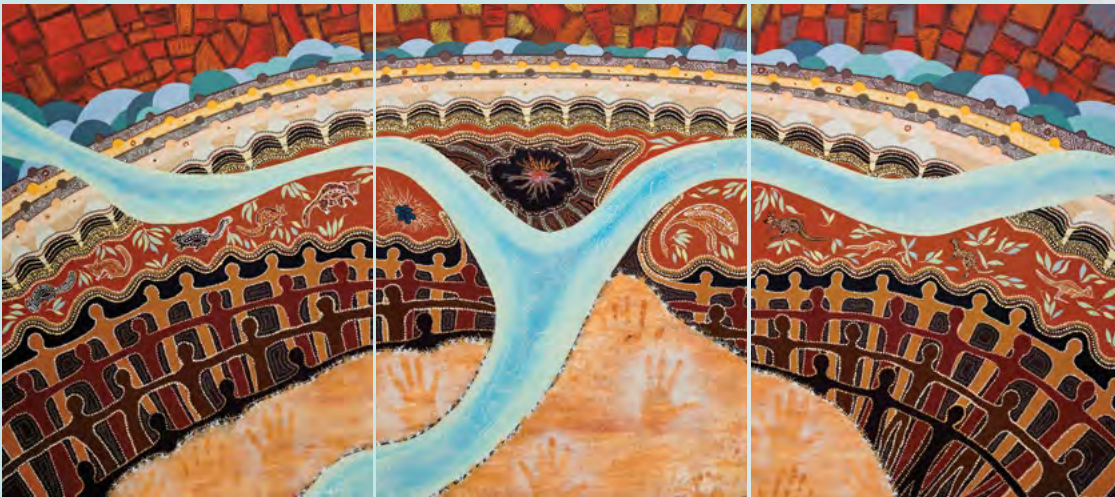


**Aboriginal and
Torres Strait Islander
Cultural Protocols
& Communication
Guidelines**

May 2020



Acknowledgement of Artist

The artwork throughout the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols and Communication Guidelines is a painting by Ngardarb Francine Riches titled *Wellness Dreaming*.

Ngardarb Francine Riches is a member of the Arriyol clan of the Bardi/Jawi/Karajarri tribe.

The painting marks the historic moment that North Yarra Community Health, Dousta Gala Community Health and Western Region Health Centre came together to form cohealth. Central to the *Wellness Dreaming* story is the relationships of the people in harmony with the land, the rivers, the animals and fire. Just as the rivers flow and merge through the triptych, there is a connection between the autonomous services and the communal reliance on traditions, nature and one another to maintain balance in life.

We value the strong working relationship we have with Ngardarb and thank her for her ongoing support and contribution to cohealth.

Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians

cohealth acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which our offices stand, the Boon Wurrung, Wurundjeri and Wathaurong people, and pays respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

We acknowledge the Stolen Generations and the historical and ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' living culture is the oldest continuing culture in the world, and we acknowledge that the land and waterways are a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal.



These guidelines were developed as part of cohealth's Reconciliation Collaborative and co-designed with Traditional Custodians and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coworkers and community members. Thank you to those who contributed.

what is this guide?

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing is a priority at cohealth. These guidelines have been developed to support cohealth staff to adhere to cultural protocols and promote respectful communications with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander coworkers, clients, community members, Traditional Custodians, Elders and partner agencies.

The guidelines aim to increase coworker knowledge and awareness of the customs and culture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples by providing information on the following topics:

- **Respectful terminology**
- **Cultural protocols**
- **Welcoming environments**
- **Asking someone if they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander**
- **Depicting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture in publications and promotional material**
- **Centering community voice in decision making**

cohealth's *Reconciliation Action Plan* provides further context and guidance.



respectful terminology

Below is a suggested guide to respectful terminology. Preferences in terminology vary across Australia for individuals and communities and can change over time. (See also 'Commonly used terminology' on p12 of this document.)

