

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PROTOCOLS DOCUMENT



**PREPARED FOR**  
**PREPARED BY**

The South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI)  
The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective, January 2018

## Document Control

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1.0	13 Feb 2018	Protocols launched at SAHMRI, alongside the Reconciliation Action Plan
1.1	28 Feb 2018	Corrections to spelling of language names

### Cultural Sensitivity Statement

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this document may contain the names of deceased people.

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols, June 2017.

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective acknowledges and celebrates that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the Traditional Custodians of the land, known as Australia.

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the First Peoples of Australia and that within these two distinct cultural groups, there is great cultural diversity.

We acknowledge that SAHMRI is located on the traditional lands of the Kurna people and pay our respects to the Kurna people, Elders, past and present, their continuing connection to this land and thriving cultural practices and knowledge.

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective have developed these Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Protocols to guide and support SAHMRI in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities nationally. The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective comprised the following staff from respective language groups during the drafting of these protocols:

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# A FOREWORD FROM Alex Brown

When SAHMRI was first conceived and built, there was a strong commitment to ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing would form a key facet of the institutes' agenda. For some, this was a key signal that the research industry in this state at least, and hopefully across the country, was coming to terms with the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to the nations own prosperity and aspirations for a better future for all Australians.

At the start of this journey, we understood as a collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, that we held important responsibilities to each other, to the institute and to our communities. Much of this relates to the need for us to be accountable to the words we say, in the things we do and the way in which we do the work we are funded to undertake. This is no mean feat, and remains a constant challenge in our work and family lives.

Five years on, and I would like to think that Aboriginal Health has embedded itself in the institute's heart. There is much we can reflect on and be proud of. But we still have such a long way to go.

As we enter into the next part of SAHMRI's journey, it is important that we refocus on what we need to achieve in the years to come. A significant part of this is enabling the expertise and capacity of all of the institute's talent to make a contribution to Aboriginal health if they choose to do so. Part of this is ensuring that we are available to answer and provide guidance

to the many requests from researchers within and external to SAHMRI of how best to engage and conduct research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities. That people now think to ask is a blessing. But it also comes at a cost to us, as we weigh up our multiple responsibilities – to our colleagues, to science, to the pursuit of knowledge – all the while cognisant of the experiences, challenges, needs and aspirations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander interests.

These protocols, negotiated across many different staff and community perspectives, go some way to providing insights to those of you interested in making a contribution to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. We hope they provide some clarity for the hard questions you may have, some guidance as to appropriate terminology, and inform you as to some ways of working with our people. But they are merely a starting point. Working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities demands a commitment to a process of engagement, communication, learning, respectful equivalence and integrity. None of which can be covered in a document, or understood without walking together with our people. Everything we do is bound to the relationships we develop, the lessons we are open to learn, the stories that we remember of one another, and the care we give to curating the gifts our community give to us as researchers, clinicians and students.

We hope that these protocols help you to start your journey alongside us.



**Professor Alex Brown**  
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# RATIONALE

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have been the subjects of research by non-Aboriginal researchers. Compared to the overwhelming amount of research conducted over recent decades, the lack of tangible health and social benefits gained by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through research, is evidence that research has been for the interests and/or benefit of others.

Alternatively, the research previously conducted has largely been completed without input from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their perspectives on design, methodology, interpretation and translation. Health and medical research in particular, has a long record of researchers gathering information from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without gaining informed consent or consulting with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and organisations.<sup>(1)</sup> Rather than working in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research participants and being guided by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, researchers have tended to treat participants, as research objects.<sup>(1)</sup> These ways of doing research are not ethical and do not meet today's requirements. Only relatively recently have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' research priorities, needs and wants been considered.

These protocols have been developed to support SAHMRI staff to do health research in partnership with and work respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. They also provide guidance to SAHMRI on how to lead work that is sensitive and considerate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives.

These protocols have been developed with input from members of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective who represent diverse language groups. Each member of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective brings unique perspectives from their language group and as much as possible we have captured these views. We are also cognisant that the perspectives of many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not included within.

# PURPOSE OF THE PROTOCOLS

These Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols are a resource providing advice and guidance for staff when conducting business at SAHMRI. It is envisaged that these protocols will assist SAHMRI staff across the institute in addressing matters of cultural and relational significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The protocols address communication processes, relationships and activities to support the 'right way' of carrying out research and business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This set of protocols will assist SAHMRI in becoming a culturally competent and respectful working environment for Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff and students, guests and visitors to SAHMRI. They are a collection of live protocols rather than static and this collection will grow over time.

# BACKGROUND

## South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute

The South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) was established in 2009, as South Australia's first independent health and medical research institute. SAHMRI is unique amongst the Australian research institutes in that its founding members are the Government of South Australia and the three major South Australian universities: The University of Adelaide, the University of South Australia and Flinders University. SAHMRI focuses on the major health challenges facing the South Australian population. SAHMRI's seven research themes reflect these challenges: Cancer; Heart Health; Healthy Mothers, Babies and Children; Infection and Immunity; Mind and Brain; and Nutrition and Metabolism. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is considered a central priority; it is being addressed through several units of SAHMRI as well as being woven across all research themes and activities.

