



**Adelaide Hills**

Division of General Practice Inc.

**SA Inner Country Health Network**

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# Communicating Confidently

*A guide to appropriate Aboriginal terminology*

## Acknowledgments

This guide has been adapted from the NSW Department of Health 2004 –

“Communicating positively - A guide to appropriate Aboriginal terminology.”

In adapting this guide, The South Australian Inner Country Health Network has worked closely with the Aboriginal Liaison Officer at the Adelaide Hills Community Health Service. This document has been approved by the Aboriginal Services Manager for the Murray Mallee, Hills, Southern, Fleurieu and Kangaroo Island Clusters.

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## **Purpose**

The purpose of this guide is to provide The Adelaide Hills Cluster Health Staff with background information and guidance on appropriate word usage when working with Aboriginal people and communities and when developing policy and programs to improve health outcomes for Aboriginal people. The use of accurate and non-offensive language is an essential component of Aboriginal cultural respect and communication training.

## **Scope**

This guide relates to Aboriginal people in SA and gives the recommended word usage for SA Health employees. The authors of this guide have aimed to use current names and terminology selected by Aboriginal people themselves. Usage of some terminology may vary with location. If you are unsure about using a particular term, ask the local Aboriginal community/ies or Aboriginal Health Advisory Council to identify their preferred terms.

## **Structure**

An overview section outlining key aspects of Aboriginal history is provided on pages 6-7. The Terminology Guide starts on page 9 and lists a number of commonly used terms under four major categories:

- • Collective names used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- • Terms associated with Aboriginal communities and community organisations
- • Other terms
- • Terms not to be used.

A description of each term, as well as its recommended usage and issues for consideration, is provided in the remaining part of the document.

Additional reading and useful websites are listed at the end of the document.



## Introduction:

### **The importance of non-discriminatory and accurate language:**

Following European colonisation, Aboriginal people were forbidden from speaking traditional languages and Aboriginal languages suffered enormous erosion as a result.

English was used to describe and communicate with Aboriginal people and led to the use of inappropriate and often discriminatory language.

Generally, language can be seen as a direct reflection of the particular culture and beliefs that have given rise to it. For example, the English language is not capable of embodying the cultural imperatives, values and contexts associated with Aboriginal languages.

Because the European colonists did not understand and were generally prejudiced against Aboriginal ways of life, the language they used to address and describe Aboriginal people was often discriminatory and offensive.

Today, just as attitudes towards Aboriginal culture are changing, terms to describe Aboriginal people are continually evolving. Understanding the distinctions between the words, and to whom they apply, can be a challenge for Health staff. However, using appropriate and accurate language is fundamental in ensuring the use of non-discriminatory language and developing positive relationships between Government & Non-Government staff and Aboriginal communities.

For ease of use, the terms in this guide are organised in to four major categories.

- 1. Collective names used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**
- 2. Terms associated with Aboriginal Communities and community organisations**
- 3. Other terms**
- 4. Terms not to be used.**



## Overview

This guide explores the correct terminology to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as terms associated with Aboriginal communities and community organisations. This overview will be helpful in gaining a better understanding of the historical, political and cultural context around this terminology.

Australia has traditionally been inhabited by two indigenous peoples that are ethnically and culturally very different – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Aboriginal people comprise diverse Aboriginal nations, each with their own language and traditions, and have historically lived on mainland Australia, Tasmania and many of the continent's offshore islands. Torres Strait Islander people come from the islands of the Torres Strait, between the tip of Cape York in Queensland and Papua New Guinea.<sup>5</sup>

In Aboriginal culture, the land was created by the journeys of the 'Spirit Ancestors' during a period known as the 'Dreaming' or 'Dreamtime'. In song, story, poetry, art, drama and dance, the Dreamtime tells how the Spirit Ancestors (each symbolised by an animal which is the totem of the clan) gave life to the land and laid down the Law – the structure of society, rituals to maintain the life of the land and rules for human behaviour. The Dreamtime explains the origin of the universe, the workings of nature and of humanity, and the cycle of life and death. It shapes and structures Aboriginal life and the relations between the sexes, and prescribes a network of obligations to people, land and spirits.<sup>6</sup>

It is important to understand that according to the Dreaming, Aboriginal people did not own the land in the European sense, but rather, belonged to the land.

