



How do I make my practice culturally safe?



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For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health does not just entail the freedom of the individual from sickness but requires support for healthy and interdependent relationships between families, communities, land, sea and spirit. The focus must be on spiritual, cultural, emotional and social well-being as well as physical health.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council. National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2003-2013, Context Canberra: Commonwealth of Australia; 2004.

Issues surrounding diversity which may impact on the delivery of services:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be reluctant to use mainstream medical services due to a lack of understanding of the mainstream health system and previous negative experiences within it.
- Access to adequate health care may be hindered by family obligations (often extended family), lack of transport or money, or geographical isolation.
- English may be the person's second language. Therefore it may be appropriate to consider the use of an interpreter and the use of plain language.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be reluctant to consult a health care provider of the opposite sex, particularly around women's and men's health issues.

You should:

- Make efforts to ensure waiting rooms are welcoming to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including displaying relevant posters and pamphlets;
- Provide a relaxed setting for the consultation, sit beside your patient not across a desk
- Allow time at the first consultation to build rapport and trust; direct eye contact may offend
- Ensure the person understands clearly what the service entails and the details of any procedures involved, and possible follow-up or referral requirements;
- Obtain health promotion information appropriate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients-talk to your Division for assistance with this;
- Allow the patient to have family members present. When inviting family or community members to accompany a patient, ensure the patient fully consents to their attendance and that the community/family members are fully aware of the need for confidentiality;
- Provide gender appropriate staff if possible, for both male and female patients around pap smears, mammograms, sexual health checks, pregnancy checks, ante/postnatal care
- Encourage all staff in the practice to attend Cultural Awareness Training programs
- Ensure practice staff have awareness of appropriate referral and support organisations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander patients-use the Aboriginal Service Directory
- Develop partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community organisations; link in with them, volunteer, call for advice, attend community events!

For more information: pbs-indigenous@health.gov.au or talk to the Indigenous Health Project Officer or the Indigenous Outreach Worker at Central west Gippsland Division of General Practice 03 5126 2899.

*Information taken from pbs-indigenous@health.gov.au