Aboriginal health within SAHMRI is established to advance the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, both in South Australia and nationally. SAHMRI is already engaged in many initiatives to build its organisational diversity and cultural competence across themes.

## Wardliparingga Aboriginal Research Unit

The Wardliparingga Aboriginal Research Unit (hereafter Wardliparingga) is the Aboriginal Health theme of SAHMRI. Wardliparingga is unique in Australia in that approximately 50% of its staff are Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people employed across a variety of research roles. A significant role of Wardliparingga is to build the capacity of all staff to work competently and in a culturally safe way with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Wardliparingga to date has led the development of key policy documents and strategies that provide guidance to all researchers in carrying out respectful and effective research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families. These key documents and activities include:

- The development and implementation of the South Australian Aboriginal Health Research Accord (hereafter the Accord)<sup>(2)</sup>;
- Demonstrated cultural competence through successfully attracting, recruiting and retaining Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
- The establishment and support of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective.

## SAHMRI Indigenous Collective

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective aims to take on the greater role of ensuring that SAHMRI is a culturally acceptable, accountable, strong and respected place for the employment and participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and that research conducted by SAHMRI adheres to the Accord.<sup>(2)</sup>

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective was established in 2014 and has six objectives:

1. To provide an opportunity for all Indigenous staff to come together to discuss cultural issues, research strategy, community engagement, leadership and workforce development.
2. To provide guidance and leadership to develop a sector-leading organisation for employment, professional development, and mentoring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and non-Aboriginal people working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research.

3. To promote high quality research with partners across SAHMRI's research themes.
4. To maximise opportunities and provide guidance for translating research to better meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other vulnerable populations.
5. To provide strategic guidance and cultural advice to the SAHMRI Executive and Management teams on the development of SAHMRI-wide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policies.
6. To assist SAHMRI and collaborating partners in designing and delivering research that is accountable to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as per the Accord.

Some of the outputs of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective include:

- Developing and implementing the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective work plan that has four priority areas (Cultural protocols and policy, Research that makes a difference, Capacity development, Accountability);
- Initiating the establishment and implementation of the SAHMRI Reconciliation Working Group and Reconciliation Action Plan;
- The development and piloting of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness program; and,
- Documenting this set of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols.

Membership of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective is open to all Indigenous staff and students, including Indigenous people on placement, exchange or visiting.



*The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective*

# INTRODUCTION TO ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PEOPLE

For thousands of years, what is now known as Australia was occupied only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. At the time of colonisation some 230 years ago it was estimated that between 750,000 and 1 million people lived on the lands and surrounding islands.<sup>(3)</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lives centred on an intimate cultural relationship with the land, sea and the natural environment as well as intimate knowledge of kinship structures within families, clans, communities and nations. Whilst there are shared experiences of colonisation, there is great cultural diversity within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population. The map is an attempt to represent recorded Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language groups across Australia (Figure 1). Prior to colonisation there were an estimated 250 language groups across the continent and in current times there is an estimated 120 of those languages still spoken.<sup>(4)</sup> Each colour on the map represents an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, referred to as a language group, because each group had their own spoken language (Figure 1). The red lines represent general clusters of dialects whereby people in different language groups may understand each other (Figure 1).<sup>(4)</sup>

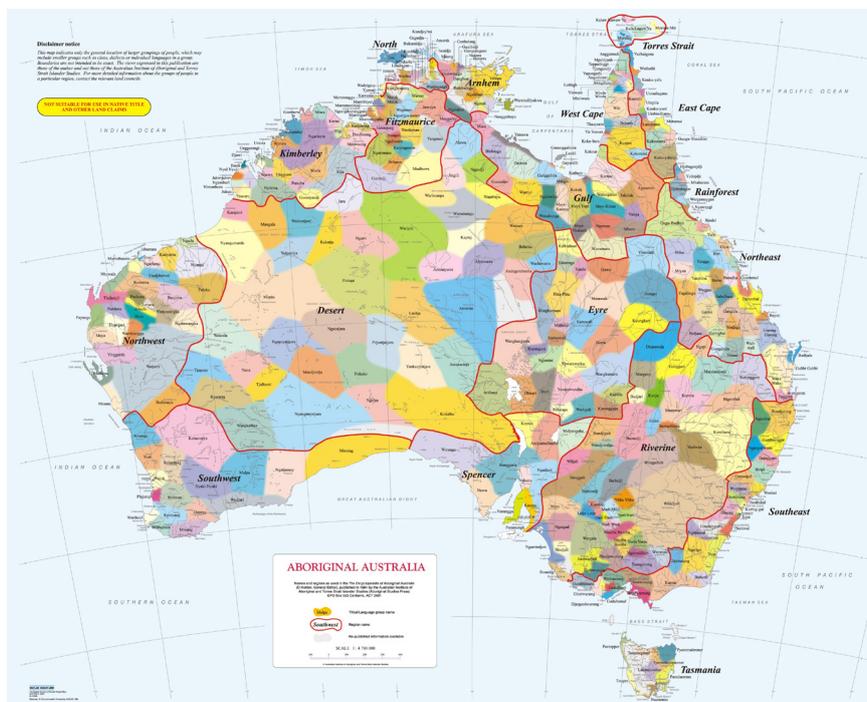


Figure 1: David R Horton (creator), © Aboriginal Studies Press, AIATSIS, and Auslig/Sinclair, Knight, Merz, 1996.

