



AUSTRALIAN COLLEGE OF  
**OPTOMETRY**

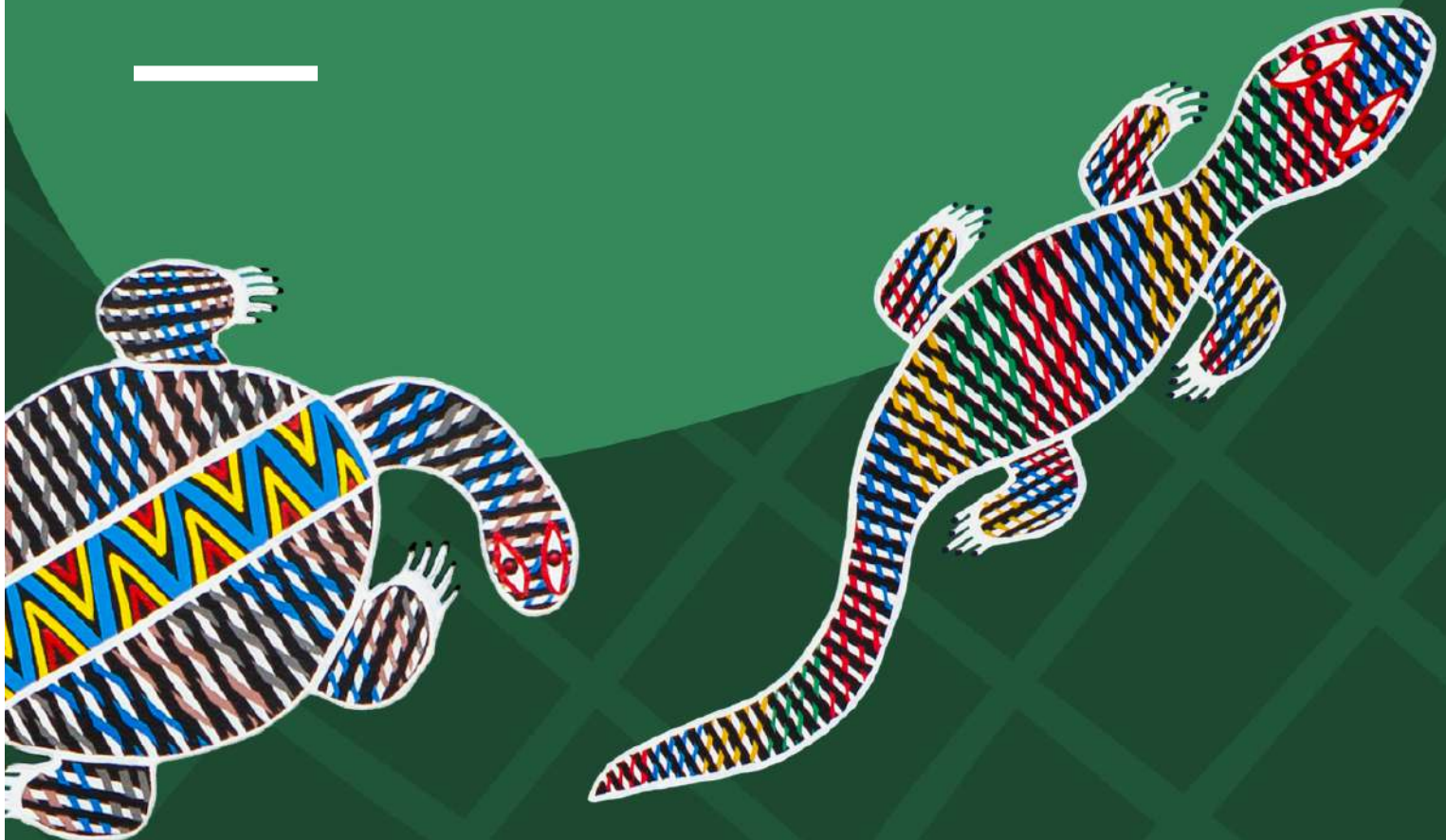
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NATIONAL VISION  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE  
OF AUSTRALIA  
AN ACO DIVISION

# Cultural Protocol Guide

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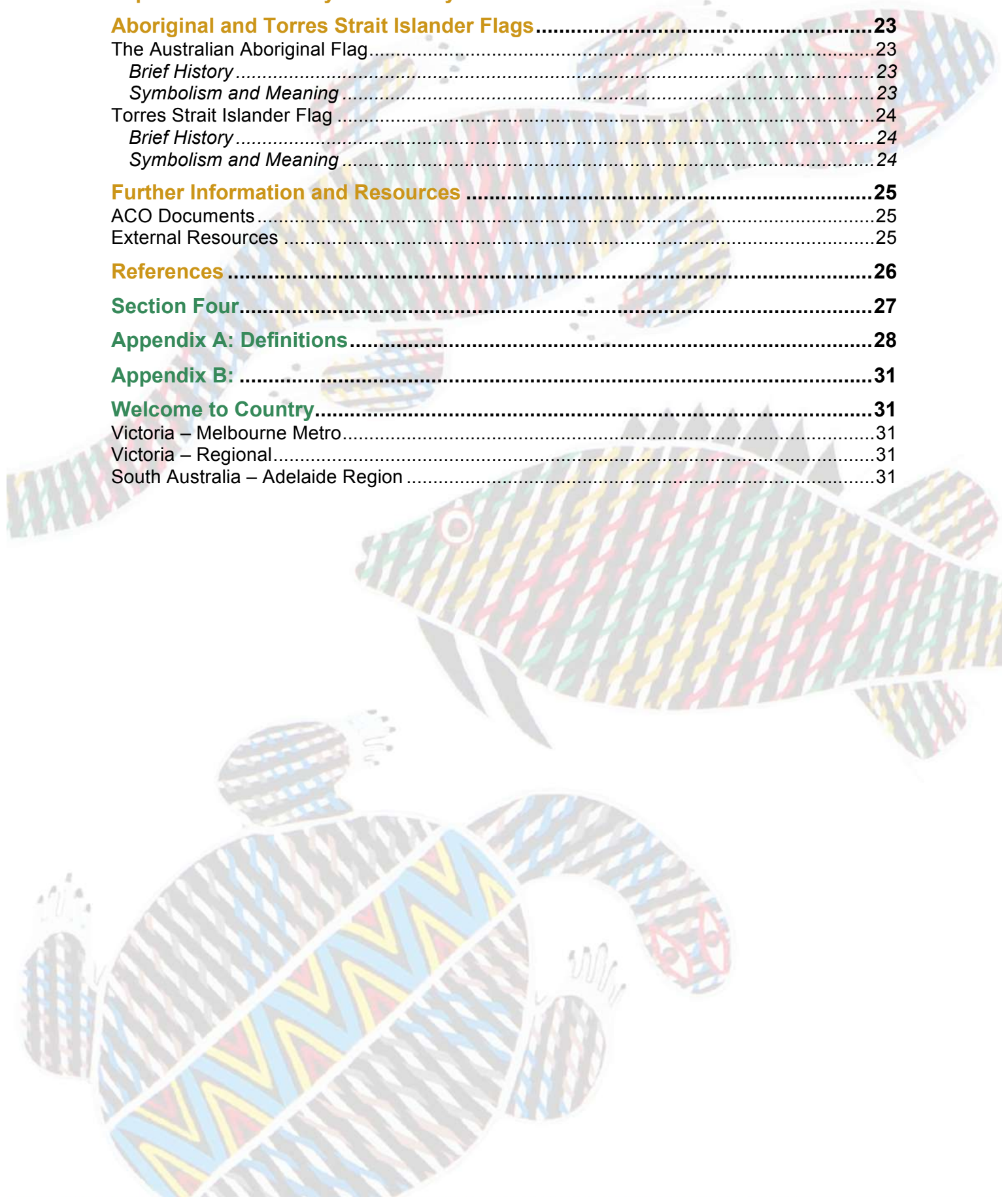
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# Acknowledgements