The rule of the Law, as passed on by the Dreaming, was absolute throughout all aspects of Aboriginal life and was guarded by the Elders, select male and female people who possessed great knowledge of the Law. These Elders made important decisions, gave inspiration and advice, arranged marriages, organised learning, initiations and ceremonies, arbitrated and settled disputes, and fixed punishments if laws were broken.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup>



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Version 1.0

Version 1.1

The Europeans did not understand Aboriginal culture, and the close connection between Aboriginal people and the land was not recognised under British law. Because Aboriginal land was deemed unoccupied it was declared *'terra nullius'* – land belonging to no one – and was taken away without negotiations or treaties.<sup>8</sup> The remnants of Aboriginal clans were forced to relocate, sometimes hundreds of kilometres away from traditional lands, onto reserves or missions where they were forbidden to speak traditional languages or practice cultural traditions. Life on the missions was harsh and there was little respect for human rights. Aboriginal people were treated as incapable of managing their own lives and were subject to arbitrary rule by mission managers and police.<sup>9</sup>

The Government's policy of 'protection' towards Aboriginal people began in the 1880s and led to the creation of 'protection boards' in all Australian states. In 1883, NSW set up the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (later renamed Aborigines Welfare Board). This board was established based on the belief that nothing could protect Aboriginal people but *'some controlling power which can not only offer them what is for their good but also constrain them to the acceptance of it'*.<sup>10</sup>

In practice, the policy of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board was that all Aboriginal people should live on reserves. The protection board could limit Aboriginal people's movements; dictate where Aboriginal people could live, who they could associate with and how and when they would be paid wages for work performed. The NSW Aborigines Welfare Board was not abolished until 1969.<sup>11</sup>

Under the Government's protection and assimilation policies, protection boards throughout Australia oversaw the removal of thousands of Aboriginal children (known as the 'Stolen Generations') from their parents. Often, these children would be sent to 'training homes' where they were trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, or fostered out to non-Aboriginal families away from their community of origin. The personal and communal desolation resulting from the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was recognised at the 1996 hearings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which gave rise to the *Bringing Them Home Report* in May 1997.<sup>12</sup>

By 1969 all states have repealed the legislation allowing for the removal of Aboriginal children under the policy of 'protection'. In the following years, Aboriginal and Islander Child Care Agencies (AICCAs) are set up to contest removal applications and provide alternatives to the removal of Indigenous children from their families.



The Government's policies of protection and assimilation were not officially abandoned until 1972 when, as a direct result of growing Aboriginal activism, it was officially replaced with a policy of self-determination – defined as 'Aboriginal communities deciding the pace and nature of their future development as significant components within a diverse Australia'.<sup>13</sup> Despite the enormous impacts of European colonisation on Aboriginal ways of life, Aboriginal people have survived and Aboriginal culture is alive and strong. It is estimated that there were 25,557 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people residing in SA as of August 8 2006.(ABS Census 2006)<sup>14</sup> Aboriginal people have fought long and hard for their rights and several important landmarks have marked modern Aboriginal history. For example, in 1983, the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW) was passed in NSW, promoting Aboriginal land rights on the basis of needs and compensation as well as prior ownership and tradition. In 1992, in the historic Mabo judgement, the High Court of Australia reversed the concept of '*terra nullius*' by holding that a '*native title*' to land had survived the colonisation of Australia, thus enshrining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land rights in Australia's common law.

Despite these advances, social indicators for Aboriginal people, including health indicators, remain the lowest of all Australian groups. Understanding the impacts of past injustices and striving to eliminate discriminatory practices are important factors in improving social outcomes for Aboriginal Australians.<sup>8</sup>



## **The Peramangk People**

The Peramangk people lived on the eastern side of the escarpment of the Adelaide Hills in the districts surrounding Mount Barker. Records indicate that approximately 600 Peramangk were living around Mt Barker and at least 1,200 across its Nation and Clan areas at the time of European colonisation. There are still many descendants living today in South Australia. The whole language of these people has not survived, but there are still many words, names of places and names of the Clans that make up the Peramangk nation.

The Peramangk people share close relationships, culture and some language with the Nations of the Kurna to the west, Ngadjuri to the north, Ngarrindjeri to the south & Meru to the east. The Peramangk lived in the strip of country running north from Mount Barker through Harrogate, Gumeracha, Mt Pleasant, and Springton to the Angaston district and south to Strathalbyn. There are also sites along the River Murray where Peramangk people had access to the River. Peramangk place names can still be found at these places. Peramangk people had relations along the River Murray, and areas north of Manunka and around it, to Swan Reach.

