaining, insurance and superannuation, Commonwealth laws and programs, and accommodation.

Sexual harassment is included in the Act because it is a form of discrimination to treat a person unfairly because of their sex.

An exception to the Act includes when goods or services can only be applied to one sex, for example female or male-specific health care. Another exception covers employing a person to look after a child in the child's home. Sexual discrimination in the training and ordination of religious ministers is also not covered under the Act.

Human Rights

The *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986* (initially called the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission) was established to deal with breaches of anti-discrimination laws and to promote human rights education.

This Act only covers actions or policies of the Commonwealth.

The Act promotes human rights for all people, and covers most forms of discrimination not already covered in the other Acts, including discrimination on the basis of:

▶ criminal records

▶ marital status

▶ medical record

▶ political opinion

▶ religion

▶ sexual preference

▶ social origin

▶ trade union activity.

Privacy

If your organisation is in the habit of collecting information about customers or clients, its operations will come under the *Privacy Act 1988*. This Act deems personal information about individuals to be sensitive, such as information about:

▶ criminal records

▶ health

▶ membership of a professional or trade association

▶ membership of a trade union

▶ political affiliations or opinions

▶ racial or ethnic origin

▶ religious affiliations or beliefs

▶ sexual orientation or practices.

This information about a person could be used by others to discriminate against them or identify them although they may wish to remain anonymous. Your organisation should inform you of your responsibilities regarding individuals' privacy. It should also inform you of its responsibilities with regards to your privacy. It is always advisable to take any information provided to you about any individual as confidential.

People generally have a right to see and correct, if necessary, files of personal information kept about them by organisations. Individuals are usually only denied access to files about them if their own or another person's safety is at risk, or if there are other legalities involved.

Culturally appropriate guidelines

In consultation with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community leaders and workers, service providers should develop culturally appropriate guidelines for service delivery. Guidelines give a source of direction and a behaviour code that ensures culturally appropriate services are offered.

Here is some information that needs to be included in the guidelines.

Culturally appropriate guidelines
Show respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and language.
Be sensitive to Indigenous Australian people's relationship with the land.
Learn how to pronounce names correctly.
Speak clearly and in plain English.
Communicate openly, honestly and with sincerity.
Establish rapport, building trust and respect.
Be supportive and non-judgmental.
Observe the fundamentals of nonverbal communication and active listening.

Workplace code of practice

Negotiating a workplace code of practice, based on your knowledge of Indigenous Australian workers and with community consultation, is a good way to ensure that all employees operate from an agreed framework of understanding.

Here are some points to consider.

Professional and ethical behaviour

▶ Health and community services providers must ensure they do not do or say things that are unprofessional or detrimental to the health, emotional and mental wellbeing of people with support needs and co-workers. This could include culturally unsound practices, such as being judgmental or failing to acknowledge an Indigenous Australian worker's family obligations in the event of a death in the extended family.

People's rights

▶ The rights of people include their right to be treated with dignity and respect, equal access to services and that confidentiality of their personal information is maintained. These rights should also extend to the right to have important aspects of their cultural heritage, such as their kinship and individuality, recognised in all dealings.

Empathy

▶ Any workplace code of practice should make reference to empathising with Indigenous Australian individuals and workers, to share and understand their emotions, feelings and their experience.

Flexibility

▶ Flexibility in dealing with Indigenous Australian people acknowledges that their ways of doing things are not necessarily structured or organised in the same way as you might be used to.

Capacity to take turns

▶ The ability to stand back and wait for your turn to speak or do things is important in developing a good working relationship with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Encourage increased participation

Encouraging the participation of Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait communities is important in the planning and development of programs. Setting up and being mindful of what is culturally appropriate means that the participation might be ongoing and could lead to a positive outcome for the program.

Consultation and negotiation are central to getting Indigenous Australian people to participate. Establishing the level of involvement of the relevant community members is an important part of the early negotiation process. Lay the ground work by identifying who the decision-makers are

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

and how consultation is to occur. It may be a good idea to begin with a focus group or ask an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander support worker to be involved to gain some insights into the decision-makers' role and what might be the best way to approach the community in a culturally sensitive way.

