A guide for health researchers working with Aboriginal people in central Australia

CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL CONGRESS

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Limitations

This guide should only be used for the specified purpose outlined in pages 4 through to 8. Information is provided in good faith to work in a collaborative and respectful way. No part of it is legally binding on individuals or Central Australian Aboriginal Congress. This Guide should not be applied to research outside Congress unless specifically directed by the relevant organisation or community representatives.

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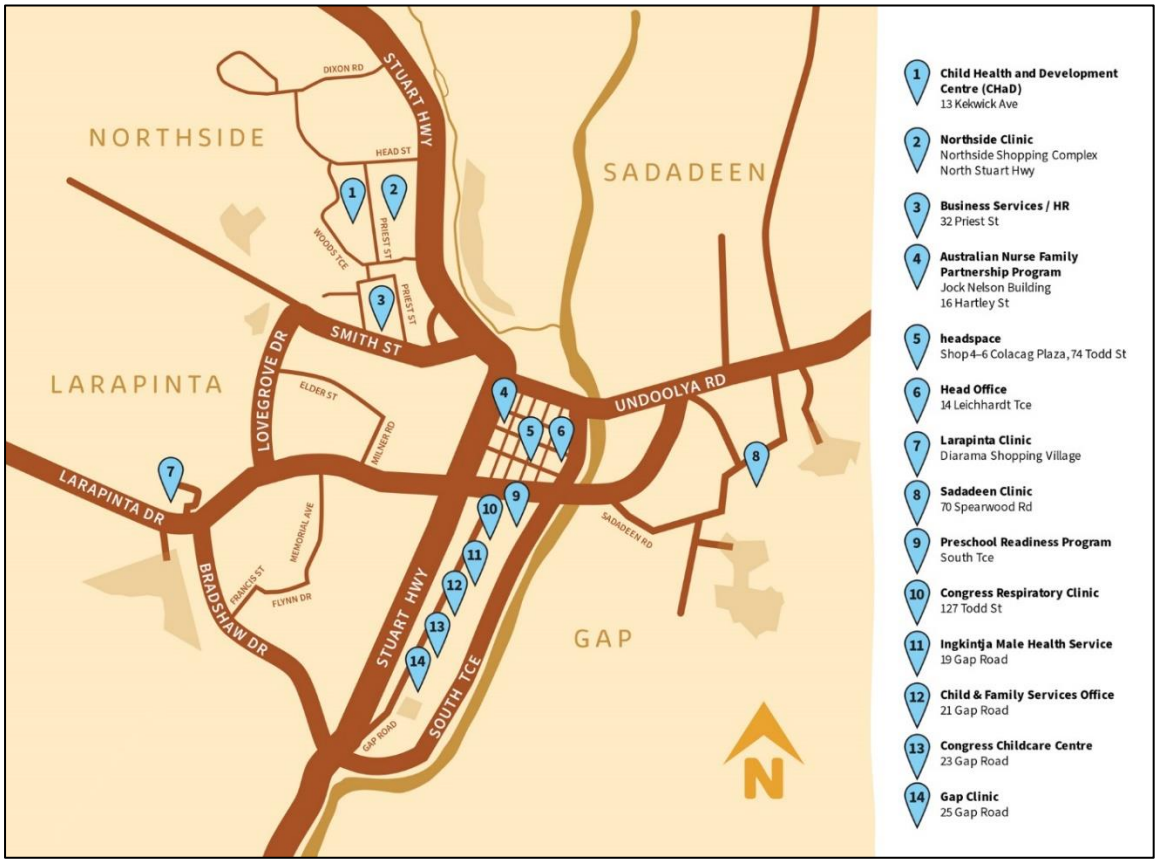
INTRODUCTION

Purpose of the Guide

This Guide is for researchers who want to know how to work safely, respectfully, and appropriately with Aboriginal people in central Australia. It introduces important considerations like Aboriginal community expectations and cultural protocols, intending to foster high quality, culturally safe, responsive and trauma-informed research. Research conducted in this way can be of benefit to the researchers and their institutes *as well as* Aboriginal people and communities who work *alongside* them. The Guide was developed under the *Aremella Arratyenye-ileme: Doing It Right* research project led by Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress).

Background to Congress

Congress is one of Australia's oldest Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations; established in 1973 in central Australia. Congress provides comprehensive primary health care (PHC) services to about 13,000 Aboriginal people living in the regional centre of Alice Springs and five surrounding remote communities. Four hundred and fifty employees, of which half are Aboriginal, work across 11 PHC clinics (six in town and five remote), specialised programs and the supporting health service infrastructure.



For nearly 50 years, Congress has provided support and advocacy for Aboriginal people pursuing social justice and equity and has a strong and long-standing commitment to research at both a strategic and operational level. Congress has led locally significant research projects such as *Settle down country* (1983), *All that rama rama mob: Aboriginal disturbed behaviour in central Australia* (1988), *On the machine: Aboriginal stories about kidney troubles* (1998), and more recently *Congress Arrurlenge: 50-year history project* (current). These research projects have been co-designed and implemented with Aboriginal researchers.

Since 1973, Congress has championed Aboriginal community control of their health and the research that involves or affects them. The aim has been to ensure that all research with Aboriginal communities in central Australia allows for the full and effective participation of Aboriginal people. As past Congress Chair William Tilmouth says: 'Nothing about us without us!' This means including Aboriginal people from the beginning of the research, in the concept and design phase as well as governance structure through to implementation, data analysis and interpretation, and the reporting of outcomes.

The Congress vision for Aboriginal community control of research is embedded in the *2019 - 2023 Congress Strategic Plan*, which (quoting from the *National Aboriginal Health Strategy 1989)* defines community control as:

> the local community having control of issues that directly affect their community. Implicit in this definition is the clear statement that Aboriginal people must determine and control the pace, shape and manner of change and decision-making at local, regional, state and national levels.

The 2019-2023 *Congress Research Strategy* reflects this vision through a commitment to build its research capacity by continuing to be actively involved in research, with a focus on employing and training Aboriginal researchers. To this end, in 2015 Congress established a Research Section within the Public Health Division and since its establishment, Congress has employed 23 Aboriginal researchers either part-time or full-time on a variety of research projects. This commitment and the ongoing employment and training of Aboriginal researchers supports Congress to work towards the vision of Aboriginal community control of research.

How the Guide was developed

From 2018 - 2020, the *Aremella Arratyenye-ileme: Doing It Right* research team consulted with the Amoonguna, Mpwelarre, Mutitjulu, Western Aranda and Utju remote health Boards, and the town-based Congress research sub-committee, to determine how they would like to see Aboriginal health research conducted in central Australia. Discussions included how research had been done in the past (good and bad), priority concerns for their community, and how they would like to be involved in research.

The National Health and Medical Research Council's (NHMRC) *Keeping Research on Track* helped guide the discussion, especially around its six core values. The NHMRC six core values listed below were interpreted and adapted for central Australia through extensive consultation with the remote Board of Directors, Congress Aboriginal staff, Aboriginal language speakers, Aboriginal Health Practitioners, Aboriginal researchers, and non-Aboriginal researchers with experience in Aboriginal health research. The result, as represented in the diagram below, was that the following NHMRC core values of:

- spirit and integrity became **commitment**
- cultural continuity became **uphold culture**
- equity became **justice and fairness**
- reciprocity became **sharing**
- respect became **respect and relationships**
- responsibility remained as **responsibility**

CONGRESS RESEARCH

CORE VALUES

COMMITMENT: Research is respectful of culture. Engage with the community and stakeholders so that research priorities respond to community needs and improve the economic, cultural and social determinants of health.

UPHOLD CULTURE: Research upholds and supports culture. Cultural distinctiveness and the lived history in community is recognised. All research operates within a cultural safety framework.

JUSTICE and **FAIRNESS:** Research commits to the principles of justice and fairness for equitable access to services and opportunities. Aboriginal community control is central.

SHARING: Collaborative research so that learnings benefit the community, knowledge is shared, and research outcomes are translated into policy and practice.

RESPECT & RELATIONSHIPS: Respect of cultural protocols and community and governance processes. Respectful behaviour includes awareness of different views, experience, values and priorities. Relationships are built and strengthened on this respect, trust and understanding.

RESPONSIBILITY: High quality, ethical, coordinated research is planned, approved, implemented and completed. Engagement through agreed ways of communicating leads to better policy, practice and service. A focus on sustainability means long lasting, meaningful outcomes, shared by all.