Respectful language	Out-of-date language
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander	ATSI Reduces the cultural diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and implies a distinct group.
Australian First Nations	Aborigine Often has negative connotations from Australia's colonial past and the injustices afflicted upon Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from that time on.
	Indigenous Is used across the world to describe all First Peoples, fauna and flora. It does not respect the unique and diverse cultures of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
	Part-Aboriginal / Half-Aboriginal Considered offensive and assimilationist terminology (Narragunnawali, 2020).

As capitalisation demonstrates respect, the words 'Aboriginal', 'Torres Strait Islander', 'Indigenous', 'Traditional Owner/Custodian', 'Elder', 'Kulin' and 'Welcome to Country' should always be treated as proper nouns and capitalised.

cultural protocols

Cultural protocols are the customs and codes of behaviour used to show respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. They guide the observance of traditional knowledge and practices. By incorporating protocols into cohealth practices, we can formally recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians and demonstrate recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ongoing connection to Country.

Welcome to Country

What is a Welcome to Country?

A ceremony performed by Elders or Traditional Custodians to welcome visitors on to their traditional land. This can be done through speech, dance, song or ceremony and is traditionally done at the beginning of a formal event. Welcoming visitors to Country has been part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture for thousands of years. A Welcome to Country must be delivered by a Traditional Custodian of the land on which the event is being held.

When do we organise a Welcome to Country?

All cohealth's major internal or public events, forums or functions should commence with a Welcome to Country. This is particularly important if the event has broad impact on, or significance for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

How do we organise a Welcome to Country?

Once you know the location of your event, contact the recognised Traditional Custodians of that area. If organising a Welcome to Country, plan well ahead (4 to 6 weeks) and expect to pay a fee for travel and time.

Boon Wurrung Foundation
www.boonwurrung.org.au

Wathaurong Aboriginal Co-operative
www.wathaurong.org.au

Wurundjeri Tribe Council
www.wurundjeri.com.au

Please note: Some cohealth sites are on shared land (more than one Traditional Owner). It is best practice to invite an Elder/Traditional Owner from each Traditional Owner group to acknowledge both lands.



Acknowledgement of Country

What is an Acknowledgement of Country?

An opportunity to demonstrate respect and acknowledge Traditional Custodians. It also recognises the continuing connection of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples to the land and waterways. It can be performed by anyone and is offered at the beginning of a meeting or formal occasion.

When is an Acknowledgment of Country required?

All internal and external cohealth meetings, interviews, forums and events should commence with an Acknowledgement of Country, stated by the chairperson, MC or first speaker. Acknowledgement of Country can occur with or without a Welcome to Country.

What should I say?

To ensure an Acknowledgement of Country is meaningful, coworkers are encouraged to develop their own personalised Acknowledgement with messages that resonate most with them and/or the meeting or event context. At a minimum, it is important to acknowledge the land on which the meeting/event is taking place and pay respect to Elders. If you are unsure about your personalised Acknowledgment of Country and would like guidance, email reconciliation@cohealth.org.au.

Alternatively, coworkers can use the following Acknowledgement that has been developed in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members:

"I acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways on which we meet today, the (insert Country here) people, and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging.

I acknowledge the Stolen Generations and the historical and ongoing impact of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. I also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' living culture is the oldest continuing culture in the world, and the land and waterways are a place of age-old ceremonies of celebration, initiation and renewal."

Acknowledgement of Country in cohealth emails

A written Acknowledgement of Traditional Custodians is part of the standard cohealth staff email signature that all staff are expected to use. The Acknowledgement appears below staff contact information and reads:

"cohealth acknowledges the ancestors and Traditional Custodians of the land on which our offices stand and pays respect to Elders past and present."

Table 1. List of cohealth offices and associated Traditional Custodians. *The information presented in the table is subject to change, which can be determined by the Aboriginal Heritage Council.