Encourage ongoing participation

To encourage ongoing participation and involvement, don't present ideas driven by process and rules that do not match the decision-making and communication styles of the group you are interacting with. Make involvement meaningful and try to encourage trust and credibility, and allow time for the decision-making process. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people generally want to recognise their community obligations and kinship relationships which may mean decision making is slowed.

Consider the following factors to encourage initial and ongoing participation.

Strategies to encourage participation
Ask a focus group about particular cultural information relevant to the community.
Identify the decision-makers.
Negotiate where and when the consultation will take place.
Know who should participate; for example, Elders and local family group representatives.
Establish which communication methods are required.
Make time for decision-making.
Collaborate to make people feel a part of the decision-making.
Develop trust, credibility and mutual understanding.

Example

Example: document a delivery service that is culturally safe

Philip has been given the task of improving the delivery of a service that is directed towards Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Philip arranges to speak with a support worker to contact the main decision-makers in this community. He visits some Elders and with the help of the support worker, gains an understanding of the needs of the community. Philip will use this information in developing the next stage of his program.

Practice task 11

1. You have been asked to participate in a reference group at work to come up with a draft code of practice for the workplace. Your group has been given a list of guidelines to consider when writing the code to encourage cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples in your workplace.

    Complete this table with a workplace example that explains the guidelines provided.

Professional and ethical behaviour

People's rights

Empathy

Flexibility

Capacity to take turns

2. List four areas of discrimination legislation that exist in Australia.

3. What benefits are there in having a negotiated workplace code of practice that reflects the needs of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

Click to complete Practice task 11

3D Integrate strategies that encourage self-determination and community control

The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights defines self-determination as the 'right of people to freely determine their political status and pursue their own economic, social and cultural development'.

Here are some points to consider.

What is self-determination?

Most Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people take self-determination to mean the opportunity to effectively participate and make decisions on issues that relate to them and to manage their own affairs. Community control is now generally seen as a requirement in overcoming health disadvantages of Indigenous Australian people.

Achieving self-determination

Medical or policy intervention from outside the community has not always been able to adequately deal with the health issues of Indigenous Australian people with support needs. Developing effective working relationships with Indigenous Australian services and groups in the community increases access to services and referrals. These services are more responsive to Indigenous Australian people's needs and issues because they are staffed by Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people who have a shared understanding and empathy.

Self-determination

Self-determination may have a different meaning for different Indigenous Australian people because of different experiences and varying levels of access to resources. Historically, policies and programs were often imposed with little consultation and, in most cases, did not reflect the ideals and views of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people. Despite these differences, there is one main shared view as outlined in the following information.

Health care and community service providers need to:

▶ plan and review new and existing services

▶ use the views and expertise of Indigenous Australian communities on different issues

▶ find appropriate ways to make services more friendly and welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

▶ discuss Indigenous Australian identities and how they impact community members.

Community control

A coordinator's role in a health or community services facility is to motivate, encourage and engage individuals and members of the community in all health service activities, including service promotion. This also includes encouraging community leadership development and health education. By definition, community control allows the community itself to define and prioritise its health needs.

Here is further information about what community control assumes.

Community control

The whole community has the opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and is not controlled by the service or program.

Government is prepared to invest in community autonomy by providing support and the opportunity for development.

Health service staff must respond to community health needs.

Support self-determination and community control

In the spirit of self-determination and community control, Indigenous Australian communities operate more than 140 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHS) or Aboriginal Medical Services (AMS) across Australia. Although these are local services, they are represented by a national body.

Here is more information about local and national representation.

Local services

A local Aboriginal Medical Service delivers holistic, comprehensive and culturally appropriate health care to its community. There is a range of services providers, from large, multi-functional services with medical practitioners and allied health professionals, through to small organisations where primary health care is provided by nurses or Aboriginal health workers.