The protocols within this guide were developed as part of the Australian College of Optometry (ACO) Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This would not have been possible without the input and feedback from members of our Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party. The ACO would like to thank our RAP Advisors, Colin Mitchell, Levi Lovett, Anne-Marie Banfield, and Robyn Bradley for their continued commitment, assistance, and contribution to this cultural protocol guide. The ACO would also like to thank our staff RAP representatives for their work on this guide.

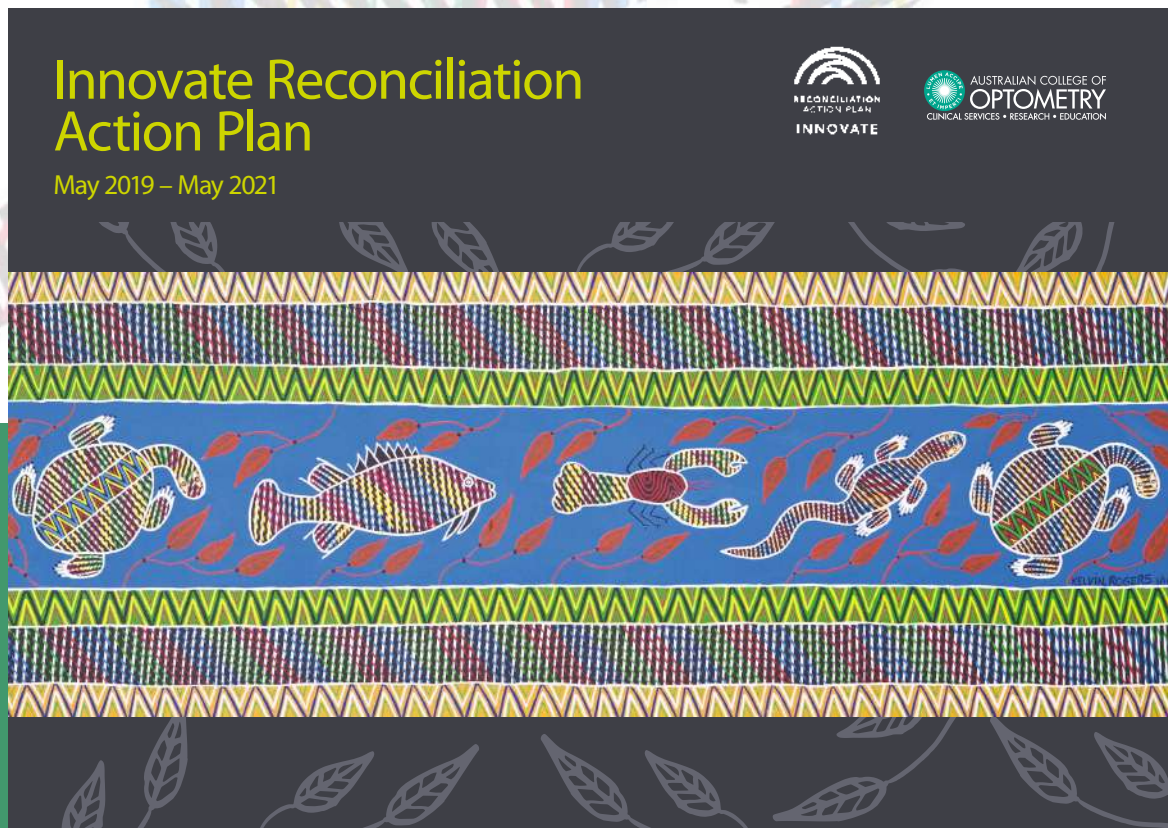
This document has also been formulated with evidence-based resources that have been adapted to fit ACO wording. All resources have been listed at the end of this document. Circumstances where the use has been more direct have been identified with footnotes.





# Preface

The ACO launched our first INNOVATE Reconciliation Action Plan in March 2019. The new iteration of our INNOVATE RAP will build on this roadmap for reconciliation and is expected to be endorsed by July 2021. Fundamentally, the RAP will demonstrate our respect of the First Nations Peoples of this country while recognising their past treatment and how colonisation has impacted their health. Our vision for reconciliation one of collaboration — to walk alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and communities, to heal our national soul, address inequality and achieve justice by contributing to closing the gap in eye health outcomes. We believe that reconciliation is an ongoing journey, which we aim to enhance by building meaningful and mutually respectful relationships. This cultural protocol guide is an essential part of the reconciliation journey by ensuring the ACO is engaging in a culturally safe manner.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are diverse with different kinships, traditions, beliefs, practices, and languages. Aboriginal cultures are also complex, dynamic, and evolving. This cultural protocol document is a general reference guide for use by ACO staff. This guide is not intended, nor does it attempt, to represent all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It should be used as a place to start, with staff encouraged to seek more information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and history including the resources accessible in the ACO Cultural Repository.

*\*Throughout this document, Aboriginal is used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Use of Koori, Koorie, and Indigenous are retained in the names of programs and initiatives, and, unless noted otherwise, include both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander.*



## Navigating the document

New staff are encouraged to read the Cultural Protocol Guide in its entirety. Where this is not possible staff will, at minimum, be required to read through Section One *Principles and Purpose* and Section Two *Reconciliation Action Plan and the ACO*. Acknowledgement of Country protocols should be read and referred to as circumstances arise in which a staff member is hosting or involved in a meeting.