Until settlement the Peramangk always maintained a good supply of water and plentiful amount of food, they rarely needed to move down onto the plains. There was trading between the Peramangk and the Aboriginal people in adjoining Nations, with them supplying: ochre, flint, quartz, supple whip-stick mallee spears, possum skins and other items not found on the plains and lower lakes. Within the community, the men would hunt for animal food while the women gathered vegetables, cared for the children and maintained the campsite. They would remain at a campsite for several days before moving, this prevented over use of the area and its food supply/resources thus ensuring the environment stayed the same for future generations over thousands of years.

The Peramangk would return to the sites used in previous years depending on the seasons and the condition of the environment. The diet also varied according to the season with vegetables, seeds, honey, eggs, grubs, insects, lizards, snakes, fish, yabbies, possums, and larger game with kangaroos, wallabies and emus all included, but depended on traditional laws of season and permissions of access. Peramangk people wore very little clothing, especially in summer, but the women were more likely to wear a cloak of possum fur or kangaroo skin.



Place names within the landscape mark a clear boundary of Peramangk territory and their many Clans, even though they also shared many trade items and dreaming across common ground, water, Sky and the Stars. Art sites along the eastern escarpment and the boundaries defined in the Tjilbruke and Ngarrindjeri song-lines that are also part of the Kurna dreaming.

The ancient beings that carved out this land and the dreaming stories of these beings is still a living presence and known by many of our Meruwatta- (Country men), Nepo-anna (neighbours) and adjoining Nations - This will never change.....even when the surface of the earth we all stand on does.

*Summary by: The Peramangk Story by Ivan-Tiwu Copley - 2010*



## Collective names used to describe Aboriginal people

### Aboriginal /Aborigine

#### **Description**

An 'Aboriginal person' or an 'Aborigine' is a person who:

- is a member of the Aboriginal race of Australia
- identifies as an Aboriginal person
- is accepted by the Aboriginal community as an Aboriginal person.<sup>15</sup>

#### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Although it is grammatically correct, beware when using the term 'Aborigine(s)' as it has negative connotations with many Aboriginal people. The use of 'Aboriginal person' or 'Aboriginal people' can be used as an alternative.

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

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

Do not use 'Aboriginal' as a noun – it should only be used as an adjective.

- ✗ The Government's new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginals.
- ✓ The Government's new strategy will support increased business with Aboriginal people.

***Never abbreviate the term 'Aboriginal' as this is offensive.***



Remember: when preparing speech notes that refer to 'our history', ensure that the use of the word 'Australian(s)' includes Aboriginal people/s. Consider the opening statement:

- ✗ 'Most Australians continue to see Aboriginal people...'  
This infers that Aboriginal people are not Australian, which is incorrect.  
The correct terminology is:
- ✓ 'Most non-Aboriginal Australians continue to see Aboriginal people...'

## Aboriginal people (s)

### **Description**

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

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

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

- ✓ 'At the time of European invasion, there were approximately 600 Aboriginal peoples'.  
Note that in this instance 'peoples' is used to describe the groups of Aboriginal people, each with their own language, cultural practices and beliefs.
- ✓ 'At the time of European invasion, there were between 300,000 and 1 million<sup>16</sup> Aboriginal people living in Australia.' Note that in this instance 'people' refers to more than one person.

If you wish to emphasise the fact that Aboriginal people are Australians, consider the use of 'Aboriginal Australian(s)' instead of 'Aboriginal people'.

**Never abbreviate the term 'Aboriginal' as this is offensive.**



## First people /first Australians

### **Description**

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

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

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

## Indigenous people (s)

### **Description**

The Macquarie Dictionary defines 'indigenous' as 'originating in and characterising a particular region or country'. Based on this definition, an indigenous person is a person originating or characterising a particular region or country.

The term can be problematic when applied to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

One area of concern is whether to capitalise the 'I' or use a lowercase 'i'.