Congress' six core values provide Aboriginal community controlled health Boards with a standard by which they can hold researchers to account and outline the type of responsibilities that are key to sustainable partnerships. From the extensive project consultations, key themes emerged and under the direction of the Congress town and remote Boards the Guide was created in the hope that all researchers would work with Congress to:

- achieve Aboriginal community control of research
- employ and train more Aboriginal researchers
- employ and train local Aboriginal people, especially in remote communities
- understand the central Australian context
- ensure cultural safety
- become trauma-informed
- use a strengths-based approach to the research narrative and discourse
- emphasise social and cultural determinants of health

The Guide builds on the NHMRC *Ethical Guidelines for Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples 2018* and the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) *Code of Ethics and Torres Strait Islander Research 2020* by providing practical guidance for researchers working with Congress in central Australia. In places, material and quotes from the *Congress Cultural Safety Framework* and *Cultural Protocols for Congress town and remote health services* have been used.

How to read the Guide

It is anticipated that users of this Guide will read it in different ways. Five guidelines are presented for working with 1. Aboriginal researchers, 2. Aboriginal language speakers and 3. Aboriginal community navigators and cultural advisors, as well as 4. Practising culturally-responsive trauma-informed research and 5. Practising culturally safe research. Prefacing the five guidelines are this broad introduction, followed by a background section to help understand the cultural context of working with Aboriginal people in central Australia.

And a note on nomenclature: in this guide 'Aboriginal' is used when referring to the various Aboriginal peoples in central Australia, rather than 'Indigenous', 'First Nation' or other. As a stand-alone term, we acknowledge this is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, the term better represents the central Australian population, and Aboriginal people in central Australia prefer to identify this way. We have therefore adopted the term 'Aboriginal' as preferred (more on this decision in the next section).

We hope the Guide will support researchers who are commencing their journey of working with Aboriginal people in central Australia and strengthen the journey of existing researchers. Gaining the knowledge and developing the skills outlined in the Guide is not something that is 'completed' or 'achieved' at any point but is instead a continuous process of engagement and understanding, a journey rather than a fixed goal. We recommend that researchers seek further readings and advice; the information provided here is not exhaustive. Many will want to dive in to find their topic of particular interest, and we encourage you to do so. But we would pause also to emphasise the importance of these first two sections in gaining a broad understanding of the context within which you are undertaking work.

Finally, please note, this Guide is considered a 'living document' that will be reviewed every two years. We welcome feedback on the Guide via email to the Congress Research Manager research@caac.org.au

UNDERSTANDING THE CENTRAL AUSTRALIAN CULTURAL CONTEXT

This section gives a brief introduction to the factors that influence and characterise the unique experience of conducting research with Aboriginal people in central Australia.

Aboriginal communities across central Australia are diverse, with different languages, cultures, histories, and aspirations. They include remote communities with strong traditional languages and cultures, town camps—Aboriginal communities within the town of Alice Springs that support a mix of permanent residents and visitors from remote communities—and the suburbs of Alice Springs itself. Aboriginal people of these diverse places may differ in the language they speak, their level of education, literacy and occupation, appearance, and family connections. But they are all Aboriginal. In turn, complex networks of relationships to kin and Country mean that many Aboriginal people in Alice Springs have long-standing and active relationships with people and places in remote communities, and vice versa.

The colonisation of central Australia has had traumatic consequences for Aboriginal people of the region for a range of reasons. These include massacres and frontier violence, loss of Country, suppression of language and culture, forcible removal of children from families, destruction of an independent economic base, and the ongoing experience of racism (systemic and individual). Such experiences are not 'in the past' but remain in living memory for many of Congress' Aboriginal clients and staff and may continue to affect their attitudes and behaviours toward non-Aboriginal people, researchers and research. In addition, *intergenerational trauma*— by which traumatic experiences of the past are 'passed from adults to children in cyclic processes as cumulative emotional and psychological wounding'[1]— can also deeply affect Aboriginal people of all ages and contributes to many health, wellbeing and social challenges faced by Aboriginal people and communities today.

The history of central Australia has witnessed disruption and disempowerment in many Aboriginal communities. Establishing Aboriginal community-controlled health services and other Aboriginal organisations such as Land Councils and housing associations from the 1970s onwards marked a new era of self-determination for Aboriginal people. Communities re-asserted their right to make decisions for themselves, rather than have them made by mainstream services, some of which had contributed to and sometimes actively facilitated processes of disempowerment. Congress was an early expression of this move to self-determination in central Australia and continues to be a voice for Aboriginal people. Its structures of community control and decision-making (including by the Boards, Aboriginal management and staff, and the Aboriginal Staff Advisory Committee) are critical to its role.

Research practice that does not recognise the factors noted above is not culturally safe, and so may only serve to prolong the effects of colonisation and disempowerment of Aboriginal people by contributing to harmful government policies, deficit thinking, power imbalances and ongoing systemic racism. Culturally safe research practice can require considerable self-reflection, which means examining how systemic and personal bias, authority, white privilege and contact history can influence relationships. Time is required to build respectful relationships and trust with Aboriginal people and communities and to ensure the ethical conduct of research (for more on culturally safe research, see Guideline #5).

[1] Atkinson J. *Trauma informed services and trauma specific care for Indigenous children.* 2013, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare & Australian Institute of Family Studies: Canberra/Melbourne.

All places or communities are different

'Every community is different' - ***Utju resident***

'We all speak different languages and have different Law … each community has its own individual culture; not one community runs the same'
- Amoonguna resident

It is important to recognise that each Aboriginal community in central Australia is unique. While the places where Aboriginal people live certainly share common features and interconnectedness through kin, marriage, language, culture, Country or song lines, there are also differences. Researchers can risk offending local people by assuming that their values, beliefs, and practices are the same as those of another community.

Significant variation between communities can be due to a combination of factors. These can include cultural, linguistic, and historic factors, the demographic composition of the community and the location of the community in relation to other non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal communities. In addition, the availability of infrastructure and resources (tangible and intangible), and the differing histories and degrees of engagement by members of the community with non-Aboriginal society, organisations, and the State, can all have an effect.

Practices and beliefs may also vary among members of the same community. This is likely to be most marked where people from different socio-linguistic groups live in the same place. Cultural practices may also differ somewhat between Elders, young people, and others within the same language group. Despite such differences, long-term residents generally feel a strong sense of connection with the place they call home and tend to emphasise its unique identity. An individual's pride in their community is a cultural asset that contributes to general well-being and should be affirmed.

Respectful interactions and communication

Being respectful means being open to understanding and accepting what is important for Aboriginal peoples. For example, the importance of family, identity, language and culture, and connection to Country and kin. Alongside such understanding and acceptance, however, is that non-Aboriginal people (and non-Aboriginal professions) bring their *own* cultures to their interaction with Aboriginal people. That is, they bring their own (often unacknowledged) assumptions about what is important, what is right, and how to behave. Helpful in growing more respectful attitudes and behaviours are the ideas of 'two-way' learning and a strength-based approach to Aboriginal language, culture and ways of being. Also, given non-Aboriginal researchers are highly likely to be visitors to the traditional Aboriginal lands of central Australia (including in and around Alice Springs), due respect from the visitors is only to be expected.

'They've got to respect us and our culture' - ***Utju resident***

Ways of showing respect include using plain language that people can understand while not talking down, loudly or roughly to them; that is, to speak in a way that chastises a person or speaks down to them, sometimes called 'growling' someone. Be considerate and try to understand people's circumstances and priorities. Furthermore, keep in mind that effective intercultural communication involves translating not just words but difficult or foreign concepts. In particular:

'Avoid using acronyms and unfamiliar terminology. Use an interpreter/translator if needed' ***- Ltyentye Apurte resident, paraphrased***

'Don't talk flat out to people' ***- Utju resident***

Be aware that many Aboriginal people do not speak English as a first language (or indeed, as their second, third or fourth language) and that they may need time to respond to questions.

'Use an interpreter, a female one with female and male with male'
- Mutitjulu resident, paraphrased

Learn to be comfortable with pauses in conversations. Pressing for a response before a person has answered a question is likely to be perceived as 'whitefella bossiness' and as an inability to listen well. Be mindful of your speaking style and tone of voice.

Central Australian Aboriginal people use non-verbal communication, including hand gestures and facial expressions, which may have different meanings in other contexts. Be mindful that your own non-verbal communication is being observed and interpreted. For example, feelings of annoyance and impatience may be reflected by your body language and are likely to be noticed. Body language and actions, such as standing over people, can be perceived as disrespectful or intimidating. To avoid such perceptions, treat people with kindness and concern: slow down.

'Outside people shouldn't come in and overpower. It's about listening, watching and connection' ***- Mutitjulu resident, paraphrased***

'Be happy! Don't come with your cranky face and talk rough to our kids.'
- Utju resident, paraphrased

Ways of conveying respect

Conveying respect means being aware of the community expectations and cultural protocols, historical legacies and current issues prevailing in the communities you are working with. Central Australia is rich in Aboriginal languages and culture, which means cultural norms vary across the region, as do the languages spoken. Remember that customs and culture influence how people convey respect, including your own.