During the induction process, new staff will be required to do the following:

- Read this Cultural Protocol Document;
- Complete the Share our Pride (online modules – sign off required once complete); and
- Complete the Asking the Question guide and review questions.

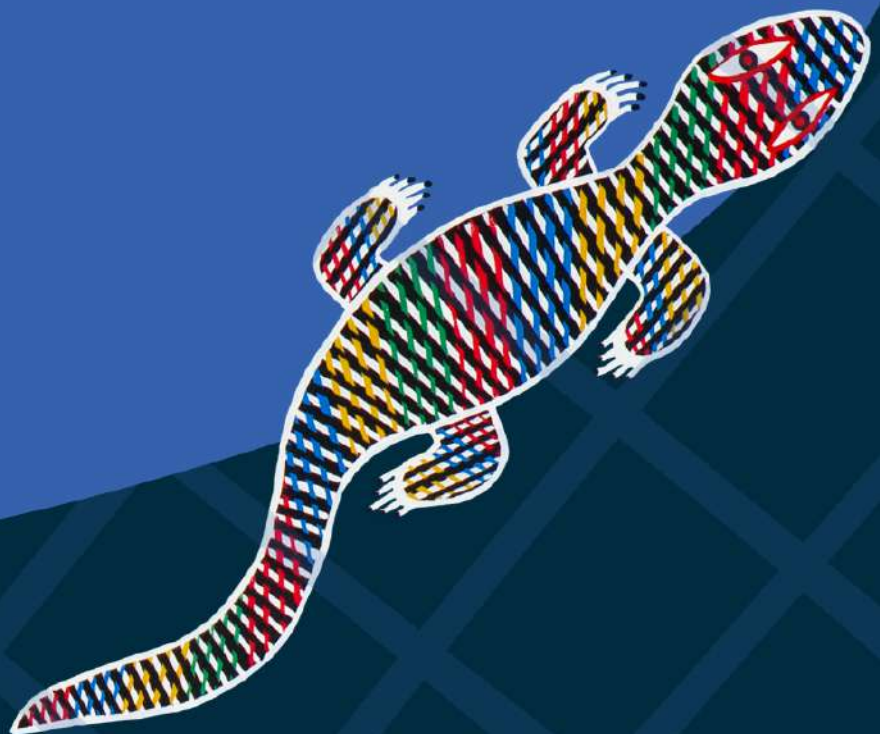
All staff are encouraged to revisit the Cultural Protocol Guide regularly and engage with both the online modules and Asking the Question Guide. Where this Guide is provided as a refresher, staff should pay particular attention to Sections One and Two.

Although the appendices are primarily for reference, they should not be overlooked as they contain important information.

# Section One

## Purpose & Principles

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# Purpose

The aim of this cultural protocol guide is to support staff in undertaking their work while respecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural beliefs and practices. This guide provides general information and links to external organisations and resources, where appropriate, to provide staff with a useful tool to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These protocols should be followed by all staff, students, and volunteers at the ACO.

A key purpose and goal for the ACO Innovate RAP, is to ensure respect by facilitating consistent Acknowledgment of Country at the start of meetings or formal engagements, and to provide guidance with respectful and inclusive language. The scripts that have been presented in this guide have been signed off by the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party. In addition to the verbal Acknowledgment, written versions for all print resources and signs have also been developed and signed off by the Reconciliation Action Plan Working Party.

The protocols in this document represent an opportunity for non-Indigenous staff to self-reflect, as well as engage in discussion of the importance of improved cross-cultural communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is designed with an aim to reduce unnecessary misunderstandings and communication barriers whilst strengthening relationships with our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

## What are Cultural Protocols?

Cultural Protocols provide a framework for working with Aboriginal people and recognising their culture. Following cultural protocols is a sign of respect to Aboriginal people and an acknowledgement of their history, customs, laws/lore's, and values.

## Why Do We Need Protocols?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced extreme prejudice, discrimination, and misunderstanding since colonisation by Europeans. A lack of knowledge about these longstanding impacts of colonisation and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, can create a breakdown in respect which increases negative outcomes.

Understanding and respecting cultures that are not familiar to you can be difficult when viewed with the context of your own cultural lens. This cultural protocol guide assists staff towards appreciation and respect, by encouraging staff to engage in culturally safe working practices.

Following these protocols is beneficial for our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, and organisational partners. The ACO recognises that improved health outcomes will not be achieved for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without respect for their individual cultural context. Respect for culture is an important part of a holistic approach to health care that in turn facilitates positive outcomes through aiding effective and respectful partnerships with individuals, their communities, and their organisations.

It is the aim of this guide to ensure that the ACO is a culturally safe environment and that our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, staff and partners feel that they are safe, welcome, respected, and valued when using our services. It is envisaged that this positive and culturally safe environment will result in increased self-empowerment and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients, staff, and stakeholders.



# Principles

The following values and principles provide structure for staff to implement these cultural protocol guidelines. Fundamentally, the Protocols in this document are influenced by the principle of respect — respect for Aboriginal heritage and culture, and the rights of Aboriginal people to own and control their culture. This includes respect for customs, points of view, and lifestyle.

How can I show my respect?

1. Learn about Aboriginal culture, for example by reading texts written by Aboriginal authors;
2. Resist the urge to propose solutions for Aboriginal issues, but rather listen deeply;
3. Ask questions during workshops or cultural events you visit;
4. Avoid stereotypes; and
5. Consult widely.

Below these principles are outlined in further detail.

## Respect for Culture

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander world views, ceremony, land, languages, lore, family, and customs are respected in all settings. These elements are intricately connected and should not be



considered in isolation. The diversity and vibrancy of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures is acknowledged and respected and staff are provided tools to educate themselves as well as minimum educational requirements. Education facilitates empathy and value for the importance of culture whilst helping to dispel stereotypes.

## Respect for Community

The importance and value of community for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is acknowledged and respected. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a rich understanding of community that encompasses not only immediate and extended family and kinship structures, but also their environment, and the living spirits of ancestors and land. Community provides essential social, emotional, and cultural ties that are respected in all aspects of ACO services and business activities.

## Consultation, Communication and Consent

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are consulted on the way in which they and their history, community, lives, and families are represented and used, in all aspects of ACO services and business activities. The ACO seeks to encourage two-way communication with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with regard to initiatives and all aspects of ACO services and business activities. Consent is always obtained prior to action.



## Involvement and Engagement

Initiatives involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are based on genuine engagement and partnership. Engagement and involvement are always based on the concept of 'with, not for'. The ACO aims to listen deeply to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to work in partnership.