Today Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remain diverse with many distinct culture groups across Australia. Torres Strait Islander people are a distinct cultural group to Aboriginal people, also comprising of language groups with distinct cultural practices. In 2016, the estimated total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population was 649 200, representing 2.8% of the total Australian population.<sup>(5)</sup> The greatest proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live in major cities. In addition, a greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Aboriginal people, live in regional and remote areas of Australia. The median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 23 years compared to 38 years for non-Aboriginal Australians.<sup>(5)</sup>

The relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the environment, language, sacred sites and the education of young people are important elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander society, and were common across language groups.<sup>(3)</sup>

# South Australian Aboriginal Language Groups

South Australia is the traditional lands of many Aboriginal language groups, including Kurna, Narungga, Ngarrindjeri, Peramangk, Bungandidj, Bindjali, Ngargad, Meru, Danggali, Wiljali, Ngadjuri, Nukunu, Barngarla, Nawo, Wirangu, Mirning, Ngalea, Kokatha, Kuyani, Adnyamathanha, Malyangapa, Pirlatapa, Yandruwandha, Yawarrawarrka, Yarluyandi, Wangkangurru, Dieri, Dirari, Arabana, Antikirinya, Pitjantjatjara, and Yankunytjatjara.

## Kurna People

Kurna is one language group in South Australia. SAHMRI is located on the lands of the Kurna people. The Kurna people are the original people of Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains Regions. Within the city of Adelaide and its parklands there are many sites which were, and still are significant locations for the Kurna people, known as Kurna Tarntanya (red kangaroo place). Prior to colonisation this location was an open grassy plain with trees and shrubs, with the environment being managed by the Kurna for hundreds of generations. Kurna country stretched north and south from Tarntanya, through to the foothills of the ranges which border the east of the city.<sup>(6)</sup>

The Kurna people speak a complex language and they share a deep understanding of the environment. The education of young people is a critical element of Kurna life; it is more than just understanding the environment, it is also important for access to food, shelter, tools and medicines. The Kurna peoples' spirituality is connected to the environment, plants, animals and stars.<sup>(6)</sup> Adelaide and the greater Adelaide Plains area are alive with the presence of the Kurna ancestors, such as the Tjilbruke.<sup>(6)</sup>

The SAHMRI building is located on the River Torrens or Karrawirraparri (red gum forest river) as it is known by the Kurna people. The river was given an English name the River Torrens in 1836 by Colonel William Light in honour of Sir Robert Torrens who was the chairman of the South Australian Colonisation Commission.<sup>(7)</sup> Where SAHMRI is located was an important meeting place for the Kurna people, with plentiful access to fish, fresh water and other food sources.<sup>(6)</sup> SAHMRI is located close to the River, where several important Kurna sites are still recognised.

## Significance of Place and Country

The significance and meaning of Place is more than just custodianship or connection to land, as Professor Mick Dodson explains:

*“When we talk about traditional ‘Place’...we mean something beyond the dictionary definition of the word. For Aboriginal Australians...we might mean homeland, or tribal or clan area and we might mean more than just a Place on the map. For us, Place is a word for all the values, Places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with that area and its features. It describes the entirety of our ancestral domains. While they may all no longer necessarily be the title-holders to land, Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Australians are still connected to the Place of their ancestors and most consider themselves the custodians or caretakers of their land.”<sup>(8)</sup>*

## Public and private knowledge

The sharing of knowledge is the cornerstone of research. In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures there are public and private knowledges.<sup>(9)</sup> Public knowledge can be shared at the discretion of individuals and communities. However, private knowledge relates to an individual's cultural standing within the Aboriginal community. There may be instances when information is withheld from researchers and not shared outside of authorised people within the community. Alternatively, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may share private knowledge that is culturally sensitive, if they feel it is integral to meet the requirements of the research. In these cases, it is important for researchers to obtain a clear understanding from participants, about what information is to be kept private and the information that can be publicly distributed.

## APPLYING THE PROTOCOLS

Members of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective have learned protocols through listening, observing and practicing. Throughout this document we share our knowledge to improve the benefits of research as well as the way we do business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These protocols are a guide only - the best way to practice protocol is to discuss your aims or intentions with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. With regard to work conducted by SAHMRI, the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective are well-placed to provide such guidance.

Thoughtful planning to respectfully carry out these protocols will avoid the embarrassment of last minute arrangements going wrong and will ensure the successful first steps in engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will result in long-term positive relationships and outcomes.

# PROTOCOLS

## Welcome to Country

### IMPORTANCE

Welcoming visitors to Country has been practiced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for thousands of years. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who travelled across land into another language group's Country were required to seek permission to enter. Once permission was granted by the local group, a Welcome to Country would be conducted. This included the offering of a safe passage and protection of spiritual well-being during their journey through the local group's Country. While visitors were provided with a safe passage, there was also an obligation to show respect for the local protocols and rules of the local group while on their Country.<sup>(8)</sup>

In contemporary Australia, the Welcome to Country ceremony has been adapted to suit contemporary life. However, the gesture and meaning of Welcome to Country ceremonies i.e. welcoming visitors and offering safe passage remain the same today.<sup>(8)</sup>

### WHEN

Welcome to Country ceremonies are essential for the most important of occasions particularly at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focused events. They can also be arranged for other occasions, such as meetings and welcoming Indigenous people to SAHMRI and can take many forms including singing, dancing, smoking ceremonies or a speech in traditional language and/or English.<sup>(10)</sup> They may be arranged by one or more people.