Expressions of recognition and appreciation vary across cultures. Non-Aboriginal people might think Aboriginal people are ungrateful or rude if they do not use terms such as please or thank you. But such terms of appreciation in English don't directly translate in central Australian Aboriginal languages. Nonetheless, there are corresponding Aboriginal language words that are used.

'Anangu[2] don't say polite words like thank you or please in our language. We say palya' - ***Utju resident***

'Palya' means good and is an expression of appreciation.

Avoiding eye contact is a customary gesture of respect for many Aboriginal people in central Australia. To make direct eye contact can be viewed as rude, disrespectful, or even aggressive. Conversely, in many non-Aboriginal cultures, *averting* the gaze might be considered dishonest, rude, or lacking in interest or respect. Observe an Aboriginal person's body language, follow their lead, and modify eye contact accordingly. Avoid cross-gender eye contact unless the person initiates it and is comfortable. A good way to respectfully avoid eye contact is to sit next to a person, rather than in front of them.

'Anangu don't like looking people in the eye too much. It's not polite Anangu way. It is OK to shake hands. When Anangu shake hands, it is a gentle shake, an acknowledgement. It is different to what piranpa[3] might expect'
- Mutitjulu resident

Shaking hands has different meanings for different people at different times and under different circumstances; it has also changed over time. Some Aboriginal people use a handshake as a form of showing that you acknowledge that they are sad and are in mourning due to the passing of a family or community member. Therefore, rather than assume a handshake is a respectful way to introduce yourself, wait for the Aboriginal person to initiate the handshake.

'….we don't shake hands when we meet someone. For Aboriginal people we shake hands for sorry, to acknowledge someone has passed away. Women shake hands and hug, it's being very respectful. Shake hands mean someone has passed away'
– Alice Springs resident

Certain terms of address and reference might signal unequal power relations and a lack of respect. For example, Aboriginal men in central Australia should not be called boys. That is because males over 13 years of age are regarded as men, whereas in many non-Aboriginal cultures, males are not viewed as men until much older.

[2] Anangu is a local Pitjantjatjara word for Aboriginal people.
[3] Piranpa is a local Yankunytjatjara and Pitjantjatjara word for non-Aboriginal person.

In turn, Aboriginal people might convey respect for non-Aboriginal people by using their own terms.

> *'Piranpa is a local Yankunytjatjara/Pitjantjatjara word for non-Aboriginal person. It is used in preference to terms like 'non-Aboriginal' or 'whitefella' because 'it is kinder' -*
> ***Mutitjulu resident***

When working in an Aboriginal community, always present yourself professionally by following your workplace health and safety guidelines and dress policy. Men and women should not wear short dresses, skirts, or shorts, and avoid singlet tops or bright red clothes. Dressing in clothes that are dirty, untidy or revealing, wearing thongs or not wearing shoes are all likely to be seen as disrespectful.

Working with local Aboriginal organisations and appropriate community representatives can help to understand community expectations and cultural protocols. Aboriginal researchers, Aboriginal Cultural Advisors and Aboriginal Community Navigators can also help you to understand and navigate community expectations and cultural protocols.

Confidentiality and privacy

Confidentiality and privacy are important to all people, especially those living in a small town or remote community. It is common in Aboriginal communities for many people to know each other and have large and interrelated family and kinship ties. Confidentiality and privacy in all communications are very important, it is a matter of respect, power, and equality. Always follow workplace guidelines. And remember, it is important not to talk about an individual's issues in front of other people, nor to discuss study participants or a community member in front of other people, but rather to respect people's rights to determine for themselves what information about them is shared.

> *'Don't talk loudly about someone in front of others publicly… People get shamed—kunta—and won't want to go back …'*
> ***- Mutitjulu resident, paraphrased***

It is also important to acknowledge people when they are present.

> *'Don't talk about a person in front of them, as though they don't exist'*
> ***- Utju resident, paraphrased***

The issue of privacy extends to all aspects of life in a small community. It is inappropriate to walk into people's houses unless you are specifically invited in. Furthermore, you should not enter people's yards unless invited to do so. Here it must be remembered that Aboriginal communities and families have experienced intense surveillance as part of the ongoing process of settler colonialism, most recently under the Australian government – Northern Territory Emergency Response, commonly known as 'the Intervention'.

'This community has suffered a lot under the Intervention. Non-Aboriginal people need to establish trust' ***– Mutitjulu resident***

Acknowledging Aboriginal language, cultural and community expertise

It is important to seek the advice of recognised local Aboriginal Elders or Cultural Advisors, Aboriginal Language Speakers, and local Aboriginal staff, such as Aboriginal Liaison Officers, Aboriginal Health Practitioners, Aboriginal Community Workers or Aboriginal researchers and be guided by them about local social and cultural practices. Remember if you seek advice, don't then ignore it.

'At the Amoonguna clinic, the clinic receptionist and Aboriginal Liaison Officer can provide invaluable advice about sorry business and other cultural matters. They let us know so we don't bother people. The receptionist and ALO are pretty critical' - ***Amoonguna non-Aboriginal resident***

In summary, consider the following when communicating with central Australian Aboriginal people:

- Know the legacy of colonisation. Familiarise yourself with the lasting impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people, the social and political context of place and the community's assets, challenges, and current priorities
- Familiarise yourself with previous, current, and ongoing government policies affecting Aboriginal people. Acknowledge power imbalances and white privilege
- Research itself can be a sensitive subject for Aboriginal people. Even the word 'research' can trigger feelings of suspicion and defensiveness
- Treat people with kindness and respect
- Be mindful of speaking style, choice of words, tone, appearance, and body language -some actions can be perceived as disrespectful or intimidating
- Remember that each remote community is unique and Aboriginal people feel a strong sense of connection with the place they call home, a cultural asset that should be affirmed
- Dress modestly, in a neat, tidy, and professional way
- Be aware of certain terms of address that might signal unequal power relations or lack of respect, such as addressing young men over 13 as boys. Call them young fellas or by their name.
- Be sensitive to cultural differences in ways of communicating such as eye contact, which in some Aboriginal cultures, if prolonged (staring), may make people uncomfortable or feel intimidated. A simple way of avoiding this is to sit next to each other, rather than directly opposite each other
- If there are questions, be aware of *who* to consult and *who* is the right person to make contact
- Don't think Aboriginal people are ungrateful or rude if they do not use terms like 'please' or 'thank you'. Some Aboriginal languages do not have an equivalent for these 'polite' words, but other words, such as palya, may be used as an expression of appreciation instead
- Become comfortable with silence, a person might be listening and thinking or waiting to hear others' ideas before expressing their own views

Learn about local Aboriginal culture and society

Aboriginal people appreciate non-Aboriginal people expressing interest in learning about their language and culture. However, people may also respond warily to being questioned by a stranger about cultural matters. It is recommended that all researchers attend an introductory social and cultural awareness session hosted by Congress' Lead Aboriginal Cultural Advisor with input from Aboriginal staff, followed by an opportunity for questions and answers. If researchers are in regular and ongoing contact with a specific community, then remote Health Board members, Aboriginal Liaison Officers and other Aboriginal staff can offer specific advice about 'dos and don'ts' in their community.

An important part of understanding another culture is the ability to set aside assumptions and not make judgements. This requires critically reflecting on one's own viewpoint or position.

> *'What is important to us is not necessarily important to others. You need to learn to let go' -* ***Amoonguna non-Aboriginal resident***

Relationships of respect and trust take time to build. Aboriginal people see many non-Aboriginal staff pass through their communities or organisations. Before they open up to the latest arrival, they may take some time to assess that person's attitudes, behaviours and their capacity for culturally safe interactions.

It is important to recognise that Aboriginal peoples' lives are complex, often with many competing commitments, so that their values and priorities are not necessarily the same as those of researchers, such as for project deadlines.

> *'People should be able to say: 'I can't go to the appointment (meeting), I've got sorry business'. It's more of a struggle for Aboriginal people here. Whitefella go home at night and might have only a few people in a house. There are not enough houses here, so there's overcrowding and different conditions that people have to contend with' -* ***Utju non-Aboriginal resident***

Participation in local cultural events

As a general principle, wait to be asked before attempting to participate in any local cultural event. Women should never approach men's ceremonial grounds (see later discussion).

> *Over time, as a trusting, respectful relationship develops, people may be more open and willing to share non-restricted cultural information. As a general principle, however, always wait to be asked before attempting to participate in cultural events. Never attend a traditional religious event unless specifically invited to do so by Elders and/or those with cultural authority' -* ***Amoonguna Aboriginal resident.***

Altyerre-Jukurrpa-Tjukurrpa

'Altyerre or Jukurrpa [Warlpiri, Tjukurrpa in Pitjantjatjara] is our constitution with all our Law. Aboriginal Law never changes but Government Law changes all the time. Our Law is not written. We grow up learning it, being shown, listening and learning. The songline is telling us the story that we follow' - ***Alice Springs resident***

The following extract about Tjukurrpa is from the Parks Australia website[4], as told by *Anangu*, people from several language groups of the Western Desert region south of Alice Springs.