cohealth office	Traditional Custodians
Ascot Vale	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Braybrook	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Collingwood	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Central City	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Deer Park	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Essendon	Wurundjeri
Fitzroy & Fitzroy North	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Flemington	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Footscray	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Kensington	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Laverton	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Melton	Wurundjeri and Wathaurong
Niddrie	Wurundjeri
North Melbourne	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Reservoir	Wurundjeri
St Albans	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Strathmore	Wurundjeri
Sunbury	Wurundjeri
Sunshine	Wurundjeri and Boon Wurrung
Werribee	Wurundjeri and Wathaurong



welcoming environments

It is important to create welcoming environments that promote inclusion and cultural safety. Visible cues of inclusion can make someone feel more comfortable to self-identity as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. The physical environment of each cohealth site is different. Consider what can be done to enhance respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, such as:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags
- Acknowledgement of Country plaque at building entrances (pictured)
- Language maps (pictured)
- Artwork
- Posters
- Lanyards and lapel pins



asking someone if they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander

It is important that all clients accessing cohealth services are asked if they identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander. Asking the question and providing opportunities for self-identification can:

- Affirm identity
- Enable access to specific health programs, clinical assessments and benefits
- Lead to health issues being managed proactively
- Result in more appropriate referrals, including to cohealth's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Health Team
- Contribute to national data collection around 'closing the gap'

The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has agreed to a standard question for determining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander origin of all clients using health services in Australia. The question every health service is required to ask of all clients receiving their service is:

"Are you (or is the person) of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin?"

People may not identify straight away due to fear of discrimination and stigma. It is important to give multiple opportunities for someone to self-identify throughout their engagement with the service. If someone does identify after the intake process it is important to update the consumer file/records.

Training on 'asking the question' is available on cohealth's Learning Management System and Diversity Connect+ page.

Important: Never make assumptions about whether someone is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander based on how they look. Always ask the question.





depicting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture in publications and promotional material

Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and culture are represented in cohealth's publications and promotional materials is a way of demonstrating respect and inclusion. This could include branding, images, illustrations, artwork and text.

It is important to consider the following when depicting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture:

- **Does the publication/material use empowering and strengths-based language?**
For example, "Helping disadvantaged Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples," would be better as a strengths-based alternative such as "Providing meaningful opportunities in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples"
- **How does the depiction affect the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people involved?**
Consider cultural sensitivities, intellectual property and ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander rights remain central.
- **Has permission and consent been sought to publish the artwork, images or text?**
cohealth's photographic and audio consent form can be located on Connect+.
- **Has the artwork, images or text been credited properly?**
See *Wellness Dreaming* artwork opposite for credit example.

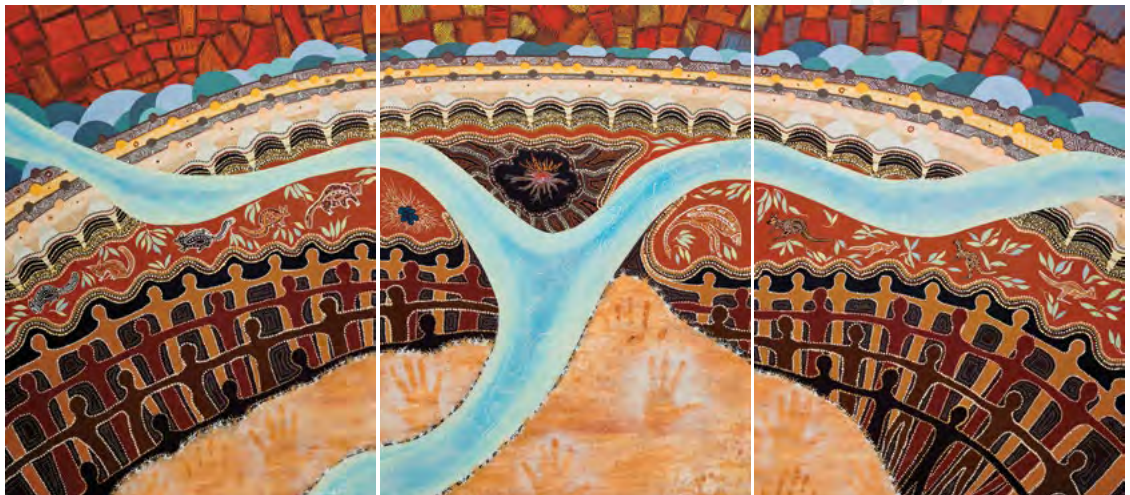
cohealth has visual elements available that have been purposefully co-designed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. This includes logos, illustrations, colour palettes and graphics, and are to be used for programs, presentations and projects where there is a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. The visual elements are in cohealth's style guide and are available on Connect+.

cohealth
care for all



cohealth is proud to have an agreement with Ngardarb Francine Riches for the use of her Wellness Dreaming artwork in cohealth publications and materials. Wellness Dreaming marks the historic moment when cohealth was formed. Ngardarb Francine Riches is a member of the Arriyol clan of the Bardi/Jawi/Karajarri tribe. Please seek permission for use of this artwork by contacting communications@cohealth.org.au.