National body

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services throughout Australia are represented by the national peak Aboriginal health body, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). More information can be found at: http://aspirelr.link/naccho

Involvement in planning of services and programs

Any decisions to be made about future planning or reviewing of a particular health service or program should involve members of the Indigenous Australian community. The health workers in community health services have expertise in health issues and treatments, but they need to work alongside and in collaboration with community leaders. These leaders are best placed to provide an insight into the workings and cultural context of their community.
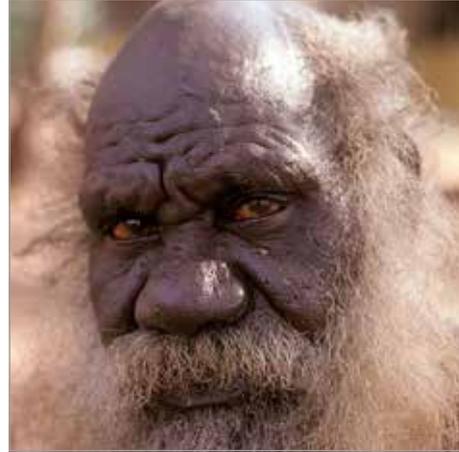
Community control means that the direction of health services is driven by the community; therefore community members must be involved

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

in the planning process. Strategies that involve a community control model are more likely to lead to improved health outcomes because they evolve from the community itself.

Involvement in delivery of services and programs

Self-determination means that Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait people are given the opportunity to participate and make decisions that relate to their own affairs. Indigenous Australian people can choose to be trained in qualifications that enable them to deliver health services and programs to their community. This strategy is being used as a way of overcoming the health disadvantages of some Indigenous Australian people and their communities. Workers trained in the health issues of Indigenous Australian people can work alongside the community with a unique view and understanding of the health issues particular to an area. They may also be able to find appropriate ways to make services more friendly and welcoming, increasing the use of these health services.

Example

Example: encourage self-determination and community control

Ruby was born in a remote area of Australia and had always wanted to train as a nurse. When she completed her degree, she was keen to go back and work in her local community. The local Aboriginal Medical Service employed her as a nurse. She works alongside other health professionals where they offer a comprehensive range of health services. Each health professional is multi-skilled and offers holistic and culturally appropriate health care to its community. Local community leaders have a key role in decisions made regarding their health service and Ruby enjoys working alongside the community to evaluate and review the health services provided.

Practice task 12

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

A health service was established in 2007 for a local area with a large population of Indigenous Australian people. Some serious health concerns had been identified in and around the area, including a high incidence of diabetes. The federal government funded and set up the health centre and it was completed in 2007, and now the leadership team makes decisions and runs the service independent of government. They report to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO). The co-ordinators meet with a representative group from the local Indigenous Australian population on a frequent basis to review and evaluate the programs and services they deliver. They are currently reviewing and considering employing another health professional to respond to the growing needs for a particular health issue – kidney health.

1. What is the common definition of self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people?

2. What three factors describe community control in health services?

3. Identify the facts from the above case study that indicate self-determination is being demonstrated.

4. Identify the facts from the case study that indicate community control is in place.

Click to complete Practice task 12

Summary

1. Culturally safe practices offer community control and self-determination through a partnership approach.

2. Strong community partnerships are central to effective service delivery and for Indigenous Australian people's self-determination.

3. The history of European settlement is a key feature behind many of the critical issues that influence workplace relationships with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

4. Numerous cross-cultural issues need to be considered when developing effective cultural safety strategies.

5. Adequate and appropriate resourcing, particularly by establishing reference groups and formal agreements to support community self-determination of service delivery, contributes to the success of community service programs.

6. Working in partnership with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the community ensures that their local cultural differences are recognised and respected.

7. Organisations within Australia must comply with a variety of federal legislations on discrimination.

8. Encouraging participation of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the decision-making around health services is an important aspect of community control.

9. Self-determination and community control are the underpinning concepts that enable the delivery of health services to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people.

Learning checkpoint 3
Develop strategies for improved cultural safety

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in developing strategies for improved cultural safety.

Part A

Prepare a report that summarises cultural aspects of building a workplace relationship with Indigenous Australian people. Your report should address the following headings and cover underpinning points listed.

1. Mutual respect and diversity – describe the key aspects of building workplace relationships and provide an example of when and how this has been demonstrated in your service.

2. Critical issues – discuss at least three critical issues that impact Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and include an example for each.

3. Strategies for maintaining effective workplace relationships – provide four practices that should be implemented in the workplace to foster effective relationships.

