

WORKING WITH ABORIGINAL PEOPLE

Enhancing Clinical Practice in Mental Health Care

DISCUSSION GUIDE



NSW MINISTRY OF HEALTH

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OVERVIEW

Improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal communities across the state is firmly on the NSW Government agenda. The NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013-2023¹ focuses on changing the health system to ensure policies and programs meet the needs of Aboriginal people.

Understanding the significance of culture, family, community and spirituality in the healing journey for Aboriginal people is important. It can assist services in designing, delivering and evaluating care that improves mental health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal children, youth and their families.

The video “*Working with Aboriginal People: Enhancing Clinical Practice in Mental Health Care*” and this discussion guide is designed to assist your service in gaining knowledge and skills in working with Aboriginal people.

It builds on the NSW Health Respecting the Difference initiative:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/aboriginal/Pages/respecting-the-difference.aspx>

and the NSW Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) Competency Framework:

<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/programs/mh/Publications/camhs-nov11.pdf>

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This discussion guide accompanies the video and can be used to facilitate small group discussions and/or individual learning.

1) Watch the video. Either the full version or as separate chapters.

2) Download or print this document so that you can use the key themes and discussion questions in each chapter. They will help guide you and your colleagues to share stories and gain knowledge in working effectively with Aboriginal children, youth and their families. It can also prompt you to explore other resources and find out more about your local Aboriginal community.

Remember, if you are facilitating a workshop it is respectful and appropriate, before you begin this video to offer a “*Welcome to Country*” or “*Acknowledgement of Country*”.

¹ NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013-2023. Available at: <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/aboriginal/Publications/aboriginal-health-plan-2013-2023.pdf>



Strong Cultural Identity

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal people belong to a strong living culture that has been a source of creativity and vast resilience for thousands of years. The introduction of this video acknowledges the impact of colonisation on Aboriginal people and how trauma contributes significantly to the mental health and wellbeing of many families.

KEY THEMES:

- It is recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing beginning from colonisation. Compounded trauma and loss of this magnitude continues to have intergenerational effects still today.
- Culturally safe and responsive services will encourage Aboriginal youth to access mental health organisations.
- Strong cultural identity is an important component to the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal children and youth.
- The Aboriginal view of health is holistic, encompassing mental, physical, cultural and spiritual elements. Connection to country, family, community and culture are central to Aboriginal people's identity and wellbeing. When the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, ill health will arise and/or persist.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Discuss ways your service incorporates Aboriginal cultural respect to support Aboriginal people accessing your organisation?
- How can your organisation expand the service delivery framework to work more effectively for Aboriginal people?

RESOURCE PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER:

NSW Mental Health Reform 2014-2024:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/reform/Pages/default.aspx>

CHAPTER 1

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CHAPTER

SUPPORTING RECOVERY

High quality service delivery must be accessible, appropriate and safe in supporting recovery for Aboriginal people. Acknowledging and accepting Aboriginal culture is a key ingredient in healing trauma and improving the mental health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people. This approach will help ignite a positive recovery journey for Aboriginal children, youth and their families who may come into contact with your service.



KEY THEMES:

- Families and community are important to recovery and wellbeing.
- Aboriginal children and young people's sense of belonging, pride and connection to cultural identity is healing. A strong relationship with community and family, supports resilience and helps protect young people from isolation and dislocation which are significant risk factors for suicide.
- Best practice models for mental health care emphasise (least restrictive) community based options. Outreach services that are flexible, safe and close to home can contribute to improving engagement with Aboriginal people and their families.
- Use holistic approaches and involve the family.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Discuss ways your organisation may incorporate multiple world views (Aboriginal cultural knowledge and westernised clinical knowledge) to support the recovery of wellbeing for Aboriginal children, youth and their families? Give examples.
- Who are the cultural champions in your area and how can your organisation include them in your service model?
- Discuss ways of incorporating culture and identity into assessments and care planning within your organisation?