There is an added level of importance if the meeting is hosting Indigenous visitors to SAHMRI, as Indigenous cultures world-wide have practiced a welcome or greeting to their lands for thousands of years. This practice is considered an important and respectful cultural protocol worldwide, and ensures Indigenous visitors are welcomed properly. To ignore this protocol may cause embarrassment to the visitors, or embarrassment to SAHMRI staff when asked about Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. The planning of a Welcome to Country should be incorporated into the organising committee's timeframes and budget considerations.

**International meetings:** International meetings being convened by SAHMRI must include a formal Welcome to Country by a Kurna traditional custodian. A Welcome to Country is to be included at the beginning of the formal event.

**National meetings:** National meetings and other events with a national or state-wide focus being convened by SAHMRI, must include a formal Welcome to Country conducted by a traditional custodian. A Welcome to Country is to be included at the beginning of the formal event.

Examples of important occasions are the opening of a building, launch of a state-wide or national program, or to open a state-wide or national conference or symposium.

### WHO

A Welcome to Country can only be conducted by an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who is a custodian of the Country on which the event is being held. Often Elders will do a Welcome to Country and some younger people may also. Individuals and language groups will have differing practices regarding who can do a Welcome to Country. Advice from local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people should be sought as to the most suitable representative to do a Welcome to Country.

A list of Kurna people or groups who provide a Welcome to Country is available at [cityofadelaide.com.au](http://cityofadelaide.com.au).



## HOW

A Welcome to Country occurs at the beginning of a formal event. Inviting traditional custodians to carry out the Welcome to Country will require planning and budget considerations, depending on the type of ceremony. Confirm the cost with the individual or group performing the ceremony.

Once you have established a relationship with Aboriginal individuals or groups in South Australia who do Welcome to Country ceremonies, confirm with them how to best approach them to arrange a ceremony for future important occasions. Finally, it is helpful to provide the representative who will do the Welcome to Country with information on the nature of the welcoming or meeting or event.

# Acknowledgement of Country

## IMPORTANCE

Since colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have experienced a long history of exclusion. For example, Australian history books do not acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' experiences of colonisation, including forced removal from Country and removal of children, a great loss of life and no legal and democratic rights.<sup>(11)</sup> Including recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in events, meetings and national symbols is one way of reducing the exclusion that has been so devastating for this nation.

Recognising local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and connection to Country is so important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. When meetings are held, acknowledgement of the traditional custodians of the place is a very significant and important part of formal recognition of Aboriginal people. An Acknowledgement of Country is an opportunity for staff to show respect for traditional custodians and the continuing connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country.

## WHEN

If the opening of an event does not have a Welcome to Country, a formal Acknowledgement of Country must be given. An Acknowledgement of Country must be held wherever large meetings or events, such as showcases, symposia, or fundraising are being hosted by SAHMRI, regardless of whether it has an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander focus, with external guests and particularly international guests. Individuals may choose to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the Country prior to their presentation or discussion.

The Acknowledgement of Country protocol applies for SAHMRI meetings or events being held in various locations across South Australia.

As a SAHMRI theme or Committee you may choose to open team meetings with an Acknowledgement of Country as a sign of ongoing respect for the traditional custodians of the land on which SAHMRI is located, regardless of whether Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people are present.

**SAHMRI written documents:** Written documents developed on behalf of SAHMRI, for example: Strategic Plans, Annual Reports, the SAHMRI Community handbook, are to incorporate an Acknowledgement of Country, which should identify the traditional custodians, the Kurna people, of the land that SAHMRI is built on and the location being the Adelaide Region.

**Public events hosted by SAHMRI:** All SAHMRI public events should be opened with an Acknowledgement of Country.

**Building tours:** Regular public tours of the SAHMRI building should provide an Acknowledgement of Country and talk about the significance of the location of the SAHMRI building to the Kurna people. This approach provides an educational experience to the public and reinforces SAHMRI's commitment to its Reconciliation agenda.

## WHO

An Acknowledgement of Country can be made by anyone.

## HOW

There is no set procedure or wording for an Acknowledgement of Country.<sup>(8)</sup> An Acknowledgement of Country is generally offered at the beginning of a meeting, speech or formal occasion.

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective recommend the following statement be used for an Acknowledgement of Country for meetings being held in Adelaide and the Adelaide Plains region:

*We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we are meeting upon here today, the Kurna people. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the Kurna people to their Place. We also pay respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples visiting/ attending from other areas of South Australia / Australia present here.*

The above can be adapted for events other than meetings:

*SAHMRI is located on the traditional lands of the Kurna people. The SAHMRI community acknowledges and pays respect to the Kurna people as the traditional custodians of the Adelaide region. We also acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and the relationship of the Kurna people to their Place. We pay our respects to the Kurna ancestors and the living Kurna people.*

For locations outside of Adelaide, the above Acknowledgement of Country can be used replacing the Kurna traditional custodians with the relevant traditional custodians:

*We acknowledge and respect the traditional custodians whose ancestral lands we are meeting upon here today, the \_\_\_\_\_ people. We acknowledge the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of the \_\_\_\_\_ people to their Country. We also pay respects to the cultural authority of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people visiting/ attending from other areas of South Australia / Australia present here.*

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language group map (Figure 1) demonstrates the diversity of language groups across South Australia. The above Acknowledgement of Country wording is provided for use / adaptation as appropriate for events and gatherings that take place outside the Adelaide metropolitan area. This statement does not preclude direct naming and acknowledgement of traditional custodians where this is specifically known.<sup>(10, 11)</sup> It is the responsibility of the SAHMRI staff organising the event to familiarise themselves with the traditional custodians of the location of the meeting so appropriate Acknowledgement of Country can be made. This can occur by making direct contact with staff of the local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander organisations in the town or area where the event is to be held. Also, SAHMRI staff can seek advice from the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective when convening a meeting outside of the Adelaide metropolitan area, or if staff are unable to determine the traditional custodians of the land on which the meeting is being hosted.

The Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies have developed an online interactive tool, which can assist with the identification of different language groups across Australia. It can be found here: <https://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/aiatsis-map-indigenous-australia>

# Appropriate Terminology when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

## IMPORTANCE

There is a history of policies and practices that have harmed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, used language that was discriminatory and derogatory and portrayed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as second-class citizens. The continued use of this language and slang, is absolutely unacceptable and is offensive. Use of such language has detrimental impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people today.

There are some common 'mistakes' made by people when talking or writing about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which can cause offence and embarrassment, and can be easily avoided.

The purpose of this section is to provide guidance to avoid these common mistakes in the use of language and appropriate terminology when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities. The terminology recommended reflects South Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community perspectives on acceptable language.

## WHEN

This guide is to be used for both internal and external communications including: research proposals, ethics applications, manuscripts, reports, publications, social media and media releases.

## WHO

All SAHMRI staff are responsible for using appropriate terminology relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

## HOW

Questions regarding appropriate terminology can be sought through the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective. Some common terminology guidance is provided below.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:** is used when referring to the First Peoples of all the lands and seas now known as Australia. Individuals may identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander or both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander. Individuals may also refer to themselves by their language group, for example, Kurna person. The acronym ATSI is not acceptable.

**Aboriginal:** is used when referring to the First Peoples of mainland Australia and those of surrounding islands who identify as Aboriginal. Aboriginal is always used in South Australia. The correct terminology is an Aboriginal person or Aboriginal people - NOT Abo, Aborigine, Aborigines or Aborigines. An exception is if they are a Torres Strait Islander person (see below). Capital A is always used for Aboriginal.

**Torres Strait Islander:** is used when referring to people who identify as Torres Strait Islander - NOT TI or TSI or Islander or Aboriginal.

**Indigenous:** is capitalised as a sign of respect and used in this document when referring to global Indigenous populations. The use of the term 'Indigenous' has evolved through international law. It acknowledges a particular relationship of Indigenous first inhabitants to the territory from which they originate.

**Non-Aboriginal or non-Indigenous:** is used when referring to people who are not of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent. In South Australia, the term non-Aboriginal is preferred to non-Indigenous.



**First Peoples or First Nations:** used interchangeably to refer to global Indigenous populations.

**When writing:** in documents relating to the South Australian population, the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia recommend, '*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and hereafter Aboriginal people*'. For populations across Australia, '*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*'. For global populations (including or excluding Australia), '*Indigenous people*' is appropriate to use. Of course, these are not always rigid and are sometimes determined by other factors, such as journal definitions or the community language group.

**Offensive term:** these terms must not be used in any context including social media: Abo, Aborigine, Aborigines, ATSI, coon, native, blacks, mixed blood, half-caste, quarter-caste, full-blood, part-Aboriginal, 25%, 50% Aboriginal (blood quantum).<sup>(12)</sup>

# Indigenous Guests, including Research Collaborators, hosted by SAHMRI

## IMPORTANCE

Welcoming guests in a cultural ceremony is practiced by Indigenous peoples globally and is traditional practice. It demonstrates that SAHMRI (as an organisation) is respectful of local Aboriginal people and cultural protocols and more broadly global Indigenous populations.

International Indigenous guests to SAHMRI will anticipate a program that incorporates a Welcome to Country.

A Visitors Book is available and should be offered to Indigenous guests to sign.

## WHEN

This cultural protocol should be applied for all Indigenous guests regardless of where they come from, e.g. local, intrastate, national and international.

## WHO

The SAHMRI theme hosting the guest is responsible for implementing this protocol.

## HOW

Be guided by the significance of the occasion or the scale of the event to determine the appropriate cultural formality. Advice can be sought from SAHMRI Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff or the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective about the appropriate cultural formality. Some guidance is provided below.

### ***International Indigenous Dignitaries and Guests and National Indigenous Dignitaries***

The development of a formal cultural program is essential when hosting Indigenous dignitaries and guests, from overseas or Indigenous dignitaries from interstate. This requires time and planning beforehand; advice and guidance can be sought from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, Wardliparingga Aboriginal Health Theme and the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective.

All International Indigenous dignitaries must be greeted on arrival and receive a formal Welcome to Country by a traditional custodian and a formal ceremony must be conducted.