Practice varies. For example, whilst United Nations documents tend not to capitalise 'indigenous' as they collectively refer to people originating from more than one region or country, Commonwealth documents generally capitalise 'Indigenous' as they refer specifically to Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The preferred option is to capitalise 'Indigenous' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Because 'Indigenous' is not specific, some Aboriginal people feel that the term diminishes their Aboriginality and must be avoided.

State Departments, Including Country Health SA recommends using the terms 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' in preference to 'Indigenous'. If in doubt and before using the term 'Indigenous' ALWAYS consult with the local Aboriginal community.

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

- ✓ The Australian Government's new strategy will support increased business with Indigenous people.



Note that the lower case 'i' for 'indigenous' is only used when referring to people originating in more than one region or country such as the Pacific region, Asiatic region, Canada, or New Zealand.

- ✓ Australia will be hosting the inter-country tennis competition where indigenous peoples from Canada, New Zealand and the Asiatic region will be competing for the right to challenge last year's winners. If using the term 'Indigenous people', define what you mean by 'Indigenous' – that is, if you are referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, say so.

## Torres Strait Islander /person

### ***Description***

A Torres Strait Islander or a Torres Strait Islander person is a person/descendant from the Torres Strait Islands which are located to the north of mainland Australia.

Note that although not originally from NSW, there are Torres Strait Islander people living in the state.

### ***Recommended usage***

Always capitalise 'Torres Strait Islander'.

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



## Goori /Koori /Murri /Nunga and other such terms

### **Description**

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

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

- Goori** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in northern NSW coastal regions
- Koori** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in parts of NSW and Victoria
- Murri** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in north-west NSW and Queensland
- Nunga** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in South Australia
- Yolngu** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in Northern Territory (north- east Arnhem Land)
- Anangu** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in Central Australia
- Noongar** – is usually used by Aboriginal people in south-west Western Australia

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Always check with the local Aboriginal community about using this type of terminology. There are many Aboriginal language groups within the above-mentioned areas and the use of such terms can be restrictive.

In South Australia the term “Nunga” is used freely in coastal areas between Kingston SE through to Pt Pirie in the west but as you move further west and north local terminology takes over. For example the word nunga in the language of the Adnyamathanha people of the Flinders Ranges simply means hello.



## Terms associated with Aboriginal communities and community organisations

### Clan

#### **Description**

The 'clan' is a local descent group, larger than a family but based on family links through a common ancestry.<sup>17</sup> A 'clan' is a subset of a nation.

For example, the Ngarrindjeri nation which spans from just west of Murray Bridge through to Kingston in the South East has several clans within it.

#### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Be aware that the term 'clan' has a specific meaning which is derived from non-Aboriginal societies, and therefore may not necessarily be applicable to Aboriginal culture. Some Aboriginal people use the term and such usage should be respected. If unsure, ask the local community for guidance.

### Community

#### **Description**

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

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

Note that an Aboriginal person may belong to more than one community – for example, where they come from, where their family is and where they live or work. The important thing to remember is that in Aboriginal culture a community is first and foremost about country, (extended) family ties and shared experience. Community is about interrelatedness and belonging and is central to Aboriginality.<sup>18</sup>



### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

It is generally acceptable to use the term 'community' to refer to Aboriginal people living within a particular geographical location. However, keep in mind the diversity of Aboriginal people within that 'community'. If you wish to emphasise the diversity of communities within the one geographical location, use 'communities' in the plural form. For example:

- ✓ The Riverland has two distinct Aboriginal communities – the local community which lives some 20 kilometres from Berri in a settlement known as the Gerard Aboriginal Community, and the local population living in and around the Riverland itself.

### **Country**

#### ***Description***

'Country' is a term used to describe a culturally defined area of land associated with a particular, culturally distinct group of people or nation. For example:

- ✓ Mt Barker is in Peramangk country.

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

Use 'country' to refer to a particular, culturally defined area of land, such as 'Peramangk country' or 'Kuarna country'. (Adelaide Plains)

### **Elder**

#### ***Description***

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

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

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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

When negotiating with Aboriginal communities, ensure that recognised Elders are involved. This may occur indirectly – for example, a recognised Aboriginal community controlled peak body such as the Aboriginal Health Council, or the local Aboriginal Health Advisory Council (AHAC), may be willing to negotiate with Elders on your behalf.



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

## Mob

### ***Description***

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

### ***Recommended usage/***

## Nation

### ***Description***

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

The SA Aboriginal map over page sets out the location of Aboriginal nations within SA.