## Recognising the Social, Emotional and Environmental Determinants of Health

Effectively working to improve the eye health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people requires 'an understanding of the social and emotional factors that influence health and wellbeing. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures these include the connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family, and community. They also include issues arising from unresolved grief and loss, trauma and abuse, removal from family, substance misuse, family breakdown, cultural dislocation, racism and discrimination, and social disadvantage'.<sup>1</sup>

## Holistic View of Health

A holistic view of health is essential for optometrists to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and communities on eye health and health-related matters.

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is:

"Aboriginal health" means not just the physical wellbeing of an individual but refers to the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total wellbeing of their community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.<sup>2</sup>

## Self-determination and Community Control

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to self-determination in their cultural and health affairs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are consulted concerning the integrity and authenticity of the ways in which history, community, interviews, lives, and families are represented, and are consulted concerning the integrity and authenticity of the representation of their cultural and intellectual property.

## Acceptance of Complexity

The factors contributing to poor health outcomes are often multiple, complex, and interconnected. Being open minded, self-reflective, understanding the context for current health circumstances as well as having a desire to learn and understand are important qualities for people working in every area of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The culture and belief systems of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are also complex and understanding their implications for the development of culturally sensitive behaviours and processes takes time.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Social Health Reference Group. National strategic framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health

<sup>2</sup> National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health organisation. 'Aboriginal health' definition. Braddon ACT: NACCHO, 2011 [cited 2011 Sept 1]. Available at [www.naccho.org.au/definitions/abhealth.html](http://www.naccho.org.au/definitions/abhealth.html).

<sup>3</sup> These principles were influenced by those found in Royal Australian College of Physicians, An Introduction to Cultural Competency.



# Section Two

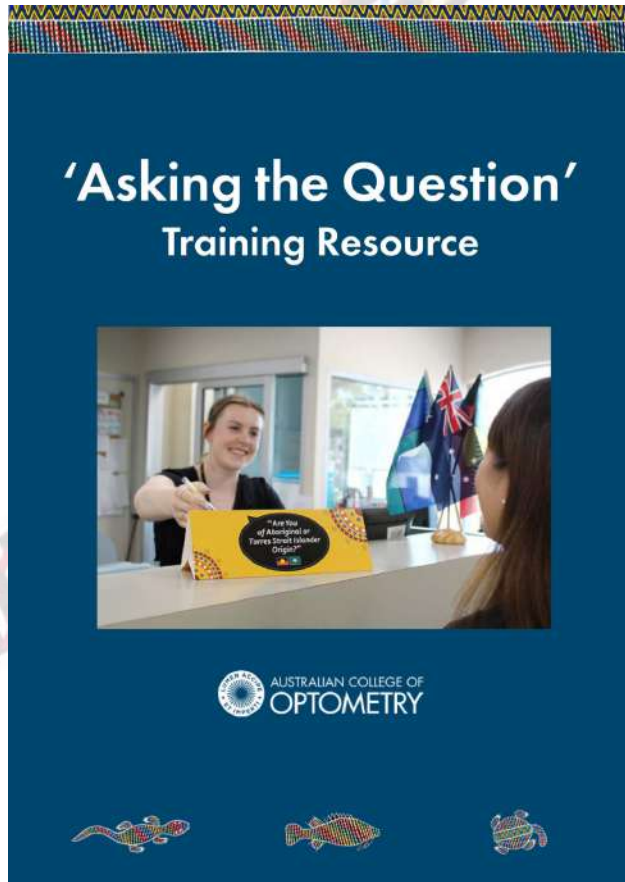


## Reconciliation Action Plan & the ACO

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# Online Cultural Training



## Asking the Question

'Asking the Question' can have significant positive impacts for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander eye health outcomes, by increasing patient access to culturally safe pathways for care. In addition, it allows the ACO, and the Department of Health, to monitor uptake and access of eye health services, to inform future planning and service development.

ACO staff are required to complete 'Asking the Question' modules as part of induction, in addition to an ongoing annual competency. The 'Asking the Question' modules aims to support and inform our staff on the importance of 'Asking the Question', and to ensure that the ACO are culturally competent and safe in our practice. The modules also acknowledge a patient's right and decision to not identify.

The modules are accessible for review in the ACO Cultural Repository. A printed Staff Guide, and information sheets are available in reception for reference, in addition to desk prompts for staff and patients.

## Share our Pride

Cultural safety training is required to be undertaken by all staff during their induction process. 'Share our pride – cultural safety modules' are provided online through Reconciliation Australia. Staff are encouraged to revisit and review these as necessary.

Access the modules at:  
<http://www.shareourpride.org.au/>



Start your journey ►



# Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country (Formal Demonstration of Respect)

The ACO recognises the culture, history, and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as First Australians, Aboriginal or First Nations People and their deep connection to the land. The ACO shows our respect through acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians and Elders at ACO events and meetings.

Protocol	Description	When To Use It	Comments
<b>Welcome to Country</b>	Traditional welcoming ceremonies are performed at the beginning of a forum, and <i>only</i> , by an Elder or appropriate member of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community to welcome people who are visiting and/or meeting on their traditional land. These ceremonies vary from speeches of welcome, to traditional dance and smoking ceremonies.	Traditional Welcomes should be incorporated into the opening of major internal or public events, meetings, forums, and functions.	Plan well ahead to allow for the availability of the appropriate person to conduct the ceremony.
<b>Acknowledging Traditional Custodians — part of Acknowledgement of Country</b>	Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians can occur with or without a Welcome to Country and/or when a smaller or less formal gathering is taking place.	<p>Traditional Custodians should be acknowledged by the first speaker at any significant organisational forum with a range of internal and external stakeholders present, as a mark of respect for the owners of the land on which the event is taking place.</p> <p>Acknowledgement should also be made where the events, and meetings are being conducted virtually.</p> <p>The first speaker in formal internal meetings and formal meetings involving external parties, should acknowledge the Traditional Custodians.</p> <p>Subsequent speakers may also choose to acknowledge Traditional Custodians. Staff are encouraged to give an acknowledgement anytime they feel appropriate – even in informal settings.</p>	<p>A script to support staff is provided below.</p> <p>A general acknowledgement is acceptable, but every attempt should be made to determine the name of the Traditional Custodians in preparation for an event.</p>

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<b>Acknowledging Elders —part of Acknowledgement of Country</b>	At major events, acknowledgement of Elders (past, present, and emerging) usually follows acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians.	The first speaker recognises and pays respect to Elders, past, present, and emerging.	Elders can be acknowledged by first name; any other term should only be used with prior approval (example Auntie or Uncle).
<b>Acknowledging local sites of significance</b>	The first speaker at a forum recognises cultural or historical sites of significance in the vicinity of the meeting.	When an event is held near a significant site.	For example, it may be appropriate for an Elder or community leader to acknowledge the site of a traditional meeting place or of a massacre on behalf of all present. <sup>4</sup>

[Appendix B](#) is an information sheet from Reconciliation Australia with provides additional detail on Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country.