On arrival and where possible, wweffort will be made to introduce the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective as a sign of respect for cultural protocols to both guests and staff of SAHMRI.

A formal cultural program should include the theme hosting the international and national dignitary or guest to:

- Arrange a formal Welcome to Country by traditional custodians on the guest's morning of arrival.
- Introduce guests to the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective during the first part of their visit to SAHMRI (including if they are guests of Wardliparingga) to acknowledge the importance of cultural protocols.
- Hold a morning or afternoon tea and invite the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective, on the guest's first day.
- Present the guest with an Australian Indigenous gift.
- Invite the guest to sign the Visitors Book as a record of their visit to SAHMRI.

### ***Interstate Indigenous Guests hosted by SAHMRI***

All Indigenous guests visiting SAHMRI from interstate must be afforded the appropriate cultural protocol on their first visit, and a formal cultural program be conducted.

Formal cultural program should include the theme hosting interstate guests to:

- Organise either a Welcome to Country or do a formal Acknowledgement of Country, based on the significance and scale of the occasion.
- Organise an introduction to the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective on the first day of their visit to Wardliparingga.
- Hold a morning or afternoon tea and invite the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective on the guest's first day.

### ***Intrastate or local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Guests (including research collaborators and advisory group members)***

Formal cultural program should include the theme hosting local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander guest to:

- Arrange for the guest to be introduced to the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective on their first visit.

# Elders

## IMPORTANCE

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, Elders are important and significant members of the community and are always consulted and treated with the upmost respect. Elders are considered to be the knowledge holders of culture and are a crucial part of the fabric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander life. The work of Wardliparingga and SAHMRI must be conducted in true and equal partnership with the Elders.

## WHEN

Include Elders in your community engagement activities during the planning phases of your research and your research governance structure. Out of respect, researchers should introduce themselves and the project to Elders in the community.

## WHO

*"An Aboriginal (or Torres Strait Islander) Elder is someone who has gained recognition as a custodian of knowledge and lore, and who has permission to disclose knowledge and beliefs. In some instances, Aboriginal people above a certain age will refer to themselves as Elders. It is important to understand that, in traditional Aboriginal culture, age alone doesn't necessarily mean that one is recognised as an Elder. Aboriginal people traditionally refer to an Elder as 'Aunty' or 'Uncle'. However, it is recommended that non-Aboriginal people check the appropriateness of their use of these terms".(13)*

## HOW

Elders will often sit on community councils or other community committees and are often accessible through these structures.

Advice can be sought from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research staff or advisory structures that you may have established as part of your project. In addition, advice can be sought from the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective in regard to suitable mechanisms to engage with Elders, or through the Council of Aboriginal Elders of South Australia. Information about the Aboriginal Council of Elders can be found here: <http://www.caesa.org/about.htm>



# Visiting Remote Aboriginal Communities

## IMPORTANCE

Aboriginal protocols must be followed when planning a visit, to remote Aboriginal communities for research studies. Aboriginal communities have times of the year for cultural practices and during these times are not available for visitors. Also there are times that can be dictated by seasonal events. A permit will be required to enter some remote Aboriginal communities and needs to be arranged well in advance. Researchers who are members of the host community will not require a permit.

Remote communities have a lot of visitors throughout the year, therefore communication, negotiation and well-advanced planning are critical for respectful engagement. Researchers need to be mindful that Aboriginal communities will have priorities above research and at certain times, for example, during sorry business (passing of a loved one) or an unplanned community event. Therefore, (even with the best communication and planning), research visits to remote Aboriginal communities may need to be postponed or researchers may need to leave the community earlier than expected.

## WHEN

When a research study requires input from people living in remote areas, consultation must occur in the community, unless otherwise advised or agreed to by the community.

Contact the Land Council, Aboriginal Community Council or Aboriginal service you are aiming to meet with for guidance on the appropriate time to visit.

## WHO

It is important to consider who in the study team is best placed to consult with Aboriginal community members. Researchers must be aware that when they discuss projects, women researchers should work with women and men should work with men. In some instances, researchers are able to cross gender lines but only if it is public knowledge. In the case of private knowledge, it must be man to man and woman to woman.

Contact the local community Land Councillor, local Community Council or the Aboriginal community-controlled health service to seek advice on the local protocol for visiting the community.

## HOW

It is strongly recommended that an Aboriginal team member is part of the visiting research team.

Visits to Aboriginal communities must be planned well in advance to fit in with community activities. Be mindful of the number of researchers within your research group visiting at one time but also across all SAHMRI research groups. Planning joint visits can be a more efficient use of the community's time.

For guidance on how to obtain a permit, contact the local Aboriginal Community Council or Land Council.

# Use of Aboriginal Language

## IMPORTANCE

The practice of speaking Aboriginal languages has been a sensitive issue, given the historical trauma many Aboriginal people have experienced by authorities denying or restricting the use of language. This has resulted in significant loss of languages and has contributed to experiences of profound grief and loss for many Aboriginal people.

Aboriginal language has been used for research titles, labelling research outputs, names of buildings, roads, parks, rooms, etc. This has not always occurred in consultation with Aboriginal people and thus at times has resulted in unintended adverse consequences. There is a respectful and safe way in which to identify the use of Aboriginal language within research and this protocol provides guidance on how to achieve this.