Part B

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

> ### Case study
>
> Alice lives in a regional centre and is one of the few remaining members of her kinship group. She has always been very active in the local community and is particularly good at articulating how her Indigenous Australian cultural practices can be incorporated into the community and community activities.
>
> A member of the stolen generations, she has never had any real contact with her extended family or kinship group, but remains very proud of her background and is keen to share her culture.
>
> Now, however, Alice's health is deteriorating and she needs full-time care. Her husband, Jack, is a non-Indigenous Australian. He is managing as best he can, but together they have to face the inevitable: Alice will have to go into residential care.
>
> Alice is resisting this. There will be no other Indigenous Australian people in the facility and she knows she just won't 'hit it off' with a lot of the other residents.

1. Identify the limiting negative cultural factors that exist for Alice in the options she and her husband are considering.

2. Suggest what options and resources may be available to make Alice's life in residential care fulfilling.

Topic 4

In this topic you will learn how to:

4A Agree on outcomes against which cultural safety strategies can be measured

4B Involve Aboriginal and/ or Torres Strait Islander people in evaluations

4C Evaluate programs and services against desired outcomes

4D Revise strategies based on evaluation

Evaluate cultural safety strategies

Services that are delivered in a culturally safe environment lead to empowerment and self-determination for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. To achieve this, it is important to include Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in all aspects of the process of evaluating the effectiveness of programs and delivery in terms of cultural safety strategies.

The evaluation process includes firstly agreeing on measurable outcomes, secondly on evaluating programs and services against these outcomes, and finally revising cultural safety strategies. There are several processes that can be used for evaluation but a model that may better suit Indigenous Australian communities might need to have less structure and allow for the measuring of success to occur in a specific cultural context.

Consultation is vital in each step of any evaluation. If revisions of culturally safe strategies are required, these revisions are more likely to be implemented and successfully adopted when the community has had control throughout the process.

4A Agree on outcomes against which cultural safety strategies can be measured

Through consultation with the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community, a service provider can identify what the community needs to establish a culturally safe practice and develop clear, measurable indicators for evaluating the effectiveness of culturally safe strategies.

The community can identify and make decisions on the culturally safe practices suitable for their health service. To open discussions on the evaluation of a service or program, a number of agreed outcomes need to be developed so the success of cultural strategies can be measured. The following questions may be useful in these discussions.

Examples of outcomes that can be measured
▶ Has the service been welcoming and friendly?
▶ Is my family welcome here?
▶ Is there always a safe place available to talk?
▶ Are there Indigenous Australian workers in this workplace?
▶ Does it value Indigenous Australian cultural values such as artwork or flags?
▶ Does the service have information on Indigenous Australian events happening in the community?

Measures of success

Measuring success is an objective process in which strategies are identified and a program or service is examined to see whether the strategies have been successfully implemented and are operating as they should. Actions can then be taken to implement changes to improve the service or program.

Cultural safety strategies are more subjective and specific to the community in which they apply. Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people may have general cultural sensitivities you need to be aware of, but keep in mind that these may not apply to all groups. Measuring the success of cultural safety will vary in different communities.

Community leaders will need to provide insights into which culturally safe practices should be in operation, and how the success of these practices will be measured based on cultural context.

The measure of success needs to be based on collaboration with the community and should be specifically developed and agreed to by that community. The measures of success and agreed outcomes can only be identified after this has occurred.

Example

Example: measure success against agreed outcomes

To evaluate the measure success of the cultural safety strategies implemented by a program or service, it may be helpful to ask the following questions as a way of working towards agreed outcomes with the community members involved.

Ask yourself these questions to assess the extent to which you believe cultural safety has been integrated. Does the service have:

▶ a willingness to explore and recognise Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander values, expectations, beliefs, attitudes, and ways of communicating and dealing with conflict?

▶ an understanding of how Indigenous Australian cultural practices and history shape many of their interactions with non-Indigenous Australians?

▶ a process to regularly reflect on cultural safety practices?

Practice task 13

Measuring the success of a culturally safe strategy used in a service or program is subjective and variable.

1. Explain why the measure of success is variable and subjective.

2. Write an example where a measure of success for cultural safety may differ between two communities.

Click to complete Practice task 13

4B Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in evaluations

When evaluating cultural safety strategies, it is important to involve as many of the Elders of the local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community as well as community leaders and local family group representatives. The decisions about how the evaluation process will occur and who will be involved need to be made during the initial planning process. Mediators or support workers could be involved to offer their understanding of the workings of the community.