<sup>4</sup> Adapted from Oxfam Australia, 2007. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols.



# Acknowledgment of Country at the ACO

Below are scripts endorsed by the RAP advisors, which staff can use when providing an acknowledgement of country. These scripts are a guide to support staff to feel comfortable to engage in this sign of respect for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Printed versions can be found in all meeting rooms at the ACO.

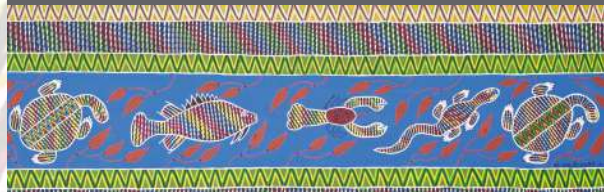
For occasions where a staff member is hosting a virtual meeting, we have also provided a relevant guide script below. These meetings may include participants who are on the land of different traditional custodians and nations, therefore an acknowledgement of this is included. It may be appropriate to allow individuals to give their own acknowledgement recognising where they are joining.

## For Meetings – spoken (Aboriginal Nation known - Vic)

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, on whose land we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present and emerging, and I extend that respect and welcome all Aboriginal people here with us today.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY For Meetings - spoken (Aboriginal nation known)

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians, the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, on whose land we are meeting today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present and emerging, and I extend that respect and welcome all Aboriginal people here with us today.



## For Meetings – spoken (Aboriginal Nation known - SA)

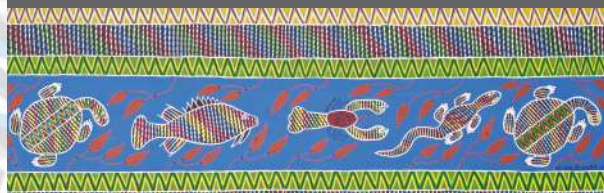
We would like to acknowledge that the land we meet on today is the traditional lands for the Kaurna people and that we respect their spiritual relationship with their Country. We also acknowledge the Kaurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region and that their cultural and heritage beliefs are still as important to the living Kaurna people today. (Source: Gawler, SA)

## For Meetings – spoken (Aboriginal Nation not known)

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. I pay my respects to them and their cultures, and to their Elders both past, present, and emerging. I extend that respect and welcome all Aboriginal people here with us today.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY For Meetings - spoken (Aboriginal nation not known)

I would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia and recognise their continuing connection to land, waters and community. I pay my respects to them and their cultures, and to their Elders past, present and emerging. I extend that respect and welcome all Aboriginal people with us today.





## **For Virtual Meetings – spoken (Aboriginal Nation known by Host - Vic)**

I acknowledge that I am hosting/recording this meeting/webinar from the traditional lands of the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin Nations, on whose land we are meeting today. I also acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the various lands on which you are all working on today. I also pay respect to Elder's past, present and emerging, and I extend that respect and welcome to all Aboriginal people here with us today.

### **How do I find out who the Traditional Custodians are for my meeting?**

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) have an online interactive map of Australia which represents the Aboriginal language, tribal or Nation groups.  
<https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/map-indigenous-australia>.

To view a Torres Strait Island map and find out more about Torres Strait Islanders languages and culture see: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/torres-strait-islander-culture>.

To learn about the local Indigenous People, history, and culture of your area, access the 'Where do I live?' documents on the Australians Together website: <http://www.australiantogether.org.au/>.

# **How to Organise a Welcome to Country**

See [Appendix B](#).





# Printed Resources and Communication

When writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or culture in both private communication and public forums ACO staff should be aware that there are specific guidelines that must be followed. Naming words, including Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, Traditional Owner/Custodian and Elder must always use a capital letter. Any abbreviation of the term Aboriginal is unacceptable as this is considered highly offensive.

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, there are often specific rules about naming people who have died. A warning statement must be used in any publications that includes the names and images of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. An appropriate warning that should be used in such a circumstance is:

‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers should be aware that this document may contain images or names of people who have since passed away’.

If there has been input from Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples during the creation of a publication or resource, ACO staff should include an acknowledgement of their consultation and ownership.

Clinicians should be particularly careful to avoid medical jargon in written documents. Any printed resource for non-Indigenous and/or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should use plain language and be accessible for all levels of health literacy.

To use images of significance to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people, appropriate permission must be obtained. For further information on this process, please see the section of this document titled ‘Use of Intellectual and Cultural Property’.

## Acknowledgement in Print

As a sign of respect, it is important to provide an acknowledgement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their connection to the land as Traditional Custodians in printed resources. The examples below have been developed in consultation with the ACO RAP Committee and should be utilised when print resources are being developed or in email signatures.

## All Printed resources

The Australian College of Optometry respectfully acknowledges the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples of this nation. We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which we work. We pay our respects to their Elders – past, present, and emerging. The Australian College of Optometry is committed to honouring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ unique cultural and spiritual relationships to the land, waters and seas and their rich contribution to society.

## Website and emails

The Australian College of Optometry acknowledge and respect the Traditional Custodians of the land on which we live, learn and work. We also pay our respects to their Elders – past present and emerging.



## Signs

The Australian College of Optometry operates on [Aboriginal nation] country. We acknowledge the [Aboriginal nation] people as the traditional custodians of the [Organisation location] region and pay our respects to [Aboriginal nation] elders past and present. We are committed to a positive future for the Aboriginal community.

# Use of Intellectual and Cultural Property

Appropriation is a serious issue that continues to impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. It is important to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual and cultural property is both respected and acknowledged. This property may include (but is not limited to) images, art, songs, and stories. ACO staff are required to uphold Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's rights to ownership in the past, present, and future if they use any media.

Intellectual property is also governed by specific laws which must be followed when using any media. Appropriate permission is required and no art, photos, and or stories should be reproduced or used without prior consultation with and approval from the artist or other appropriate representative. Although previous permission may have been granted, this process must be repeated *each and every* time Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander art or property is represented, unless covered by a licensing agreement. When the artist or appropriate representative is found, staff should explain how, why, and where the property will be used. They should be given comprehensive detailed information for them to make an informed decision. If the artist consents to the use, written permission should be obtained and kept for later reference.

When media is being selected, staff are required to ensure that these are representative of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and do not show negative stereotypes. Public consumption of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander media and intellectual property is not appropriate as some may be confidential, personal, sacred, or secret. Staff should also be aware that there are cultural protocols around the naming and/or representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that have died: refer to 'Printed Resources and Communication' section of this guide.