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

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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

For example:

- ✓ The Peramangk nation is located around the Adelaide Hills area.

Be aware that the boundaries of some Aboriginal nations (e.g. Adnyamathanha.) cross over state boundaries. This has important implications for service delivery and provision, as well as negotiation processes.

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Map of Aboriginal Territories South Australia



## Traditional owner

### ***Description***

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

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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

In 1981 the Pitjantjatjara people of South Australia are granted land under the **Pitjantjatjara Land Rights Act (SA)**. A large area of the state is returned to the Anangu Pitjantjatjara. Anangu Pitjantjatjara, a corporate body, is established to administer some 100,000km of land for the Anangu people

## Tribe

### ***Description***

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

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

Be aware that 'tribe' has a specific meaning derived from non-Aboriginal societies, and therefore may not necessarily be applicable to Aboriginal culture. Some Aboriginal people use the term and such usage should be respected. If unsure ask the local community for guidance.



## Assimilation policy

### **Description**

In 1937 the Commonwealth Government convened a conference with the states where it was officially agreed that the aim for those Aboriginal people not of 'full-blood' should be their ultimate absorption into the wider population. This policy, referred to as 'assimilation', was designed to solve the 'Aboriginal problem' by ensuring that Aboriginal people would lose their identity and culture within the wider community.

Under the Government's assimilation policy, thousands of Aboriginal children were removed from their parents. Often, these children would be sent to 'training homes' where they were trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, or fostered out to non-Aboriginal families away from their community of origin. The personal and communal desolation resulting from the removal of Aboriginal children from their families was recognised at the 1996 hearings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which gave rise to the Bringing Them Home Report in May 1997.<sup>21</sup> The Government's policy of assimilation was not officially abandoned until 1972 when, as a direct result of growing Aboriginal activism, it was officially replaced with a policy of self-determination – defined as 'Aboriginal communities deciding the pace and nature of their future development as significant components within a diverse Australia'.<sup>22</sup>

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Be aware of the history of abuse of Aboriginal people's human rights by Government authorities. This history has given rise to ongoing mistrust of Government by Aboriginal people.



## Culture

### **Description**

'Culture' consists of 'accepted and traditionally patterned ways of behaving'. It is a 'common understanding shared by the members of a group or community. It includes land, beliefs and spirituality, language, ways of living and working, artistic expression, relationships and identity'<sup>23</sup>.

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

Be aware that traditionally, and until today Aboriginal cultures were/are many and varied (ie there is no one homogeneous Aboriginal culture). Be aware that like all cultures, Aboriginal cultures have evolved over time, and that modern Aboriginal cultures are therefore different from traditional Aboriginal cultures. When working in partnership with Aboriginal communities, it is important that there be an awareness and understanding of the local Aboriginal culture. Ways to do this include inviting members of the Aboriginal community to participate in activities organised by health service providers. Such activities may include launches, conferences, publication designs and major events such as 'Journey of Healing Day' (May 26 each year) and 'NAIDOC Week' (held annually, generally in the second week of July).

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## Invasion / colonisation / settlement

### **Description**

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

The colonisers claimed the land for their own purposes with no thought to the impact this would have on Aboriginal people and culture. This is referred to as the European invasion. Following the invasion, settlement spread piecemeal across the country. This was accompanied by a drastic decline in the Aboriginal population as the invasion brought with it the introduction of diseases to which Aboriginal people had no immunity.

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

### **Recommended usage/ issues for consideration**

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

## Land rights

### **Description**

To Aboriginal communities, land is not only about hunting and gathering, it is also the basis of spiritual life. The aim of the land rights movement is to counteract the land dispossession of Aboriginal people that occurred with European invasion. The Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act 1981 of South Australia enabled land to be transferred to the Pitjantjatjara people, who had maintained a continuous connection with their land. However, the act provided no basis for claims by other groups.

### **Recommended usage/issues for consideration**

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

Be aware of the difference between lands claimable under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW) and that claimable under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth).

Be aware that the operation of the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW) has created a range of concerns within some Aboriginal communities.