Photo © Ludo Kuipers, OzOutback.com.au

Involving all key stakeholders and community leaders in the collaborative process will mean that a broad number of responses, experiences and viewpoints are collected. Actively involving local Indigenous Australian people from the early stages will mean that measures of success will reflect the cultural values of the community.

Seek feedback

Seeking and recording feedback needs to occur throughout the consultation process. Events and points of view need to be recorded and appropriately filed. The feedback received can be used to draw conclusions that may identify actions or changes that need to be implemented in the delivery of the service or program. Having accurate documentation means that there is a record of evidence and examples to back up the need for a change.

The records of the feedback you receive needs to include accurate details of comments and discussions, as well as notes on which community members made which comments. Seeking feedback requires careful listening and mediating skills; be mindful of allowing enough time for answers while also thinking about keeping the discussion on track.

Feedback is more likely to be authentic and meaningful if you develop a relationship of respect and partnership with the all people involved in the discussion. This will also mean the results will be more likely to be in context for the community and will benefit the services being evaluated.

Example

Example: cooperative evaluations

Julia is employed as an Aboriginal support worker has been asked to begin planning for an evaluation on the delivery of a specific health program run by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service. The evaluation aims to see if the program's culturally safe strategies are adequate and meet the needs of the local community. Julia is making a list of the key decision-makers and representatives of the community who will need to have their viewpoints recorded. Julia is identifying the best location for the meetings and debating the most appropriate methods for recording the conversations. The records Julia gathers will need to be used later for summarising and making conclusions about the service. These will eventually become recommendations for improvements.

Practice task 14

You have been given the task of beginning the planning process for an evaluation of a recreation and leisure centre in a local community.

List some of the things that need to be done and considered in the initial stages of preparation. Think about collaboration during the evaluation and the importance of accurate recording of the conversations and feedback.

Click to complete Practice task 14

4C Evaluate programs and services against desired outcomes

Once the desired outcomes have been identified and agreed upon, then the evaluation of the findings and recommendations can be put together. The set of agreed outcomes will be used to determine if the service or program being evaluated has met the needs of the community. They will be used as a reference point to look into the level of cultural safety offered.

The leaders and representatives who will be involved in the feedback will be selected based on the scope and aims of the evaluation. If possible, it is a good idea to incorporate a wide variety of people including individuals with support needs, staff, volunteers and casual workers.

Information needs to be collected in a format that is easy to collate and must clearly show the findings. Data must be easily summarised and condensed into a format that is easy to read and share.

Analyse feedback

To analyse feedback gathered about a program or service, the information will need to be collected and collated. Data collecting can occur by face-to-face questioning, or by preparing a written or online evaluation form. This type of data is called quantitative data, because the results it provides are expressed as numbers. For example, if you ask health workers how many times they provide a particular service to an individual in a week, the results would be a quantity represented by numbers. Other examples of ways to collect quantitative data include interviewing with closed questions (questions requiring yes/no answers) and observation.

Another form of data you can collect is called qualitative data. This is typically more descriptive and is more difficult to analyse. Qualitative data is useful for case studies where you want to find out something in detail about someone or a small group; for example, how a certain action or event made them feel. Generally, this form of data collection involves smaller numbers of participants and is best gathered through interviewing. For determining cultural safety, qualitative data might be useful when collecting feedback that is subjective and for responses about levels of comfort or feeling welcomed.

Example

Example: evaluate services against outcomes

Clive is a health worker who recently completed his evaluation and now needs to present his findings to his coordinator. His coordinator is looking forward to hearing about the strategies that can be implemented that will improve the cultural safety of the residential home. Clive has used a quantitative method for collecting information from the staff, people with support needs and the local community. Clive will present h is results in a table format to show the numbers of people he interviewed and examples of their responses to the questions he asked them. Clive will summarise the data and show how the home's cultural safety strategies already in place compare with the strategies that the community would like to see in place.

Practice task 15

1. Explain the uses of quantitative data and give examples of this form of data collection.

2. What are the benefits of using qualitative data for gathering information about a person's feelings; for example, their experience of the level of cultural safety provided?

Click to complete Practice task 15

4D Revise strategies based on evaluation

Revision is the final stage of the evaluation process. When the evaluation of cultural safety strategies has been concluded, there are likely to be areas that have been identified as needing revision. In some cases new strategies may be required to be introduced.