## WHEN

It is appropriate for Aboriginal staff to share language words and symbols in meetings and discussions about research.

Aboriginal language may be used by Aboriginal research participants. One example is where no English words translate or when English is not a first language. If explanations are needed they should be given by an interpreter. It is essential that an accredited interpreter of the relevant Aboriginal language is used to convert Aboriginal language to English.

Researchers may want to use Aboriginal language in their project or have been guided by Advisory or participants to do so.

## WHO

It is inappropriate for Aboriginal language to be used by non-Aboriginal people without permission from Aboriginal Community Elders / leaders or community members with authority, particularly when dealing with research participants or patients, community reference group members and Aboriginal staff, unless the person is an accredited interpreter of identified Aboriginal languages.

## HOW

A South Australian Aboriginal languages and interpreters guide is available on the Department of State Development website.<sup>(14)</sup>

The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective can refer you to individuals or groups that can assist with Aboriginal languages.

# Sorry Business

## IMPORTANCE

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a reduced life expectancy of 10 years, compared to non-Aboriginal people. As a result of premature loss of life, attending funerals is a very common experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. 'Sorry Business' takes precedence over everything else and must be respected by those working in or with the community. Sorry business affects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, reference groups, businesses and organisations.

## WHEN

Sorry business occurs with the passing of any Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person. When a person passes away who has had a significant role in the community, made a significant contribution to health, social determinants of health and/or maintaining and sharing cultural knowledge, additional community and organisational responses may be enacted. For example, SAHMRI may lower the flags, as a sign of respect.

## WHO

SAHMRI Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff should work with their supervisor to identify the necessary time needed for them to participate in sorry business.

When required, with regards to Wardliparingga's response to sorry business, the Theme Leader will work with the senior staff of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective to determine the appropriate sorry business response, as sorry business responses are not the same for everyone.

When a SAHMRI-wide response is appropriate, senior Aboriginal staff will work together with the Executive Director of SAHMRI to implement the appropriate sorry business response.

It is important during these times, that all staff (Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Aboriginal staff) are supported and supportive of each other. SAHMRI has an Employee Assistance Program that is accessible to staff and their families, which is a confidential service for up to five visits, at no cost.

## HOW

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including staff members, may have specific cultural obligations during sorry business. It is essential that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are afforded the opportunity to meet cultural obligations.

Wardliparingga has practiced respect during sorry business in the past by:

- Encouraging or approving staff attendance at the funeral and/or sorry business activities
- Closing the Unit on the day of the funeral as a sign of respect to the person and family, and to allow Wardliparingga staff to pay their respects.

SAHMRI staff who have built relationships with the individual who has passed, their family and/or community may show their condolences. If unsure of how to do this, the senior Aboriginal staff of the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective can be consulted.

Non-Aboriginal staff may find it difficult to know what to say to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff and colleagues during sorry business. It is supportive for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff that non-Aboriginal colleagues share their condolences and check colleagues are OK.

Some language groups also have a protocol that when someone passes the use of their name, image and voice may no longer be used. Some families may retract this at a time appropriate to them. Ensure you consider the use of name, images, voice and video recordings of those who have passed and seek approval for future use of this material from the person's immediate family. If unsure, senior Aboriginal staff must be asked for advice on sorry business protocols.

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Flags

## IMPORTANCE

Flying the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags every day demonstrates SAHMRI's commitment and recognition of the First Peoples of Australia. Flying the flags is a highly visible symbol of respect. It promotes a sense of partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, a commitment towards reconciliation and closing the gap in life expectancy and a welcoming environment.

Two flags represent the two distinct cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These are representative of the unique identities of the two cultural groups. Within the two cultural groups there are hundreds of language groups and it is important to acknowledge the diversity of language and cultural practices across Australia, and that some language groups may have their own flag.

In 1995, both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags were recognised as official flags of Australia under Commonwealth legislation.<sup>(15)</sup>

The Aboriginal Flag was designed by Harold Thomas, a Luritja man from Central Australia. The colours of the flag represent:



- Black: the Aboriginal people of Australia
- Yellow: the Sun, the giver of life and protector
- Red: the red earth, red ochre and a spiritual relationship to the land.

The flag was first flown at Victoria Square in Adelaide on National Aborigines (sic) Day, 12 July 1971, after which it was chosen as the flag for the Aboriginal Tent Embassy in 1972.<sup>(15)</sup>

The Torres Strait Islander flag was designed by the late Bernard Namok from Thursday Island. The flag was recognised by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission in June 1992 and given equal prominence with the Aboriginal flag.<sup>(15)</sup>

The meaning of the Torres Strait Islander flag is represented through:



- Green: the land
- Blue: the sea
- White: peace
- Black: the Torres Strait Islander people

At the centre of the Torres Strait Islander flag is a dhari (headdress), which represents the people of the Torres Strait Islands. The five-pointed star in the middle of the dhari represents the five major island groups, as well as the importance of stars for navigational purposes.

## WHEN

SAHMRI currently flies both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags.