## Mission / reserve

### **Description**

Missions were first set up in the 19th century by Christian missionaries, ostensibly to attend to what missionaries considered being the spiritual and material welfare needs of Aboriginal people. In reality, these missions were largely about 'Christianising' Aboriginal people and teaching them what was considered 'habits of order, industry and subordination'. Life on these missions is described by Richard Broome in Aboriginal Australia<sup>24</sup> as:

*"All the work was done by Aboriginals. They were told: 'do not go around naked, do not be dirty, do not work on Sunday, and do not drink, smoke or be promiscuous. Corroborees were usually forbidden. Children had to wear uniforms and work, play, learn and pray according to clockwork schedules'."*

Examples of these early 19th century missions in NSW were Cumeragunja, Warangesda and Brewarrina. In the late 1880s, these and other places where Aboriginal people had settled were taken over by the colonial government and run as stations or reserves. By 1900, there were 133 reserves.<sup>25</sup> Life on these missions or reserves was incredibly harsh, with poor living conditions, no access to education and little respect for the human rights, cultural needs and practices of Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal people were forced to leave their traditional lands or country to live on reserves, which was extremely restrictive to their traditional way of life as hunters and gatherers. Relocation of Aboriginal people to lands away from their traditional area also resulted in the destruction of families, culture and Aboriginal cultural lore, and sometimes led to animosity between the various traditional groups struggling to survive.

Reserve or mission managers controlled and regimented every aspect of Aboriginal peoples' lives. They had the right to search Aboriginal people, their dwellings and belongings at any time, confiscate their property, read their mail and order medical inspections. They could also order children to sleep in dormitories, expel Aboriginal people to other reserves and break-up families.<sup>26</sup> Life on the missions had disastrous effects on the health of Aboriginal people as they were forced to give up traditional foods for a diet made up almost exclusively of flour and sugar. Sitting around was less healthy than hunting and food gathering, and living in one place caused significant hygiene problems.<sup>27</sup>

Most importantly, Aboriginal people were prohibited from sharing, learning and enjoying traditional culture, language and family associations. They were also forbidden from speaking traditional languages and practicing their culture in the form of ceremonies, rites of passage and corroborees. Breaking these rules attracted serious penalties, including the expulsion of individuals from the mission or reserve.

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



### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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

Be aware that the forced removal of Aboriginal people and placement on missions caused many conflicts. Often members of Aboriginal tribes / clans /nations were placed with Aboriginal people from other tribes / clans /nations who were traditional enemies.

These issues need to be considered when working in partnership with Aboriginal people and communities.

Be aware of the negative connotations associated with the expression ‘mission manager’.

Today, this term is sometimes used to refer to someone who is acting in a controlling, disempowering and/or degrading way towards Aboriginal people.

### **Native title**

#### ***Description***

The legal recognition in 1993 of the existence of native title in Australia reversed the concept of ‘terra nullius’, which held that land belonged to no one at the time of European invasion. Native title is the official recognition under federal Australian law of the traditional rights and interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in relation to land and water.

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

When using the term ‘native title’, be aware of the difference between lands claimable under the *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983* (NSW) and that claimable under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth).

Be aware that the operation of the *Native Title Act 1993* (Commonwealth) has created a range of concerns within some Aboriginal communities.

### **Pre / post contact**

#### ***Description***

‘Pre and post contact’ refers to the period before and after European invasion.

#### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

‘Pre and post contact’ is the preferred terminology to refer to the period before and after European invasion. Note that using the terminology ‘pre-history/post-history’ is not acceptable as it infers that history in Australia did not begin until the landing of the First Fleet and subsequent European invasion, and that Aboriginal culture has no history. In fact Aboriginal culture is the oldest surviving culture in the world.



## Protection policy

### ***Description***

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

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

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

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

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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



## Self-determination

### ***Description***

Following the federal election in 1972, the assimilation policy that had dominated Aboriginal affairs for 20 years was replaced by a policy of self-determination. Self-determination is about Aboriginal people being empowered to decide the pace and nature of their own future. This policy is based on the recognition that Aboriginal people should be actively involved in all decision-making that affects their lives.

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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

## Stolen Generations

### ***Description***

Under the Government's protection and assimilation policies, protection boards throughout Australia oversaw the removal of thousands of Aboriginal children (known as the 'Stolen Generations') from their parents. Often, these children would be sent to 'training homes' where they were trained as domestic servants or farm labourers, or fostered out to non-Aboriginal families away from their community of origin. The personal and communal desolation resulting from the removal of

Aboriginal children from their families was recognised at the 1996 hearings of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, which gave rise to the *Bringing Them Home Report* in May 1997.<sup>28</sup>

The 'Stolen Generations' have had immense impacts on Aboriginal culture, community and relationships since 1883 to as late as 1972. These impacts are ongoing until today and range from psychological harm to loss of native title entitlements, increased risk of incarceration, poverty, poor health and early death.