> 'Tjukurpa (*sic* - pronounced 'chook-orr-pa' in English) is the foundation of our culture. Just as a house needs to stand on strong foundations, so our way of life stands on Tjukurpa.
>
> Tjukurpa has many deep, complex meanings. Tjukurpa refers to the creation period when ancestral beings created the world. From this came our religious heritage, explaining our existence and guiding our daily life. Like religions anywhere in the world, Tjukurpa provides answers to important questions, the rules for behaviour and for living together. It is the law for caring for one another and for the land that supports us.
>
> Tjukurpa tells of the relationships between people, plants, animals and the physical features of the land. Tjukurpa refers to the past, the present and the future at the same time. This knowledge never changes, it always stays the same.'

Many Aboriginal people also have Christian values and views and blend the two belief systems. Most communities will have at least one church, some have several.

Avoidance of places

Within remote communities and surrounds, there are places to avoid sometimes; so always ask where you can and cannot go. These are considered *no go zones* and are rarely signposted. Prohibited places may change over time for cultural reasons.

No go zones can vary across remote communities and over time, for example:

They can run (for exercise) on the main road and at airstrip but not south of the oval—that's men's side and old people's museum area, ladies' museum - ***Utju Aboriginal resident***

There are no permanent designated areas to avoid. At certain times, places may be 'no go' zones—expect such areas to change over time. Advised to always seek advice from local Aboriginal health staff and Board members about areas that are accessible or to be avoided - ***Amoonguna Aboriginal resident, paraphrased***

[4] https://parksaustralia.gov.au/uluru/people-place/culture.html note alternate spelling - Tjukurpa - used on website

Business and Ceremonial Time

Matters associated with men and women's traditional ceremonies and Dreaming stories are referred to as *men's and women's business*. Women must avoid men's business, and men, women's business. This is the case for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal clinic staff.

> *'During men's business time I don't work here—I can't be here [at the clinic]' -* ***Female Aboriginal health practitioner***

Culture is not only a matter of knowledge, as it can also involve embodied practices. For example, it is common during ceremonial business for men and women to become ochred, which is to cover part or all of the body in ochre, a natural clay pigment. In central Australia red ochre is commonly used. Afterwards, they allow the ochre to wear off their bodies naturally. Please note that it is culturally offensive to ask Aboriginal people to wash off ochre.

Generally, men's business occurs each year at different times and locations, it is not one single event, and can occur anytime between October and March. Be mindful that men's business is often announced spontaneously, therefore, research plans may need to change rapidly. Women's business usually happens in one location in the month of April. Always check with local community members or representatives.

Sorry business

Sorry business concerns bereavement practices. While protocols can vary among families, sorry business generally involves an initial period of mourning for the deceased person, a funeral and a 'finishing up' stage of mourning. Following a death, close kin of the deceased will establish a specific space for mourning called a *sorry camp* where relatives come to pay their respects and grieve.

> *This is a small community and everyone from all the houses join together for sorry business -* ***Utju Aboriginal resident***

People are often highly mobile during sorry business. Generally speaking, the house in which the deceased lived is vacated by resident family members. The house may remain empty for days or for many months until other relatives move in. When someone passes away, close family members who did not live with the deceased may also temporarily leave their houses to stay at a sorry camp at the community where the death occurred. It is not appropriate to go to a house when someone has passed away. Always seek guidance from local Aboriginal staff at such times.

The timing of sorry business practices can vary. Depending on circumstances, a person's funeral may occur many months after their death, after mourning has taken place. A church service is generally held as part of the funeral. After the funeral, the deceased person's house is cleansed of lingering spirits and relatives may *smoke* buildings that were frequented by the person before they passed away. A Christian leader cleanses the home with prayers and the relatives of the deceased walk around with eucalypt branches and brush away the tracks of the deceased. These practices are part of the 'finishing up sorry' process. In addition to private homes, the clinic, store and other community places may also be smoked and swept (brushed).

'They will sweep the clinic floor, bed, chair and whatever the person was using. This is a way of paying respect to the family' - ***Utju Aboriginal resident***

'We brush the twigs/branches on items used, areas walked on and used, to help put their spirit to rest' - ***Congress Lead Aboriginal Cultural Advisor***

Aboriginal mourning practices differ from those of non-Aboriginal people. They may also differ within a community depending on the identity, status and prior role of the deceased person. Be aware that there are a range of cultural practices associated with death and sorry business or bereavement. In some communities, bereaved people may ritually cut themselves in sorrow or wear white clay on their faces. Men and women may also shave their heads or cut their hair out of respect for the deceased. Be mindful that changes in appearance, such as haircuts or scarification may be related to sorry business, so be considerate and try to avoid asking questions or making comments unless invited to.

People also use the term *bad news* to refer to the death of a relative. And it is culturally inappropriate to refer directly to the deceased person or to use their name. Various terms are used to substitute for the name of someone who has passed away, this includes words that sound similar to the person who has passed and may vary with the Aboriginal language. The terms *Kunmanara* (a Pitjatjantjara/Luritja word) and *Kwementyaye* (an Arrernte word) are used within central Australia across the language groups, *Kunmanara* predominating south of Alice Springs and *Kwementyaye* east, west and north of Alice Springs.

'If a researcher got the same name as a person who has passed away, they need to use the term Kwementyaye out of respect. Otherwise, some people might just walk out or get angry. Sometimes they will say to the person "What's his real name". We use the surname, or maybe skin name, that's alright. Knowing how to use Kwementyaye or surname or skin name is important.'

Avoidance practices

Aboriginal people practise customary avoidance between certain categories of male and female kin. When people say that they have 'no room' this can mean they cannot go near a certain person, nor have eye contact or talk with them.

Categories of persons who should not be in the same room are typically mother-in-law and son-in-law, father-in-law and daughter-in-law, and poison cousins, also referred to as *tjampirtiyi*. To avoid the risk of running into someone with an avoidance relationship, men and women may enter buildings and spaces from different sides or sit away from the group. Allow people to choose where they sit and when and where they enter a space, if at all. Don't ask people to justify their choice.

Among the younger generation today, observing certain avoidance relationships is somewhat more relaxed than in the past. For example, in the past, a mother-in-law and son-in-law could not speak directly to each other or look at one another, but now may talk from a distance.

Gender considerations

Aboriginal cultural beliefs about gendered persons are implicated in practising culturally responsive research practice. During ceremony time, cultural sensitivities are heightened, and it would be most appropriate for a male researcher to talk to men and a female researcher to talk with women.

Kinship

Kinship is concerned with notions of 'family'. Kinship describes who counts as a relation (both close and distant) and how they care for one another. These family connections vary cross-culturally as does the role of kinship. Aboriginal people in central Australia construct kinship in different ways to people of other cultures. This is not simply a matter of different kin structures and terminology; it also concerns patterns of behaviour between different categories of kin with associated responsibilities and sentiments. Different systems of kinship have implications for caregiving and other social responsibilities.

For instance, it is helpful to know some key features of the system as these have implications for caregiving, and the expectations and obligations associated with different types of relatives. A person regards their mother's sisters as 'mothers'; similarly they regard their father's brothers as 'fathers'. Significantly, these other mothers and fathers are regarded as having the same kind of responsibilities and obligations toward the person as the person's biological parents. For researchers, this may have implications for parental or guardian consent for children.

Aboriginal ways of reckoning kin relations have implications for the care of children and, for research purposes, who has the authority to give consent.

> *'Mother's sister can make decisions. She is called Auntie by white people but for us she is like another mother. Father's sister has to step back a bit—not part of the conversation' -* ***Santa Teresa Aboriginal resident***

An important way of showing cultural respect is by recognising that other models of family and caregiving exist, apart from one's own. It is also important to be aware that distinctions made between close and distant kin are *not necessarily* based on what Anglo-Australians refer to as close biological family. Aboriginal people often recognise a much larger group of people as both close and distant kin (extended family).

Age and Seniority

Age confers status in Aboriginal societies and is associated with familial and community obligations. At the same time, and like many cultures around the world, the expectation is that older people must be treated with care and respect. Older people should not be made to wait and should also be offered interpreting help if necessary. Also, use qualified or recommended interpreters and dedicated Aboriginal Liaison Officers. Be mindful that not all older people are considered *Elders.* Elders are people who hold cultural authority for their family and traditional lands. And they are not always old. Sometimes a young person has been given the right to cultural authority for a specific family or topic or decision. Each community will have a number of Elders representing different groups of people in that community.