ACO staff who are non-Indigenous Australians should be cautious to assume that they are able to understand and interpret the meaning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual and cultural property. ACO staff are advised to acknowledge that while they have some insight into their significance, deeper understandings can only be explained by the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander artist or writer themselves.

If you are unsure about the use of any image or artwork, contact the ACO Marketing Manager, or the Director of Education, Membership and Marketing to discuss.



## ACO RAP Artwork

As part of the ACO's Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan, the ACO selected a work of art from the Torch Project.<sup>5</sup> The ACO is the custodian of this collaborative art piece and it is currently on display in Carlton in the main Foyer, staff break room as well as at each of our other ACO facilities. The artist has provided copyright permission for the use and reproduction of the piece. The artwork represents the long journey of the local wildlife swimming down the Murray River. The cross-hatching and the line-work in the border patterns represent what we go through in life: our experiences, struggles and achievements. The Murray River stays the same and is always going to be there, as our home. Additional information is on the ACO Website located under Reconciliation Action Plan.

Preapproved templates with the RAP artwork (e.g., letterhead) are available for use by staff and can be found in the ACO Cultural Repository. If staff wish to use the artwork in any form beyond this, they must contact the ACO Marketing Manager, or the Director of Education, Membership and Marketing to discuss.



# Undertaking Projects and Research

ACO staff undertaking research should complete their own procedures. Below are some additional resources that may be helpful.

- For detailed information in regards to obtaining ethics approval for studies involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, you can access the AIATSIS website here: <http://aiatsis.gov.au/research/ethical-research/guidelines-ethical-research-australian-indigenous-studies>
- The National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) website also provides a comprehensive guide to ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research: <https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/health-ethics/ethical-issues-and-further-resources>
- To assist Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make informed decisions about their involvement in research, the NHMRC have developed the 'Keeping research on track' guide: [https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files\\_nhmrc/file/publications/synopses/e65.pdf](https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/files_nhmrc/file/publications/synopses/e65.pdf)
- The Lowitja Institute is another organisation that provide ample information on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander projects and research: <http://www.lowitja.org.au/>

<sup>5</sup> For more information of the Torch go to <https://thetorch.org.au/>.

# Section Three

## Further Information

- Inclusive and Respectful Language
- Important Dates & Key Community Events
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags





# Language & Terminology

## Definitions

See [Appendix A](#).

## Inclusive and Respectful Language

Effective cross-cultural communication can only be achieved where language and terminology are used with respect. Language has historical context and can reinforce negative experience, discrimination, prejudice, and unjust power dynamics. Hence to ensure a culturally safe environment and effective communication, non-discriminatory and accurate language should be used. This can also help foster trust and improved partnerships.

For our ACO patients, respectful and culturally safe communication will lead to increased confidence in asking health related questions, seeking care, and performing self-advocacy.

Refer to [Appendix A](#) for additional guidance from Reconciliation Australia which further highlights the importance of terminology when addressing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Staff should be familiar with respectful terminology and are encouraged to seek guidance when appropriate.

The following table is provided for staff to reference and has information about appropriate and inappropriate terminology used in the description of, and interaction with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

✓ Appropriate Terminology	✗ Inappropriate Terminology
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Indigenous Australian people(s)</li><li>• Aboriginal people(s)</li><li>• Aboriginal person Torres Strait Islander people(s)</li><li>• Torres Strait Islander person</li><li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities</li><li>• First Australians/First people European invasion/European colonisation</li><li>• Shared issues/Shared challenges</li><li>• First Nations People</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Aborigines</li><li>• Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders – as a noun and plural</li><li>• The Aborigines Native</li><li>• Blackfella/Whitefella</li><li>• ATSI (or any other abbreviation)</li><li>• Indigenous (refers to many cultures from around the world and diminishes Aboriginality)</li><li>• Mixed blood/Half Caste/Quarter Caste/Full blood/Part Aboriginal/25%, 50% Aboriginal</li><li>• These/Them people/Those people/Those folk/You people</li><li>• European settlement/European arrival/European discovery</li><li>• Aboriginal problem/Indigenous problem<sup>6</sup></li></ul>

**Note:** It is important to refer to non-Indigenous Australians as 'non-Indigenous Australians' not 'Australians'

<sup>6</sup> Table from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Cultural Protocol, St Vincent's Health Australia – Inclusive Health Protocols



# Important Dates & Key Community Events

The ACO encourages all staff to acknowledge and attend the following events to engage with and support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

## **Survival Day – 26 January**

Australia Day is not a celebration for all Australians. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples mark this day as Survival Day. Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have been subjected to government-sanctioned violence, policies that removed children from families, the removal of people from their lands and the denial of self-determination. Survival Day was formerly referred to as 'Invasion Day' and has since been referred to as Survival Day because the Aboriginal people 'survived' the invasion.

## **Anniversary of the National Apology – 13 February**

The National Apology to the Stolen Generations, who suffered because of past government policies of forced child removal and assimilation, which occurred on the 13<sup>th</sup> February 2008. It is important, that as a nation, we commemorate this significant milestone, acknowledging the wrongs of the past, while reflecting on the work that still needs to be done to address the impacts of unresolved trauma.

## **National Close the Gap Day – 19 March**

For the last 10 years many thousands of Australians from every corner of the country, in schools, businesses and community groups, have shown their support for Close the Gap by marking National Close the Gap Day each March. This is an annual event to raise awareness of the health experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Evidence indicates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a life expectancy approximately 10 years less than other Australians. The day aims to promote health equality within a generation and achieve health equality by 2030.

## **Harmony Day – 21 March**

This day celebrates the cultural diversity of Australia and the importance of inclusiveness, respect, and sense of belonging for everyone. Harmony Day is a day of cultural respect for everyone who calls Australia home. By participating in Harmony Day activities, people can learn and understand how all Australians from diverse backgrounds equally belong to this nation and enrich it.

## **National Sorry Day - 26 May**

This day marks the anniversary of the 1997 tabling of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their Families, Bringing Them Home (April 1997). This report was the result of a National Inquiry into the forcible removal of Indigenous children from their families, communities, and cultural identity. The first 'Sorry Day' was held in Sydney in 1998 and is now held nationally with memorials and commemorative events that honour the Stolen Generations.

## **National Reconciliation Week – 26 May to 3 June**

National Reconciliation Week (NRW) is a time for all Australians to learn about our shared histories, cultures, and achievements, and to explore how each of us can contribute to achieving reconciliation in Australia.

The dates for NRW remain the same each year; 27 May to 3 June. These dates commemorate two significant milestones in the reconciliation journey— the successful 1967 referendum, and the High Court Mabo decision, respectively.

