



# Editorial style guide for content on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health

June 2024

This style guide is specific to the Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care.

Web content on health.gov.au uses [plain English](#) and usually follows the style choices of the [Australian Government Style Manual](#). The Style Manual has a specific section on [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#).

When creating this guidance we reviewed several guides and then consulted with the department's National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Staff Network. **The final guidance differs in places from other style guides, but is approved usage for the department.**

In all content, aim to use [strengths-based language](#) rather than focusing on 'problems'.

## Referring to people

### Use

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** – Use this as first choice in most cases. Refers to a collective of individual people from different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations across Australia.

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples** – Refers to the collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations across Australia.

**First Nations people** – While 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is first choice, 'First Nations' is interchangeable and can be used when space is limited (for example, in website navigation menus). Take care with substituting 'First Nations' if could lead to confusion (because First Nations can be used to describe Indigenous peoples from across the world). For example, if a health service is only available to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (such as the MBS item 715 – Health Assessment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People), changing this to 'First Nations' could imply that it is available to other First Nations peoples (such as Māori people).

### First Nations Peoples

**Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people** – Use in contexts where it is important to acknowledge people who identify with both unique cultures.

### non-Indigenous Australians

### Avoid

Indigenous people (see notes on use of [Indigenous](#))

Indigenous Australians

First Australians

First Nations Australians

### Do not use

Aborigine, Aborigines

Islander, Islanders



acronyms like 'ATSI' or 'TSI'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent

our – in the context of sentences such as 'our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff'. This can make staff feel as if they are 'owned' by the department.

## Terms and phrases

### Non-Indigenous people should not use these words without permission

mob

blackfulla/s

yarn

walkabout

These words have been used throughout history to demean and describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a derogatory way. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are reclaiming these words for their own use, non-Indigenous people should not use them without permission.

### Acknowledgement of Country

See the intranet page [Acknowledging and celebrating First Nations people](#) for up-to-date guidance. As of June 2024, the approved Acknowledgement of Country for departmental websites is:

The Department of Health and Aged Care acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Country throughout Australia, and their continuing connection to land, sea and community. We pay our respects to them and their cultures, and to Elders both past and present.

### First Nations

Note that not all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people agree with this terminology. More widespread use in government was introduced in 2022 by the Minister for Indigenous Australians, but without consultation.

### Indigenous

Avoid using 'Indigenous' to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **people**.

You cannot avoid it if it forms part of a program name, such as Indigenous Australians' Health Programme.

You can use Indigenous to refer to organisations (for example, the Indigenous health sector).

Can be used in:

- Indigenous beliefs and knowledge
- Indigenous data sovereignty
- Indigenous wellbeing methods and practices
- Indigenous languages.



## Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs)

Now preferred over Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs). No hyphen between community and controlled. Lower case s at end of initialism to indicate plural. Do not use an apostrophe.

## Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs)

Use in preference to Aboriginal Health Services (AHS) or Remote Area Aboriginal Health Services (RAAHS).

## Capitalisation

The [Style Manual](#) notes that ‘There are few firm rules for capitalisation, as different peoples have their own preferences. Always ask the relevant community’s preferences and usages, and follow their advice.’

Given that we are a federal government department, this localised approach may not always be possible in our written materials. In general, we follow the Style Manual’s convention of minimal capitalisation. For the terms Country, Elders, Traditional Custodians and Traditional Owners, we now capitalise to align with Reconciliation Australia.

Term	Notes
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health worker	Lower case for ‘health worker’ (similar to doctor, physiotherapist etc)
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practitioner	Lower case for ‘health practitioner’ (similar to doctor, physiotherapist etc)
Acknowledgement of Country	Capitalised as per <a href="#">Style Manual</a>
community/communities	Lower case
Country	Upper case to align with Reconciliation Australia
culture	Lower case
cultural determinants of health	Lower case
social determinants of health	Lower case
Elders	Upper case to align with Reconciliation Australia
Traditional Custodians	Upper case to align with Reconciliation Australia
Traditional Owners	Upper case to align with Reconciliation Australia
Health Plan	Cap when using as a shortened version of the full name (National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan)
Indigenous	Capitalised, unless referring to many indigenous peoples internationally
Welcome to Country	Capitalised as per <a href="#">Style Manual</a>

## Content warnings

### Images or voices of deceased people

If your content includes the name, voice or photo of an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who has died, provide the following warning at the beginning. Modify the parts in italics as required for your content:



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should be aware that this *website/document/video* contains *images, voices and names* of a *person/people* who *has/have* died.

### Sensitive content

If your content could cause distress, consider including a content warning. Adjust the wording to suit the content. An example is:

Content warning: This piece discusses sensitive topics around trauma and racism.

### Consent

If you are using an image or recording, ensure that consent to use it has been obtained (including for promotional material/social media channels).

This document has been released by the Department of Health and Aged Care administratively.