Use of Ngangkari or Angankeres (traditional healer) and bush medicine

For their health it is common for Aboriginal people to visit a traditional healer, known as *Angankeres* by Arrernte speakers and *Ngangkari* by Pitjantjatjara and other central Australian language groups. People may also use bush medicine to heal themselves. The use of traditional healing practices is always undertaken in conjunction with western medicine.

'Nurses have to understand that health and well-being are not just about Western medicine. It's Anangu cultural way to ask a Ngangkari to come in to the clinic'
- Utju Aboriginal resident

'If someone wants to see a Ngangkari, the family will go and get them; the nurse should ask' ***- Mutitjulu Aboriginal resident***

Concept of time

Aboriginal people's sense of history and time spans more than 65,000 years lived on the Australian continent and differs from the Western viewpoint. Aboriginal people do not see time as an exclusively 'linear' category (i.e., past-present-future) and often place events in a 'circular' pattern. Events are placed in time according to their relative importance for the individual and their community (i.e., the more important events are perceived as being 'closer in time'). Therefore, it is important to refer to community events or people's routines rather than actual dates, days or time when interviewing someone about time.

'Time is based on relationships, places and events; it's about 'Who you know and what you've seen' and not linear time' ***- Congress Lead Aboriginal Cultural Advisor***

Using respectful language and terminology

Using respectful language and terminology is an essential component of building and strengthening relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. Please note, the following guide is specific to Congress and central Australia. Such specificity highlights that you should always seek advice from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in your local community regarding preferences and protocols around the use of language and terminology, as it differs across Australia.

For Congress and many other Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in central Australia, the term 'Aboriginal' is preferred when referring to Aboriginal people of central Australia. As stated at the outset of this Guide, we acknowledge 'Aboriginal' as a stand-alone term is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, this better represents the central Australian population and Aboriginal people in central Australia prefer to identify this way. It is not used to cause offence or exclusion. If the person or population is specific to a particular Country or language, then use that term, for example, Luritja man, Arrernte children, Pitjatjantjara women. If referring to all of Australia or areas where Torres Strait Islanders may live, it is best practice to use the term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples', which respectfully encompasses the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and identities

across Australia. Reference terms such as ‘Indigenous’, 'First Peoples' or ‘First Nations’ are also terms that are not used by Congress.

Capitalisation of a word demonstrates respect, therefore, ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres Strait Islander’ should always be capitalised and extended to terms such as Elders, Traditional Owners/Custodians, Country and Boards. Language groups should also be capitalised. It is also important not to abbreviate ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres Strait Islander’, to use the acronym ‘ATSI’ or to use the term ‘Aboriginals’ or ‘Aborigines’. Assimilationist terms such as ‘full-blood,’ ‘half-caste’ and ‘quarter-caste’ are extremely offensive and should never be used when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Using strengths-based and positive language

Acknowledging and addressing the historical injustices and inequities experienced by Aboriginal peoples since colonisation is a critical part of reconciliation. Nevertheless, it is also important to acknowledge the strengths and resilience shown by Aboriginal peoples, languages, cultures, and communities in the face of discrimination, and to celebrate Aboriginal contributions to shaping a shared sense of national unity and identity.

Using empowering, strengths-based language avoids patronising or paternalistic rhetoric. Consider the difference between more deficit discourses such as ‘helping disadvantaged Aboriginal people,’ and a more strengths-based alternative such as ‘providing meaningful opportunities for Aboriginal people to achieve their full potential.’

Aboriginal people are not ‘in need’ of being ‘rescued’ or ‘saved.’ Reconciliation is about working collaboratively with Aboriginal people and their strengths, not doing things 'for them' or 'to them'. This collaboration should not be described through binary ‘us and them’ language, they should instead concentrate on promoting mutually respectful and genuine two-way relationships of shared significance.

Recognising currency and continuity

Aboriginal peoples are one of the oldest continuing living cultures. It is therefore important to refer to Aboriginal people and cultures in the present tense, not just the past, so recognising that these cultures are indeed ongoing today.

Statements that relegate Aboriginal people to an ‘ancient past’ were common in twentieth century education texts. These statements promote static representations of Aboriginal people, cultures and contributions that do not honour their continuing and current presence and significance. These representations also tend to ignore tens of thousands of years of active Aboriginal contributions and connections to Country prior to British colonisation, misleadingly perpetuating the legal fiction of ‘terra nullius’ (or land belonging to nobody).

GUIDELINE #1. WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL RESEARCHERS

Who is an Aboriginal researcher?

Aboriginal researchers are Aboriginal people who have chosen research as their career. They may be from central Australia, have lived in central Australia for many years, or married into family here. They may live in Aboriginal communities, have relationships within Aboriginal communities, or have a comprehensive understanding of the community and organisations. However, they may be from other places across Australia and also be new to the central Australian context. They may or may not speak or understand a central Australian Aboriginal language. They may have high levels of education or low literacy levels. Just like any other professional, they may be an experienced researcher or new to research. They may have a wealth of previous work and life experience, or they may not.

Why collaborate with Aboriginal researchers?

Funding bodies, universities and research institutions are becoming increasingly aware of the importance of employing Aboriginal researchers in research. Aboriginal researchers have significant and often unique knowledge and insight and can therefore provide much more than guidance or input to participant recruitment strategies. They draw on cultural expertise, community networks and skills to work with a community and contribute local knowledge and relationships, all of which can help link researchers and research institutions to the Aboriginal community and build rapport with them. This may also improve the quality and cultural competence of research for both the community and research institutions.

Moreover, Aboriginal researchers can provide significant strategic direction and governance for research projects. Most importantly, they can ensure the research is well designed, with a culturally safe research implementation plan. A well-designed study is one that is appropriate to the cultural and community context, has genuine community and stakeholder support, and utilises the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal researchers. This type of ongoing collaboration with Aboriginal researchers will help build capacity for individuals and research institutes in ways that are respectful, reciprocal and that foster two-way learning.

How to collaborate with Aboriginal researchers

Research aiming to collaborate with Aboriginal researchers must be non-discriminatory, equitable, and recognise the cultural distinctiveness and diversity of Aboriginal peoples. It is important to acknowledge and recognise the skills, experience, relationships, and cultural knowledge that an Aboriginal researcher brings to a research study. Being transparent and honest is core to building trust with Aboriginal researchers and the community.

Aboriginal researchers should be informed of their duties, roles, and responsibilities from the outset of employment, and be given the opportunity to discuss conflicts or ethical/cultural/social dilemmas that may arise. They should be included in any decisions that directly affect their capacity to work on projects. To this end, Congress encourages research institutions to include Aboriginal researchers throughout the research process, from concept development to governance, design, implementation, monitoring, data analysis and interpretation of research outcomes, and the translation of findings back to individuals, communities, and health services.

Skills enhancement and knowledge exchange

Genuine reciprocity (sharing) is fundamental to respectful relationships. Research institutions should proactively work *alongside* Aboriginal researchers to identify ways their contribution might build capacity. And a reminder: Knowledge exchange is always two-way, and respectful interactions will allow you to learn from Aboriginal researchers and vice versa.

Research institutes should actively grow the skills of Aboriginal researchers so they can participate equally and meaningfully in research. This can support growth for the individual as well as the organisation. There are many ways to do this through training, scholarships, mentoring and professional development options. Regular guidance, tailored support, training opportunities, and a commitment to cultural safety will help to grow and develop Aboriginal researchers, and at the same time, provide professional development to the non-Aboriginal researcher.

#TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Working with Aboriginal researchers

Consult these tips and memory joggers to work well with Aboriginal researchers in central Australia. We recommend this be read in conjunction with #TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Practicing culturally safe research on page 33.