### ***Recommended usage/ issues for consideration***

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



## Terms not to be used

**The following terminology is inappropriate or dated, and MUST BE AVOIDED AT ALL TIMES AS IT IS OFFENSIVE:**

- ● ATSI
- ● Mixed blood
- ● Quarter-caste
- ● Part-Aboriginal
- ● Them
- ● Those people
- ● You people
- 'Them' ✗ involving them in policy making decisions...
- ✓ involving members of the Aboriginal community in policy making decisions...
- 'those people' ✗ an invitation inviting those people to attend the meeting will be sent out on ...
- ✓ an invitation inviting members of the Aboriginal Community to attend the meeting will be sent out on...
- 'You people' ✗ if you people need...
- ✓ if the Aboriginal community needs...
- Clearly, the following terms are also offensive and should never be used:
  - ● coloured
  - ● nigger
  - ● gin
  - ● coon
  - ● savage
  - ● coconut
  - ● darky
  - ● Native
  - Half-caste
  - ● Full-blood
  - ● 25%, 50% Aboriginal
  - ● Them people
  - ● Those folk
  - ● primitive
  - ● lubra
  - ● abo
  - ● boong
  - ● jacki jacki
  - ● sooty
  - ● blacks



## Additional resources

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

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

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

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

### ***Useful websites***

[www.yarrahealing.melb.catholic.edu.au](http://www.yarrahealing.melb.catholic.edu.au)

<http://www.creativespirits.info/index.html>

[www.atsic.gov.au/News\\_Room/As a Matter of Fact /default.asp](http://www.atsic.gov.au/News_Room/As_a_Matter_of_Fact/default.asp)  
[www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au](http://www.unisanet.unisa.edu.au)

Guidelines for non-racist language use in Aboriginal and Australian Studies  
– Developed by David Hollinsworth

[www.npws.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal /index.html](http://www.npws.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal/index.html)

[www.faira.org.au](http://www.faira.org.au)

[www.aiatsis.gov.au](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au)

[www.dreamtime.net.au/Indigenous](http://www.dreamtime.net.au/Indigenous)

[www.daa.nsw.gov.au](http://www.daa.nsw.gov.au)

[www.library.trinity.wa.edu.au/aborigines /terms.htm](http://www.library.trinity.wa.edu.au/aborigines/terms.htm)

Written by SAICHN and Adelaide Hills Division of G.P. - June 2011.

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## References

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- 2 Horton D (1994). *Encyclopaedia of Aboriginal Australia*. Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Canberra
- 3 NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs, op.cit.
- 4 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (1999). *As a Matter of Fact – Aboriginal History is not Australian History*. Canberra: 1
- 5 Parbury N (1986). *Survival – A History of Aboriginal Life in New South Wales*. Ministry of Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales. Sydney
- 6 ibid: 17
- 7 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, op.cit: 9
- 8 ibid: 10
- 9 Miller J, quoted in Parbury, op.cit: 11
- 10 Parbury, op.cit: 87
- 11 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, op.cit: 11
- 12 ibid: 11
- 13 Australian Bureau of Statistics (2000). *Population Distribution – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian 2001*. ABS Catalogue Number 4705.0
- 14 *Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1983 (NSW)*: Section 4(1)
- 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, op.cit: 8
- 16 ibid: 42
- 17 NSW Office of the Board of Studies (1998). *New South Wales Aboriginal Languages Interim Framework K-10*. Board of Studies NSW: 10
- 18 Ibid: 122
- 19 Departments of Lands (1987). *Aboriginal New South Wales A Pictorial Study Guide*. Department of Lands Bathurst.
- 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, op.cit: 11
- 21 ibid: 11
- 22 NSW Office of the Board of Studies, op.cit: 30
- 23 Quoted in Parbury, op.cit: 51
- 24 Parbury, op.cit: 51
- 25 ibid: 87
- 26 ibid: 51
- 27 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission, op.cit :1 **SHPN** (AHB) 030102