Artwork: *Wellness Dreaming* (2014) by Ngardarb Francine Riches.



cohealth publications, flyers and communications should include an 'everyone is welcome here' image that includes the Aboriginal flag (far left) and the Torres Strait Islander flag (second from the left).



everyone is welcome at **cohealth**

cohealth publications or communications with images or names of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should have the following warning displayed in a prominent position:

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this [document/website] may contain images or names of people who have since passed away."

centering community voice in decision making

To provide accessible and culturally safe services, it is important to center the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across all levels of cohealth’s decision-making processes. Equally important, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, particularly Registered Aboriginal Parties and Traditional Custodians, should be consulted and involved in all decisions affecting cultural heritage and the ways in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, community, stories and cultural and intellectual property are represented and used.

Depending on the purpose of the engagement, you could consider engaging Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander...

- Community members
- Elders/Traditional Custodians
- Clients
- Recognised Aboriginal Parties
- Staff members
- Local Aboriginal Networks
- Aboriginal Controlled Health Organisations

If you haven’t engaged with Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people before, you can email reconciliation@cohealth.org.au for support and advice on who to engage and how to accord cultural respect.



Principles of engagement

- Self-determined
- Culturally safe
- Trauma informed
- Respectful
- Transparent
- Mutually beneficial



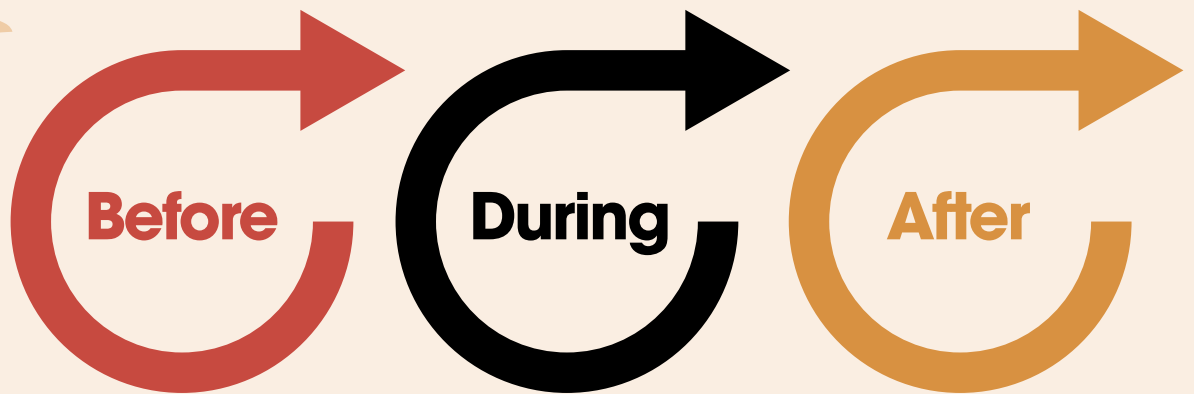
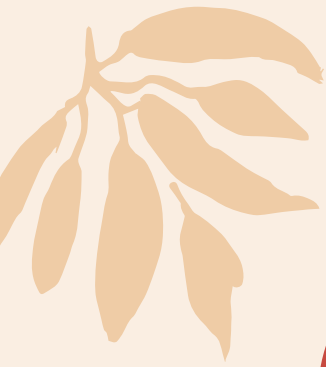
Levels of engagement

- Community-led (full decision-making power)
- Partnership (co-designed)
- Advisory/consultation (organisation obtains feedback)
- Individual (consumer-directed care)



Types of engagement

- Community initiated
- Co-design process
- Advisory committee
- Focus group
- Interview
- Consultation session