Know the legacy of Colonisation

- Aboriginal researchers are *Aboriginal community members* foremost. The legacy of dispossession and colonisation as well as the complex and ever-changing dynamics within a community and family may affect Aboriginal researchers. Familiarise yourself with the lasting impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people, the social and political context of place and the community's assets, challenges, and current priorities
- Familiarise yourself with previous, current, and ongoing government policies affecting Aboriginal people. Acknowledge power imbalances and white privilege
- Research itself can be a sensitive subject for Aboriginal people. Even the word 'research' can trigger feelings of suspicion and defensiveness. Aboriginal researchers may feel cautious toward a perceived 'colonial mentality' or 'positional superiority' ingrained in the psyche of many non-Aboriginal researchers

Work as partners, collaborate, consult

- Ensure collaborations, consultations and negotiations are real, genuine, and not tokenistic. Whenever possible, work with Aboriginal researchers from the planning and design stage through to sharing outcomes and sharing knowledge
- Be aware and respectful of extended family and kinship structures
- Consult with relevant, appropriate Aboriginal community representatives in the planning and design stage to identify if the study requires cultural considerations, such as Men's and/or Women's Business. If so, make alternate arrangements
- Where feasible, work in gendered bicultural pairs to promote cultural safety and two-way learning
- Allow Aboriginal researchers to decide what roles and responsibilities they can take on through the project as there may be cultural or family considerations you are not aware of that can impinge on their ability to carry out their roles safely
- Put Aboriginal values at the centre of the research process and honour traditional knowledge, views and values including ways of knowing and doing things

- Aboriginal researchers may work through their existing community relationships and networks to build trust for researchers and support for research. They may be the main point of contact for the community. This also makes them vulnerable to criticism about the research, your behaviour and actions, or to other community perceptions. Risks should be discussed openly and reviewed regularly

Plan for cultural safety and awareness

- Cultural safety for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal researchers should be a priority in the project risk management plan
- Participate in cultural awareness training appropriate to the central Australian context and prioritise ongoing learning opportunities whether new or old to Aboriginal health research.
- Educate research teams and organisations on culturally accepted ways of doing research with Aboriginal researchers and communities
- Seek advice about local cultural protocols. For Aboriginal people in central Australia, these protocols include historic and current customs, practices, traditional Law and codes that are part of Aboriginal cultural observances
- Respect, acknowledge, actively listen, and respond to the advice of Aboriginal researchers in a culturally appropriate manner. It is important not to dismiss any advice given
- Be aware and respectful of sensitive issues and their potential impacts on Aboriginal people, including researchers. Seek local advice if unsure what sensitive issues need to be considered. It is good practice to ask questions; as silly as this may sound, it shows a willingness to learn
- Do not make assumptions about how things work in the community. Seek local advice where possible from Aboriginal staff or community members

Communicate clearly and allow time

- Be mindful that levels of education vary, and literacy levels are low in central Australia, which may include some Aboriginal researchers
- Use clear and uncomplicated language. Do not use academic jargon if it can be avoided. Do not use ‘pigeon’ (broken down English) as this can be interpreted as patronising or rude
- Each Aboriginal community may speak a different language or several languages. Don’t make assumptions about language. Work with Aboriginal researchers to tailor language requirements for the people and community/s you are working with
- Be mindful that literacy levels are low in central Australia, this includes some Aboriginal researchers
- Be responsive and flexible with time. Be aware that Aboriginal researchers may have other community, family, or kinship obligations. Working together and being flexible enables the research to meet the needs of both the research institution and Aboriginal researchers.
- Allow adequate time to build relationships, trust, and two-way learning and reflection. Be prepared to modify the approach where necessary
- Be patient and open-minded, with enough time for relationships and community.

GUIDELINE #2. WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL LANGUAGE SPEAKERS

Researchers and research institutions who seek to conduct research with Aboriginal communities in central Australia must plan early for *inclusive* and *effective* communication. This section highlights the value of working with language speakers in research.

Who is an Aboriginal language speaker?

An Aboriginal language speaker is a person who can speak one or more Aboriginal languages. Predominately, they are local Aboriginal community members who have been recommended by relevant community representatives or family members from that language group; few have had formal training in interpreting or translating. Very occasionally, a trusted non-Aboriginal person who speaks the required language is recommended by the relevant community representative. Aboriginal language speakers have varying degrees of fluency in their spoken language/s, the required language, and English. Sometimes an Aboriginal language speaker may not be fluent in the required Aboriginal language or English but have sufficient fluency to navigate the nuances of the Aboriginal language and English to make the communication more effective. Always seek recommendations from relevant community representatives of that language group or family members to identify the appropriate language speaker; different language speakers may be recommended depending on the topic and relationships. Where possible use trained Aboriginal language speakers from the local Aboriginal Interpreter Services.

Why work with Aboriginal language speakers in research?

Central Australia is rich in language and culture. There are up to 16 different languages spoken and for many Aboriginal people in the region, English is not their first language. Working with local language speakers can help researchers to communicate inclusively and effectively with Aboriginal people, allowing for intercultural matters and translation. Aboriginal language speakers can also help to understand and navigate community expectations and cultural protocols. They can support the researcher throughout the project, especially in the planning, consultation and recruitment phases, and in the dissemination of findings. However, if consent or a rigorous interview is to be conducted in language, the Aboriginal language speaker must have been trained in research ethics, the specific research project and be a qualified interpreter. A separate qualified interpreter in that language must also be available to back translate the interview to English. Given that most central Australian Aboriginal language groups have small populations, complex cultural, familial and privacy considerations, conducting interviews in language for health and medical research purposes is rarely achievable.

Appropriate approaches to language can be built into all aspects of research work including the design, methodology, data collection, analysis, and results dissemination. A good start is to work with central Australian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, non-Government organisations employing local Aboriginal staff, and local Aboriginal Interpreter Services.

Translate meaning not just words

Translation of language is not easy. And intercultural communication involves not only translating words; it also entails translating unfamiliar or unknown concepts. Each person has a different method of translation. When working with translators or language speakers, take the time to build a relationship. Ensure the translator understands the context and meaning of the message. This will help ensure the translation is as *accurate* and *meaningful* as possible.

Be mindful that Aboriginal languages are traditionally spoken languages, not written languages. Therefore, do not assume that the Aboriginal language speaker can also provide written Aboriginal language. As with all languages, Aboriginal languages are not static. Consequently, older people often speak differently to younger people. Also, within one Aboriginal language, there are often differing dialects.

Remember that some English words have different meanings in local Aboriginal languages. Take care to ensure the meaning and intent of your words are clear and be prepared to explain further. One example is the cultural difference in the meaning of words relating to family. Aboriginal people in central Australia construct kinship in different ways to non-Aboriginal people, recognising a much larger group of people as both close and distant kin, compared with non-Aboriginal cultures. For example, calling a mother and mother's sister(s) by the same term for 'mother'; and a father and father's brother(s) by the same term for 'father'.

#TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Working with Aboriginal language speakers

Consult these tips and memory joggers to work well with Aboriginal language speakers in central Australia. We recommend this be read in conjunction with #TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Practicing culturally safe research on page 33.

- Know the legacy of colonisation. Familiarise yourself with the lasting impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal people, the social and political context of place and of the community's assets, challenges, and current priorities
- Familiarise yourself with previous, current, and ongoing government policies affecting Aboriginal people. Acknowledge power imbalances and white privilege
- Research itself can be a sensitive subject for Aboriginal people. Even the word 'research' can trigger feelings of suspicion and defensiveness
- Aboriginal language speakers are community members foremost
- Speak clearly and use plain or uncomplicated English. Avoid jargon, acronyms, and academic language
- Use visual, animation or other creative ways to help explain what you are saying
- Written reports, papers, emails, or PowerPoint presentations may be the norm in academic fields but may not be the most effective way to communicate with Aboriginal language speakers or engage Aboriginal people and communities. Work with Aboriginal staff or Aboriginal organisations to determine the best way for communication to take place
- Be mindful of body language. Different body language can make the same words take on different meanings
- Language may be different in different communities, even the same language may be different in other communities or between family groups
- You may need to work with more than one Aboriginal language speaker in each community to engage with different genders and different family groups
- Aboriginal languages are oral languages, therefore people who *speak* language may not necessarily *read* language. Generally, only people who are literate in English will be able to read Aboriginal languages
- Central Australian Aboriginal languages have been documented by different linguists: therefore, the spelling of a word may differ across language groups. For example, there are two spellings for Arrernte/Aranda. Arrernte is used in the central and eastern languages, whereas Aranda is used in the western language

- Many English words in health and research do not have a translatable word in Aboriginal languages. Allow for discussion and time for the language speaker to find a suitable word or term
- Be patient and open-minded. Make sure you have enough time for effective communication. It may take longer than working with first-language English speakers. People who do not speak English as a first language may need more time to respond to questions. Learn to be comfortable with long pauses in conversations. Pressing for a response before a person has answered a question is likely to be perceived as 'whitefella bossiness' and an inability to listen well
- Be willing and open to learn. Take the time to learn basic phrases and key words in the local language. This shows commitment, respect, and can often be a useful icebreaker. Make sure to seek appropriate advice on the correct language, terms and appropriate phrases to learn.
- When working with Aboriginal language speakers ensure they are remunerated fairly and appropriately for their time, skills, and knowledge
- Always use Aboriginal language speakers who have been recommended by the relevant community representatives and where possible, use qualified interpreters from the local Aboriginal Interpreter Service

GUIDELINE #3. WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY NAVIGATORS AND ABORIGINAL CULTURAL ADVISORS

This section introduces Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors, two *community-based* roles that are different but share common elements. Such Aboriginal people are well-known, respected, and trusted, they are recognised leaders or have leadership abilities, and are characteristically neutral (or can manage conflict) with the ability to be a 'middle person' and act as a liaison. They are also able to speak from a good understanding of English and an Aboriginal language(s), have a deep understanding of the community and able to undertake community consultation well with the ability to go between Aboriginal cultures and non-Aboriginal (mainstream) culture. A workplace-based Aboriginal Researcher may share some of the skills and knowledge of an Aboriginal Community Navigator or Cultural Advisor, but don't assume or expect this to be the case.