Reconciliation must live in the hearts, minds, and actions of all Australians as we move forward, creating a nation strengthened by respectful relationships between the wider Australian community, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



**Mabo Day – 3 June**

This day commemorates the anniversary of the 1992 High Court decision in the case brought by Eddie Mabo and others, which recognised the existence in Australia of Native title rights. On the tenth anniversary of this day in 2002 there were many calls for the day to become a public holiday, an official National Mabo Day.

**NAIDOC Week – First full week of July**

The first Sunday of July sees the beginning of a week dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples to celebrate NAIDOC (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Day Observance Committee) Week. NAIDOC Week is a celebration for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples of their survival. It is also a time for all Australians to celebrate the unique contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and cultures and to bring issues of concern to the attention of governments and the broader community.

The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

**National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children’s Day – 4 August**

This day was first observed in 1988 and each year it has a special theme. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care produce a poster to celebrate the day.<sup>7</sup>

**United Nations International Day of the World’s Indigenous People – 9 August**

Observed worldwide each year to raise awareness of and to help protect the rights of the world’s indigenous population. This event also recognizes the achievements and contributions that Indigenous people make to address global issues.



<sup>7</sup> The information in this section was primarily sourced from Building better partnerships, Working with Aboriginal communities, and organisations: a communication guide for the Department of Human Services, Victorian Government



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

Staff should note that some usage of either the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander flags require copyright approval (primarily use on commercial products). Additional information can be found at <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/Flags-factsheet.pdf>

## The Australian Aboriginal Flag

### Brief History

Artist Harold Thomas designed the Australian Aboriginal Flag and first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide, on National Aborigines Day in July 1971. In the Flag 1972 became the official flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in Canberra. It has since become a symbol of the unity and identity of Aboriginal people.

In 1994 the Commonwealth took steps in to give the flag legal recognition because of the flag's wide acceptance and importance in Australian society. In July 1995, the Aboriginal flag was proclaimed a 'Flag of Australia' under the Flags Act 1953 and in 1997 the Federal Court recognised Harold Thomas as the author of the flag.

### Symbolism and Meaning

The Aboriginal flag is divided in two horizontally. The top half is black and the lower half red. A yellow circle featured in the centre of the flag. The Aboriginal flag should be flown or displayed with the black at the top and the red at the bottom.

Harold Thomas, the flag's designer, has stated that the meaning of the three colours in the flag are:

**Black:** Represents the Aboriginal people of Australia.

**Yellow Circle:** Represents the Sun, the giver of life and protector.

**Red:** Represents the red earth, the red ochre used in ceremonies and Aboriginal peoples' spiritual relation to the land.





## Torres Strait Islander Flag

### Brief History

The late Bernard Namok designed the Torres Strait Islander flag as a symbol of unity and identity for Torres Strait Islanders. In 1992 it was adopted after being selected as the winning entry in a design competition run by the Island Coordinating Council, a Queensland statutory body representing the community councils in the Torres Strait. Also in 1992, the Flag was recognised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) and afforded equal prominence with the Australian Aboriginal Flag.

The Australian Government recognised it, with the Australian Aboriginal Flag, in July 1995 as an official 'Flag of Australia' under the *Flags Act 1953*.

### Symbolism and Meaning

The Torres Strait Islander flag has three horizontal panels, with green at the top and bottom and blue in the middle. These panels are divided by thin black lines. A white Dhari (traditional headdress) sits in the centre, with a five-pointed white star beneath it.

The Dhari is representative of the Torres Strait Islander people, and the five-pointed star represents the five island groups within the Torres Strait. The star is also a symbol for seafaring people as it is used in navigation. The meanings of the colours in the flag are:

**Green:** Represents the land.

**Black:** Represents the Indigenous peoples.

**Blue:** Represents the sea.

**White:** Represents peace.



# Further Information and Resources

An online cultural repository of resources is available to all ACO staff.

## ACO Documents

Accessible via the ACO Cultural Repository are the following documents:

- ACO Reconciliation Action Plan – Innovate (May 2021)
  - ACO Accessible at <https://www.aco.org.au/reconciliation-action-plan/>
- ACO Employment Strategy
- Ask the Question Module and Guide

## External Resources

The ACO Cultural Repository includes some external materials, however staff are also encouraged to go beyond these resources and do their own research.



# References

The following evidence-based resources were consulted in the writing of this Cultural Protocol Guide.

1. Australians Together, Our History. Accessible at <https://australianstogether.org.au/education/curriculum-resources/our-history/>
2. Australians Together, Why are culture and identity important? Accessible at <https://australianstogether.org.au/discover/indigenous-culture/culture-identity/>
3. Building better partnerships, Working with Aboriginal communities, and organisations: a communication guide for the Department of Human Services, Victorian Government. Accessible at [https://mungabareena.org.au/cdn/CTHG\\_Directory/Engagement\\_and\\_Partnerships/Documents/Building\\_Better\\_Partnerships.pdf](https://mungabareena.org.au/cdn/CTHG_Directory/Engagement_and_Partnerships/Documents/Building_Better_Partnerships.pdf)
4. NAIDOC, Information on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flag usage. Accessible at <https://www.naidoc.org.au/about/indigenous-australian-flags>
5. Oxfam Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols, 2007. Accessible at <https://resources.oxfam.org.au/pages/view.php?ref=223&k>
6. Royal Australian College of Physicians, An Introduction to Cultural Competency. Accessible at [http://www.racp.edu.au/hpu/policy/indig\\_cultural\\_competance.htm](http://www.racp.edu.au/hpu/policy/indig_cultural_competance.htm)
7. St Vincent's Health Australia, Inclusive Health Protocols – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and Cultural Protocol. Accessible at [https://www.svha.org.au/ArticleDocuments/3007/SVHA\\_Cultural\\_Protocol.pdf.aspx](https://www.svha.org.au/ArticleDocuments/3007/SVHA_Cultural_Protocol.pdf.aspx)
8. Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Cultural Safety 2016. Accessible at <http://www.vaccho.org.au/consultancy/cs/>
9. Victorian Department of Health, Cultural responsiveness framework: A guide for Victorian health services, 2009. Accessible at [http://www.health.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf\\_file/0008/381068/cultural\\_responsiveness.pdf](http://www.health.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/381068/cultural_responsiveness.pdf)

# Section Four



# Appendices

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# Appendix A: Definitions

Below is a non-extensive list of some key terminology and definitions:

**Aboriginal:** to mean 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers:** Aboriginal Health Workers (AHWs) play a vital role in the primary health workforce. They provide clinical and primary health care for individuals, families and community groups including specialty areas of drug and alcohol, mental health, diabetes and eye and ear health'. AHWs are an important link between non-Indigenous health professionals and the local community and provide considerable cultural education to practice staff.