Before

- Be clear about the purpose of the engagement
- Where possible, engage at the beginning of the process
- Allow adequate time, respecting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultural knowledge and advice can be in high demand
- Ensure you have sufficient budget – like any specialised advice, honorariums and fees apply
- When inviting someone to engage, provide as much background information as possible
- Consider what the mutual benefit of the engagement is

During

- If in a group setting, ensure there is a conversation about how to maintain cultural safety within the group
- Use language that is accessible and easily understood (avoid jargon or acronyms)
- Be aware of power dynamics and encourage equal participation

After

- Provide opportunities for the participant to give feedback on their experience of the engagement
- Share engagement outcomes with the people involved, in a timely manner
- Maintain connection with the people who were involved in the consultation and let them know how their input impacted change



Feedback

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be invited to provide feedback about their experience and satisfaction with cohealth at regular intervals through accessible culturally responsive and safe processes. People can share their feedback in the following ways:

- Talk to a staff member
- Complete an online feedback form
- Phone email or write to our Quality Team
- Feedback forms (available at our service sites) and place in box in the waiting area

Feedback should be systematically captured and uploaded to cohealth's feedback and risk- management program (Riskman). The process to record and action feedback is outlined in cohealth's Client Feedback Policy and Procedure documents.

commonly used terminology

Term	Definition
Welcome to Country	A Welcome to Country is performed by a Traditional Custodian or Elder at the beginning of a formal event. It is to welcome people who are visiting, gathering or meeting on their land. It can be done through speech, dance, song or ceremony.
Acknowledgement of Country	An Acknowledgement of Country is a mark of respect for the Custodians of the land on which an event, gathering or meeting is taking place. It can be done by anyone.
Registered Aboriginal Parties (RAP)	Registered Aboriginal Parties are the recognised Traditional Custodians of an area. They have important roles and functions in managing and protecting Aboriginal cultural heritage.
Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP)	Reconciliation Australia's RAP Framework provides organisations with a structured approach to advance reconciliation. A RAP is a strategic document that includes practical actions that will drive reconciliation both internally and in the communities in which organisations operate.
Elder	An Aboriginal Elder is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs.
Traditional Custodian/Owner	A Traditional Custodian (also called Traditional Owner) is an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person or group directly descended from the original Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander inhabitants of a culturally defined area of land or Country. They have a cultural association with their Country, which derives from the traditions, observances, customs, beliefs or history of the original inhabitants of the area.
Koorie or Koori	Koori or Koorie is a term denoting an Aboriginal person of southern New South Wales or Victoria. It is not a synonym for 'Aboriginal'.
Kulin Nation	The Kulin Nations are the five Aboriginal tribes that traditionally lived in South-Central Victoria. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Boon Wurrung (Boon-wur-rung) – also referred to as Bunurong • Dja Dja Wurrung (Jar-Jar-Wur-rung) • Taungurung (Tung-ger-rung) • Wathaurong (Wath-er-rung) • Woiwurrung (Woy-wur-rung) – commonly known as Wurundjeri
Cultural awareness	Being aware of the similarities and differences that exist between two different cultures and the use of this sensitivity in effective communication and engagement.
Cultural safety	A culturally safe environment is spiritually, socially, physically and emotionally safe; where there is no assault, challenge or denial of identity of who people are, and what they need. It is defined by the persons experience of the service (not the provider), and by their ability to access services and to raise concerns (INWPCP & The Long Walk, 2019).
Self-determination	Where Aboriginal people and their communities make decisions, have a voice and lead on their own terms and use their own cultural values, models, paradigms and ways of working (Phillips, 2015).



References

Inner North West Primary Care Partnership and The Long Walk (2019). From Symbols to Systems: Strengthening Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural security in mainstream organisations.

Narragunnawali: Reconciliation in Education (n.d.), A Guide to Using Respectful and Inclusive Language and Terminology. Retrieved 7/4/2020 from www.narragunnawali.org.au/about/terminology-guide.

Phillips, G.L. (2015). Dancing with power: Aboriginal health, cultural safety and medical education, School of Psychological Sciences, Monash University, Clayton.