Who is an Aboriginal community navigator?

An Aboriginal Community Navigator is a *facilitator* or *connector* with community-based organisations, groups, families, and others, to ensure researchers have useful and meaningful engagement with community members and groups. They may be a senior person, but this is not always the case. A community navigator may be older or younger, male, or female. Ideally, they have a strong affiliation with the target group that you wish to engage with. While a community navigator is an Aboriginal person, they may not necessarily be *from* the community, but can be someone who has lived there for a long time, married into a local family, and understands family connections, kinship systems, community life, organisations and service providers. Importantly, they understand the relationships and roles key individuals play within organisations and the community.

Who is an Aboriginal cultural advisor?

An Aboriginal Cultural Advisor is a more senior role. They may be a male or female Elder (or delegate) specific to the place and language group. An Aboriginal Cultural Advisor is chosen or acknowledged by the community or family to take the role, ensuring the advisor has knowledge of Aboriginal family ties and kinships, Country and Law and the story for places (and understands the significance of them). They would also understand community expectations and cultural protocols specific to that community, cultural communication processes and cultural ways of connecting with others. The advisor can advise, guide, or deliver cultural awareness, support, and education to a researcher.

Why work with Aboriginal community navigators and Aboriginal cultural advisors in research?

Planning to employ an Aboriginal Community Navigator and/or an Aboriginal Cultural Advisor in the research will strengthen any project's community engagement and communication by providing community and cultural guidance. Ideally, such collaboration starts at the beginning of the project and carries through all stages of the research.

Make sure to connect with Aboriginal Community Navigators and/or Aboriginal Cultural Advisors through central Australian Aboriginal community controlled health organisations, other local Aboriginal community controlled organisations, local Aboriginal researchers, local Aboriginal staff, or relevant community representatives engaged in the research project. The appropriate approach will depend on the type of research, the capabilities within the research institute, and the community you are working with. Working with Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors will help

researchers engage with Aboriginal people in ways that consider individual, family, community and cultural needs.

#TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Working with Aboriginal community navigators and Aboriginal cultural advisors

Consult these tips and memory joggers to work well with Aboriginal community navigators and Aboriginal cultural advisors in central Australia. To be read in conjunction with #TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Practicing culturally safe research on page 33.

- Know the legacy of colonisation. Familiarise yourself with previous, current, and ongoing government policies affecting Aboriginal people. Acknowledge power imbalances and white privilege
- Research itself can be a sensitive subject for Aboriginal people. Even the word 'research' can trigger feelings of suspicion and defensiveness
- Aboriginal community navigators and Aboriginal cultural advisors are Aboriginal community members foremost
- Ensure there is a mutual understanding of the roles, responsibilities, and scope of the work to be undertaken by Aboriginal Community Navigators, Aboriginal Cultural Advisors, and researchers, both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Consider how these roles inter-relate and overlap
- Be realistic about the extent that Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors can influence community members
- Engage Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors as early as possible in the research process to ensure culturally safe and appropriate ways of communicating
- Be aware that you may need to work with more than one Aboriginal Community Navigator or Cultural Advisor in each community to engage with different genders and family groups
- Be mindful of your behaviour and communication and how it may reflect on the Aboriginal Community Navigator and Cultural Advisor
- Listen to concerns, considerations and conflicts of interest raised by Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors and respond appropriately
- Understand that the role of Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors may mean that they are held accountable by the community for the action of the research or researcher/s and act accordingly
- Establish a culturally safe process for *how* research information is communicated and disseminated to community members, groups, and organisations. This may also include working with Aboriginal staff, researchers, or Aboriginal organisations to determine the best way for communication to take place
- Be mindful that even though people can speak English or an Aboriginal language, they may not necessarily read English or an Aboriginal language
- Be patient and open-minded: Learn to be comfortable with long pauses in conversations. Pressing for a response before a person has answered a question is likely to be perceived as 'whitefella bossiness' and as an inability to listen well with empathy
- Speak clearly, use plain or uncomplicated English. Avoid jargon, acronyms, or 'academic speak'
- Be open and willing to learn
- Be flexible and respond to last-minute changes respectfully
- Ensure Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors are remunerated fairly and appropriately for their time, skills, and knowledge

GUIDELINE #4. PRACTICING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, TRAUMA INFORMED RESEARCH

This section of the Guide assists researchers and research institutes to start on the journey to understand the complex effects of trauma and how research can be improved.

Who is a culturally-responsive trauma-informed researcher?

A culturally-responsive trauma-informed researcher knows *The Six Rs*. They:

- **Realise** the widespread impact of trauma and understand paths for recovery
- **Recognise** the signs and symptoms of trauma in themselves and others
- **Respond** by integrating knowledge of trauma into research design and practice
- **Reduce** re-traumatisation of themselves and others
- **Revive** connection to things that matter - community, family, Country
- **Regenerate** opportunities for healing through the research process

What is trauma?

Trauma can result from a single event or a series of related or unrelated events. It can result from loss, abuse, violence, neglect, war, disaster, and other emotionally harmful experiences. Trauma does not discriminate, it can affect anyone, at any age and at any time, including health researchers. Described as overwhelming stress, trauma can be experienced in many different forms, such as acute, chronic, complex, vicarious, and intergenerational. Some people may experience a traumatic event with few lasting negative effects, whereas others may experience long-lasting impacts across many areas of their life. *Damulgurra*[5], the Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance of the Northern Territory (AMSANT) social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) support team, explains trauma as being 'stuck in survival, using up energy from the body, mind, emotions and spirit to survive layers of unresolved threat'.

Intergenerational trauma is trauma transmitted across generations, from the first generation of survivors who directly experienced the traumatic event, to future generations. The *Damulgurra* SEWB support team talk about intergenerational trauma being painful history passed down, through painful and survival-based thoughts, reactions, sense of self and worth, disrupted meaning, value and belonging, ongoing experiences of denial, dismissal and injustice, and embodied patterns of distress and survival. As well, intergenerational trauma can be transmitted through parenting practices, behavioural problems, violence, harmful substance abuse and mental health issues. Research shows that people who experience trauma are more likely to engage in self-destructive behaviours, develop life-style diseases and enter and remain in the criminal justice system.

What is trauma for Aboriginal people in central Australia?

Unresolved trauma is psychological, emotional and spiritual wounding caused by events so frightening or threatening that they overwhelm our capacity to cope. Congress Lead Aboriginal Cultural Advisor, Sabella Kngwarraye Turner, defines trauma as *Utnenge Kwarneme Atnyeneme*, or 'hurt held in the spirit'. Such hurt occurs from being 'spun away' from the things that come from the living ground: culture, Country, language, kinship, stories, clear thinking, good feelings, good friends and strong bodies. When these are connected and held properly, we have *Utnenge Rlterrke,* or 'Strong Spirit'. The understanding of what it

[5] Damulgurra is the word for 'heart' in the Larrakia language. http://www.amsant.org.au/aod-and-mental-health-program-support/

means for these important things to be 'connected and held properly' belongs with each place and to the people who belong to Country, Law, language, and culture of a region.

What is culturally-responsive trauma-informed research practice?

Culturally-responsive trauma-informed research practice promotes *Utnenge Rlterrke,* or 'Strong Spirit'. From inception to results dissemination, this type of work pays allegiance to five principles.

1. Support relationship building and connectedness to promote healing

Relationships can affect both healing and trauma. Importantly, research methodologies that maintain a distance between researchers and research participants to achieve 'objectivity' are risking re-traumatisation, regardless of the research topic. It is important to take the time to build respectful relationships that foster two-way learning and shared decision making throughout all phases of the research. Aboriginal researchers, Aboriginal language speakers, Aboriginal Community Navigators and Aboriginal Cultural Advisors can play an essential role here in building and navigating relationships that promote healing through the research process.

2. Understand trauma and its impacts

Aboriginal people in central Australia share a history of displacement from language, culture, Law, community, kin, and Country. This collective history of trauma forms a part of the research context, with implications for both the way the research should be conducted and how findings might be interpreted and presented. It is important to seek out community and cultural advice throughout the research process and to develop the skills to recognise and respond to trauma in culturally safe ways. It is equally important for researchers to recognise their own trauma and how it impacts them and the project.

3. Understand privilege and the dynamics of power

Traditional Aboriginal cultural systems in central Australia continue to be undermined by mainstream assumptions and practices asserted by the privileged. Cultural safety in research requires culturally respectful interactions and communication. This means ongoing critical reflection throughout the research process and a heightened awareness of how power dynamics – both explicit and implicit – can impact research participants, members of the research team, and the research itself.

