

Respectful Language Guide

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Introduction

Using respectful and inclusive language is an important part of reconciliation and key to achieving our vision for a healthcare system free of racism. We can all work towards creating an environment where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples feel culturally safe, valued and respected by being proactive about educating and informing ourselves, and consistently using preferred terminology. Whether intentional or unintentional, racist, disrespectful or inappropriate language disempowers people and can have multiple long-term negative impacts on health and wellbeing, levels of job satisfaction and retention, attitudes and behaviours, and relationships. The way we speak to each other can create a culture in which people feel valued, respected, and part of the team (included), or it can create a culture in which people feel undervalued, disrespected, and out of place (excluded). In short, language matters.

While we don't always get it right, it is our responsibility to keep learning and improving. To support this, we've created a short guide to help you communicate clearly, consistently and respectfully through presentations, posters and resources.

A note on diversity

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are not a homogenous group. There is a diversity of opinions, perspectives and preferences regarding language and terminology. If you're not sure, please ask. If an individual or community's preferences differ to what's outlined below, please respect their preferences. This guide covers common terminology issues and has been developed in collaboration with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Steering Committee, but it is by no means exhaustive.

Preferred terms

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people(s)

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is the preferred term for general use across the college. Both 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' are acceptable, depending on the context.

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' is a collective name for the original people of Australia and their descendants, but it does not emphasise the diversity of languages, communities, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.

Adding an 's' – 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' – emphasises this diversity.

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' can be used to refer to more than one person.

For example:

- *'At the time of British colonisation, the population of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples consisted of many different groups or nations'*. Here, 'peoples' is used to describe the groups within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, each with their own distinct language, cultural practices and beliefs.
- *'We aim to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed at the company to reach population parity'*. In this instance, 'people' refers to more than one person.

It is inappropriate to use only the word 'Aboriginal' if you are also referring to Torres Strait Islander peoples. Unless you are referring specifically to Aboriginal people or peoples, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' should be used to ensure inclusivity of Torres Strait Islander peoples.

For example:

- *'Dr Marchesani has a special interest in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health'*.
- *'Most patients that visit the clinic in the Northern Territory town of Yulara are Aboriginal people'*.

Capitalisation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' and 'Indigenous' should always be capitalised. Use of lower case 'indigenous' is only appropriate when referring to entities such as indigenous plant life or animals. For example:

- *'flora and fauna that is indigenous to Australia.'*

Please also capitalise the following terms as a demonstration of respect:

- Elders
- Traditional Owners/Custodians
- Country (and corresponding terms such as 'Land,' when it is used in place of 'Country')
- Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country.

First Nations and First Peoples

Other terms such as 'First Nations' or 'First Peoples' are acceptable and appropriate terms broadly as they encompass the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities.

Unacceptable terms

Indigenous

Generally, the term 'Indigenous' should be avoided when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it diminishes individual and distinct identities and cultural groups. However, the use of 'Indigenous', capitalised, is appropriate when referring to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian people or when referring to an existing name, program, job title, unit, organisation or service. For example:

- *'There is a significant healthcare disparity between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and non-Indigenous Australians'*.

Deficit and dichotomous language

Throughout Australia's colonial history, deficit and dichotomous language has been used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This language is rooted in racist assumptions and understandings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and communities. When referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is therefore important to restructure this narrative by using strengths-based and empowering language. Examples of deficit and dichotomous language include:

- referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as 'they' or 'them'
- paternalistic and patronising terms like 'help' or 'give'
- victimising terms, such as 'disadvantaged' and 'marginalised'.

The acronym 'ATSI' or 'A&TSI'

The acronym 'ATSI' or 'A&TSI' should not be used. 'ATSI' is inappropriate and should be avoided when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Using this term can be offensive and does not respect the diverse and distinct identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and communities.

Other unacceptable terms

- Straight (i.e. misspelling Torres Strait Islander)
- Abbreviating First Nations to 1st Nations
- Aborigine(s)
- Aboriginals
- Blood quantum definitions, such as 'full-blood', 'part Aboriginal', 'half caste, and 'quarter caste'
- Native

Acknowledgement of Country

We / I acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Custodians of the land and waterways in which we live and work. We / I recognise their continuing connection to land, water and culture and pay our respects to Elders past, present, and emerging.