Lowering of the Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander flags to occur:

- As a mark of respect for the passing of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander Community member who is significant to SAHMRI and or our staffing, and
- In the event of the passing of a significant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community member,

In line with the Australian flag protocol, flags on the grounds of SAHMRI will be flown at half-mast on the day of the passing and the day of the funeral. The flags will be raised no earlier than first light and will be lowered no later than dusk.<sup>(16)</sup>

## **WHO**

The SAHMRI Executive will decide outside of the Australian flag protocol<sup>(16)</sup>, when the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags are flown. The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective is responsible for advising of the passing of a significant Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander community member.

## **HOW**

There are four flagpoles at the front of SAHMRI, on one each of these fly the Aboriginal and the Torres Strait Islander flags.

Flags are flown in line with the Australian flag protocol.<sup>(16)</sup>

# Significant Events and Dates in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Calendar

## IMPORTANCE

There are dates of significance in the annual calendar to celebrate and commemorate events of importance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Celebrations are focused on the preservation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture, and significant milestones in the Australian political sphere relating to recognition, land and human rights. There are also significant dates to commemorate the injustices of Australian policies that have resulted in the forced removal of children from families, segregation and assimilation, and to remember those who were directly subjected to these policies and all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have been and may continue to be effected by these.

## WHEN

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

The first national public apology by the Australian government occurred on 13 February 2008.<sup>(17)</sup>

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

National Sorry Day acknowledges the impact of the Australian government policy that sanctioned the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from families. This date was first commemorated on 26 May 1998, following the release of the Bringing Them Home report.<sup>(17)</sup>

### ***National Reconciliation Week - 27 May to 3 June:***

Is in recognition of 27 May as the anniversary of the 1967 Referendum which successfully removed from the Constitution clauses that discriminated against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, and 3 June as the anniversary of the High Court decision in the Eddie Mabo land rights case of 1992.<sup>(17)</sup>

### ***NAIDOC Week - Second Sunday in July to the following Sunday, nominated week:***

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' Day of Celebration (NAIDOC) week is held every year to celebrate and promote a greater understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and cultures - the oldest surviving cultures in the world.<sup>(17)</sup>

## WHO

These dates of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are a way for anyone to show respect and recognition of the events that have occurred.

It is important that SAHMRI recognise the importance of dates of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and allow staff to attend events (where possible).

## HOW

SAHMRI through the implementation of the Reconciliation Action Plan may hold events to recognise these dates. For dates of national importance, it is essential to have appropriate representation from both the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (where possible). In the past, the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective, have held events at SAHMRI for national reconciliation week and NAIDOC week, and may hold events in the future.

On the national days of significance, there are opportunities for anyone to attend state-wide events, such as the Apology breakfast and the NAIDOC family fun day. Most Aboriginal organisations will also host events on certain dates of significance, where they invite community members and organisational partners and colleagues.

# GUIDANCE ON DIRECT RESEARCH-RELATED TOPICS

This section provides researchers with information on matters that need to be implemented when conducting ethical research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## Potential Aboriginal Health Research Ideas / Proposals

When SAHMRI and external researchers have a research idea that involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants, and do not have established relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and stakeholders, counsel should be sought from the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective to ensure that the research meets the priorities of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Considerable work has already been undertaken in identifying Aboriginal community research priorities in South Australia and is available within the 'Next Steps' Report.<sup>(18)</sup> The SAHMRI Indigenous Collective can provide advice to researchers in regard to consultation, engagement and working in equal partnership to ensure the process meets Aboriginal ethical requirements and the principles of the South Australia Aboriginal Health Research Accord.<sup>(2)</sup>

## Aboriginal Community Reference Group Members

In conducting respectful research the 'right way', community reference groups are established for all major projects. SAHMRI staff are responsible for ensuring that all members of Aboriginal community reference groups are introduced to the SAHMRI Indigenous Collective, as a formal process during the first meeting of the reference group, irrespective of the theme leading the research. If an introduction cannot occur at the first meeting, then it must occur as soon as reasonably possible. This introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff ensures the protocol of greeting each other and making kinship connections, which strengthens the ties to enhance the quality of the research.

## Conference Presentations

SAHMRI researchers presenting at state, national or international conferences, as outlined in this document should acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which they are meeting.



## Aboriginal Health Specific Seminars

Aboriginal research is best presented by Aboriginal researchers or community members who have participated in the research. Aboriginal health research presented in isolation, without Aboriginal involvement, would be diametrically opposed to the principles of the Accord.<sup>(2)</sup> SAHMRI through its commitment to reconciliation, supports self-determination and capacity strengthening of all members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce, wherever possible.

Protocols must be adhered to, and the appropriate staff to present information should be considered in the right context. For example, consider gender sensitivities relating to the specific health condition, level of cultural knowledge relating to understanding of the topic and the community role or responsibility of an individual.

## International and National Conference Presentations

SAHMRI staff submitting abstracts at international and national conferences must consider how they will ensure the involvement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community reference group members (including as presenters) and staff. The joint presentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research is considered best practice and demonstrates equal partnerships. Including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community involvement is to be considered and factored into grant applications, including conference presentations.

## Health Research Ethics

Research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should follow the guidance of the Accord<sup>(2)</sup> and the NHMRC Ethical Guidelines<sup>(19)</sup>. For research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that is conducted in South Australia, approval must be sought from the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics Committee. For more information on the Aboriginal Health Research Ethics committee: <http://ahcsa.org.au/research-overview/ethical-review-ahrec/>

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