To ensure changes are implemented in the most meaningful way and that they suit the specific needs of the community to which they apply, key decision-makers should be engaged for their help and advice. Consultation and involvement with local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people is vital in determining areas for improvement and developing strategies to implement change. When modifying delivery strategies to accommodate the changes recommended by an evaluation, you should involve participation from the community so they have some control over how the changes will occur.

Make suggestions for improvement

The improvements made to enhance the cultural safety of a program or service delivery can vary from very small changes to large organisational change. These changes will be implemented at different speeds according to the scope of the changes and the resources required to implement them. Housing, buildings, transport, money for purchases, skill development of staff and additional staffing may have to be budgeted for and may not immediately appear. Resources will have to be redirected to accommodate changes.

It is important to develop a plan that outlines how the service can work towards putting into place suggestions and improvements. Improvements in making a service more culturally safe and welcoming to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people will be valued and seen as something worth working towards. Feedback from the local Indigenous Australian leaders and key stakeholders should continue as a sign of respect; an open dialogue demonstrates that the improvements in cultural safety are an ongoing priority.

Example: revise strategies based on evaluations

Example

A list of improvements is presented to the coordinators of a disability centre that works within an Indigenous Australian community. The suggestions are based on an evaluation and feedback from the Elders of the community and several recommendations refer to improving the cultural safety of the service. One item involves improving the atmosphere of the entrance foyer of the building to make it more welcoming to Indigenous Australian people. Another idea presented by the Elders is to provide space for extended family to stay overnight after travelling to visit kin. The coordinators put together a plan on how to change the purpose of some rooms to accommodate the suggestion. The coordinators ask the local community Elders to arrange for some local artists to paint the foyer walls.

Practice task 16

Read the case study and answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Glen often attends a health centre in his neighbourhood because he enjoys the exercise classes they offer. On a recent visit, he was told that he might notice some changes at the centre over the following weeks. The changes are a result of feedback gathered from an interview Glen participated in several weeks earlier, and from suggestions made by the leaders of the local Aboriginal Australian community. Glen notices over the following weeks that there are some new Aboriginal Australian staff members employed at the centre, and the Aboriginal flag and other cultural symbols appear in the hall. Glen feels that this makes the exercise classes more welcoming to the people in his community.

1. What evidence is there from the case study that the changes were aimed at improving cultural safety and increasing participation by the local Aboriginal Australian people?

2. What resources might have been redirected and used to implement the revised strategies and suggested improvements?

Click to complete Practice task 16

Summary

1. Consultation will enable agreed outcomes to be developed and can then be used to measure success.

2. Measures of success need to be developed by the community for which they are to be used.

3. Cultural safety will differ between communities.

4. Involve Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people in the collaboration process to enhance its meaningfulness to the local community.

5. Keep accurate documentation and records of the feedback. When interviewing, listen closely and allow time for responses.

6. Analyse feedback carefully and present recommendations in a clear way.

7. Collect quantitative and/or qualitative data for feedback information.

8. Consultation should be employed when revising and implementing any new strategies.

9. Improvements to cultural safety can be small or large, but either way will require a redirection of resources for implementation.

Learning checkpoint 4
Evaluate cultural safety strategies

This learning checkpoint allows you to review your skills and knowledge in evaluating cultural safety strategies.

Read the case study, then answer the questions that follow.

Case study

Dylan is an Elder who is assisting in the evaluation of a community centre. Several health, education and leisure activities operate from the centre and the majority of the people who use the services are from Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities and travel various distances every week to participate.

Dylan has asked interview questions and has been involved in small group discussions to help identify how best to improve the cultural safety of the centre. Dylan is one of several Elders who are involved and over many weeks have developed a set of measures that can be used to examine the cultural safety of the centre.

When a list of suggested improvements is finally developed, Dylan believes the suggestions are a good representation of the feedback from him and others. The recommendations should improve and encourage further participation of the Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander communities in the activities run at the centre.

1. Why is it important to have Dylan and the other Elders agree on outcomes for measures of success before an evaluation begins?

2. What type of data collection was used in this evaluation?

3. What is the value of revising cultural strategies based on evaluation?