**Acknowledgement of Country:** An Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by anyone and is a way of showing awareness of, and respect for, the Aboriginal Traditional Owners/custodians of the land on which a meeting or event is being held.

An Acknowledgement of Country can be performed by an Indigenous or non-Indigenous person and is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech, or formal occasion. There are no set protocols or phrasing for an Acknowledgement of Country.

**Community:** Due to the forcible removal of people from their ancestral lands, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective of community is not necessarily based on geographical location. In this context, the term community refers to country, extended family ties, shared experience, interrelatedness and belonging.

**Country:** A culturally defined area of land associated with a distinct group of people or nation. This intimate knowledge of the land and ways of relating to it are also reflected in language, including many words and concepts that have no English equivalent. This deep relationship between people and the land is often described as 'connection to Country'.

For Aboriginal people, "country" does not just mean the creeks, rock outcrops, hills, and waterholes. "Country" includes all living things. It incorporates people, plants, and animals. It embraces the seasons, stories, and creation spirits. "country" is both a place of belonging and a way of believing.

**Culture:** Aboriginal culture is holistic, defined by its connection to family, community, language, ceremony, and country. When Aboriginal people are disconnected from culture, this has a deep impact on their sense of identity, belonging and wellbeing.

**Cultural safety:** Cultural safety is about creating an environment which is spiritually, socially, and emotionally safe, as well as physically safe for Aboriginal people; where there is no assault, challenge, or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need.

**Elder:** An Aboriginal Elder is an identified and 'respected' person of any age within the community who has the trust, knowledge and understanding of their culture and the permission to speak about it.

**Nation:** A culturally distinct group associated with a particular culturally defined area of land or country. Each nation has boundaries that cannot be changed and language that is tied to each nation and country. Boundaries of nations may cross state borders, which is important to recognise in service delivery, provision, and negotiation.

**Self Determination:** This is the right of all peoples to 'freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development' (*article 1 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*). Self-determination is a collective right that belongs to a group rather than being an individual right.



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**Stolen Generation:** The Stolen Generations describes how many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were stolen and removed from their communities and families as children by Australian Federal and State government agencies and church missions under acts of parliaments. This occurred from the late 1800's to the 1970's. Aboriginal children were then sent away to be placed in girls and boy's homes, missions, and foster families where they were forbidden from speaking their native language or expressing any part of their Aboriginal or Torres Strait Island culture.

**Traditional Owner/Custodian:** Traditional Owners are Aboriginal people who have ongoing traditional and cultural connections to country. Some Traditional Owner groups have been appointed as Registered Aboriginal Parties by the Victorian Aboriginal Heritage Council

**Tribe:** Similar to Nation, a tribe can be defined as a culturally distinct group of people associated with a particular, culturally defined area of land or country. This term has a specific meaning derived from non-Indigenous culture, so may not be suitable for use with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community.

**Welcome to Country:** A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners to welcome visitors to their Country.







## Demonstrating inclusive and respectful language

Using respectful and inclusive language and terminology is an essential component of reconciliation. The ways we *speak* about reconciliation is just as important as the ways we *act*: language is itself active, and can impact on attitudes, understandings and relationships in a very real and active sense.

While they are guidelines only, below are some recommendations for using respectful and inclusive language and terminology throughout your RAP and other communications.

### Seek guidance

Given the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities across Australia, you should always seek advice from your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders regarding preferences and protocols around terminology.

Please consider these guidelines, alongside guidance from your Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders.

## Referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Using 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is most often considered best practice.

- 'Aboriginal' (and less commonly accepted variants such as 'Aboriginals' or 'Aborigines') alone is also not inclusive of the diversity of cultures and identities across Australia, for which reason it should be accompanied by 'peoples' in the plural.
- Similarly, as a stand-alone term, 'Aboriginal' is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples, and reference to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be spelt out where necessary.
- The acronym ATSI should be avoided as this can be seen as lacking respect of different identities.

### First Nations and First Peoples

Other pluralised terms such as 'First Nations' or 'First Peoples' are also acceptable language, and respectfully encompass the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities.

### Acknowledging diversity

Pluralisation should extend to generalised reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 'histories,' 'perspectives,' 'ways of being,' 'contributions,' and so forth. This acknowledges that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not homogenous.

### Indigenous

In some parts of the country, the term 'Indigenous' can be considered offensive. That is, it has scientific connotations that have been used historically to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as part of the 'flora/fauna' rather than the human population of Australia. It can be seen as a problematically universalising or homogenising label for what are, in reality, highly diverse identities.



# Appendix B: Welcome to Country

## Victoria – Melbourne Metro

To organise a Welcome to Country provided by a Wurundjeri person please contact:

Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation  
<https://www.wurundjeri.com.au>

Events (Welcome to Country and Smoking Ceremonies): [events@wurundjeri.com.au](mailto:events@wurundjeri.com.au)

## Victoria – Regional

Please refer to the guide on the traditional owners in Victoria  
<https://www.aboriginalvictoria.vic.gov.au/welcome-country>  
<https://achris.vic.gov.au/weave/wca.html>

## South Australia – Adelaide Region

To organise a Welcome to Country provided by a Kaurna person please contact:

Tauondi Aboriginal College who can assist in this process: 8240 0300 or  
[reception@tauondi.sa.edu.au](mailto:reception@tauondi.sa.edu.au)

Kaurna Register - <http://online.portenf.sa.gov.au/community/atsi/welcome-to-country/register>





## Welcome to and Acknowledgement of Country

### 1. What is a Welcome to Country?

Protocols for welcoming visitors to Country have been a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures for thousands of years. Despite the absence of fences or visible borders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups had clear boundaries separating their Country from that of other groups. Crossing into another group's Country required a request for permission to enter. When permission was granted the hosting group would welcome the visitors, offering them safe passage and protection of their spiritual being during the journey. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, they also had to respect the protocols and rules of the land owner group while on their Country.

Today, obviously much has changed, and these protocols have been adapted to contemporary circumstances. However, the essential elements of welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain in place. A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language or English. A Welcome to Country is delivered by Traditional Owners, or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been given permission from Traditional Owners, to welcome visitors to their Country.

### 2. What is an Acknowledgment of Country?

An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for anyone to show respect for Traditional Owners and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Country. It can be given by both non-Indigenous people and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

There are no set protocols or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country, though often a statement may take the following forms.

*General:* I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today. I would also like to pay my respects to Elders past and present.

*Specific:* I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, the (people) of the (nation) and pay my respects to Elders past and present.

Similar to a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