4. Create environments in which people feel physically, emotionally and spiritually safe

Environment is key to people's sense of safety. To promote physical, emotional, and spiritual safety among research participants and the research team, consider both the physical and relational aspects of the environment. Take direction from Aboriginal staff when selecting the physical location or setting for the research. In the relational space, use strategies to distil power imbalances and foster a two-way learning environment.

5. Empower and support Aboriginal community control of the research journey

Research agendas are often set by funding bodies, research institutions or the interests of researchers. Including Aboriginal people and communities in setting the research agendas from the outset can help establish mutual aims, guide the research process, and provide permissions relating to the sharing of information.

#TIPS FOR PRACTICE: How to be a culturally-responsive trauma-informed researcher

Consult these tips and memory joggers to support you to become a culturally-responsive trauma-informed researcher in central Australia. To be read in conjunction with #TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Practicing culturally safe research on page 33.

- Understand trauma and its impact on all - researchers, participants, stakeholders
- Recognise signs and symptoms of trauma - exhaustion, confusion, anxiety, numbness, disassociation, agitation, sleep disorders
- Treat people with kindness and respect, speak calmly and quietly, tread lightly
- Build relationships and support connectedness to promote healing
- Take the time to develop relationships with Aboriginal staff and community members and learn about the local community and cultural protocols
- Ensure cultural safety, understand privilege and the dynamics of power
- Create environments in which people feel physically, emotionally and spiritually safe
- Develop safety protocols to address risks to the social and emotional wellbeing of participants and colleagues, particularly risks of 'triggering' and re-traumatising
- Ensure access to therapeutic care by knowing local referral pathways
- Use central Australian Aboriginal community-controlled organisations and local research institutions to connect with Aboriginal staff and follow their advice
- Empower and support Aboriginal community control of the research journey
- Work with communities to agree on mutual aims and co-design the research methodology where possible. Be open to doing things in ways that do not fit traditional health and medical research moulds
- Throughout the process, seek permissions to share information and document what you can and cannot share
- When presenting or publishing, seek permission in relation to the content and respective audience (some things may only be shared with certain people and in certain ways)
- Take up opportunities to become more culturally aware and trauma-informed

GUIDELINE #5. PRACTICING CULTURALLY SAFE RESEARCH

This section gives background on culturally-safe research practices and an overview of cultural protocols for researchers working in central Australia with Aboriginal people and communities serviced by Congress. It is based on the *Congress Cultural Safety Framework* and *Congress Town and Remote Cultural Protocols*. In consultation with the Congress Research Sub-committee and remote Boards, protocols were adapted for use by internal and external researchers. The Guideline should be used when engaging with Aboriginal people, Aboriginal communities, and Congress clinics in central Australia.

Who is a culturally safe researcher?

A culturally safe researcher is any researcher, Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal, who creates a safe working environment for people from all cultures. This means everyone, regardless of culture, are treated with respect and inclusion. However, cultural safety is more than just being aware of other cultures and respecting all people. It is about creating a safe working environment where everyone can examine their own cultural identities and attitudes and be open-minded and flexible in their interactions with people from cultures other than their own. It also requires everyone to understand that their own values or practices are not always the best or only way. A culturally safe researcher is someone who encourages research that accounts for cultural considerations with respect for all people, their languages, and cultures. They are non-judgmental and open to ongoing learning.

Why do we need a culturally safe research practice?

Culturally safe research practice is a fundamental right of anyone involved in research and an expected part of all researchers' professional behaviour. Culturally safe research practice is important because it can:

- *provide better access to opportunities*
- *lead to better quality research*
- *help address the social determinants of health*
- *recognise and support human rights*

For health researchers, culturally safe research practice can help deliver higher quality results, expand professional practice, and aid personal development.

What is culturally safe research practice in central Australia?

Culturally safe research practice includes:

- researchers who recognise the historical experiences of Aboriginal people, their contemporary experience of racism, and how the ongoing power imbalance between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australia profoundly affects health and well-being
- a research environment that encourages and empowers Aboriginal people to make their own decisions for themselves and their family
- research governance, policies and practice that affirm Aboriginal language, culture, and rights

Moreover, no Aboriginal researcher or staff member should be expected to 'leave their Aboriginality at the door' when they come to work. Instead, their understanding of cultural matters and connection to and knowledge of the community should be valued and recognised as a key part of delivering effective and culturally safe research. Also, whether the research itself, an environment or situation is culturally safe to Aboriginal people or not, may only be decided by Aboriginal people themselves.

And remember, it is *always* important to ask the right person. If a non-Aboriginal researcher is unsure who that might be, the first question is 'who is the right person for me to speak to about this issue?' – this might include approaches to Aboriginal staff or management, Congress Lead Aboriginal Cultural Advisor, the Aboriginal Staff Advisory Committee or even (with approval of the CEO) the Women's or Men's Health Sub-Committee to the Congress Board. Meeting the demands of effective, culturally safe research practice is complex and all advice should be respectfully heard and used in decision-making.

Sometimes an Aboriginal staff member may not be able to disclose everything about a particular cultural situation. In this case, patience and respect are needed, as trying to 'push' for more information is unlikely to succeed and may even undermine the development of a trusting relationship. Aboriginal staff have their own jobs and duties to perform. Non-Aboriginal researchers should be thoughtful and consider this, only seeking guidance when necessary. And of course, there is no point seeking advice only to argue against it or ignore it.

Lastly, this guideline provides important information, but no set of protocols or principles is enough by itself to create culturally safe research. It takes commitment, time, and practice. In this regard, the most valuable resource for any non-Aboriginal researcher is their Aboriginal co-workers and community members. Seeking their advice on how to handle a particular situation is critical to developing culturally safe practice.

#TIPS FOR PRACTICE: Practicing culturally safe research in central Australia

Developing culturally safe research practice requires an ongoing commitment from all researchers. It is not something that is 'completed' or 'achieved' at any point but rather is a continuous process of engagement and understanding, a journey rather than a fixed goal. The following principles are a starting point and guide.

1. **'Aboriginality comes in all different shades':** The culturally safe researcher recognises and respects the diversity of Aboriginal people in central Australia and seeks to respond to the individuality of the Aboriginal person with whom they are interacting.
2. **Understand Aboriginal history and its contemporary effects:** The culturally safe researcher does not carry guilt about past events over which they had no control. However, they acknowledge those events and seek to understand how they affect Aboriginal people today, and how they could affect the power-relationships inherent in the researcher-participant relationship.
3. **Practise respect:** The culturally safe researcher practices respect for Aboriginal people, languages, and cultures. They embrace working with central Australian Aboriginal people as a 'two-way' learning process and develop their ability to open their eyes and ears to what is around them. Their practice is an open and reflective, non-judgemental practice, and they avoid jumping to conclusions or making hasty judgements.
4. **Develop trusting relationships:** The culturally safe researcher builds trusting relationships with Aboriginal staff and community members, recognising that this requires time and respect.
5. **Support empowerment, community control and self-determination:** The culturally safe researcher seeks to understand the history of Congress and the importance of its role as an Aboriginal community-controlled health service. They support the processes of Aboriginal decision-making and control within the organisation, including research, encourage self-reliance and support Aboriginal community capacity.
6. **Attend to issues of language and communication:** The culturally safe researcher will pay particular attention to issues of language and communication, recognising the diversity in the use

of the English language among Aboriginal people in central Australia. They tailor their approach to the person they are talking to, particularly in relation to vocabulary, tone, and non-verbal communication (e.g., body language).

7. **Seek and respect advice:** The culturally safe researcher respects local Aboriginal knowledge by thoughtfully seeking the advice of Aboriginal co-workers and community members. They understand the importance of getting advice from the right person, of recognising that they do not have a 'right' to Aboriginal cultural knowledge, and that respecting that advice is critically important.
8. **Note particular areas for attention:** The culturally safe researcher seeks advice about cultural issues such as sorry business; gender and age; kinship relationships; prohibited areas; appearance and dress; and community politics.

CONCLUSION

This Guide has been intended for researchers working or intending to work with Aboriginal people in central Australia. Specifically, it aims to help and guide those researchers who want to know how to work safely, respectfully, and appropriately when conducting research here. It has introduced important considerations like Aboriginal community expectations and cultural protocols, with the aim of fostering high quality, culturally safe, responsive, and trauma-informed research. Each guideline has been developed from extensive research and consultation. Congress and the authors hope that research conducted according to these guidelines can be of benefit to the researchers and their institutes as well as Aboriginal people and communities who work alongside them. Remember, this is a living document and future editions will benefit from feedback, which can be emailed to the Congress Research Manager research@caac.org.au

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