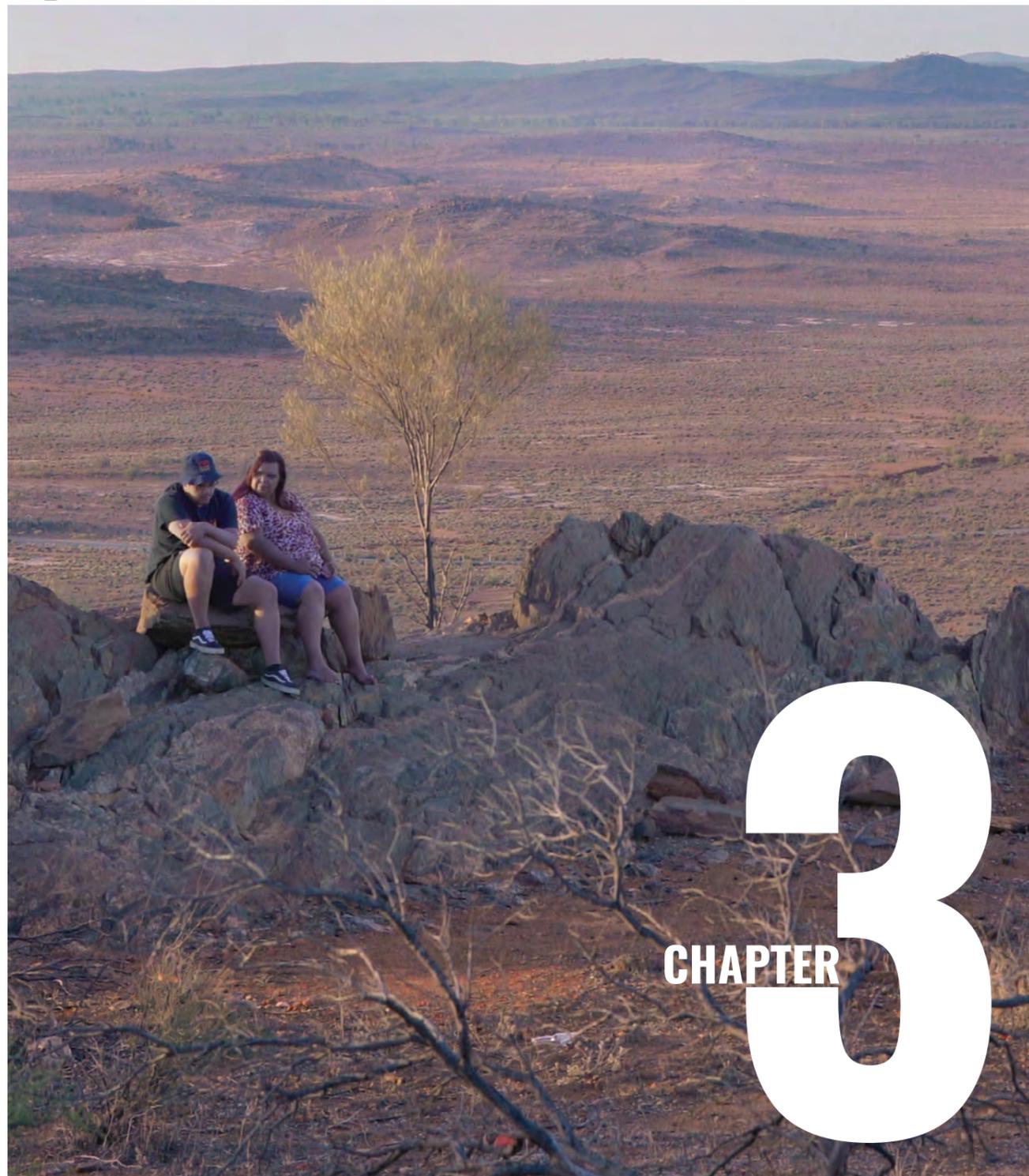
RESOURCE PRESENTED IN THIS CHAPTER:

Amendments to the NSW Mental Health Act (2007):

<http://www.mha.nswiop.nsw.edu.au/images/factsheets/MHA-FactSheet-Clinicians-v2.pdf>



PROVIDING PERSON-CENTRED CARE



Aboriginal people have a strong connection to their country and community. Aboriginal people are diverse and may live in urban, rural or remote areas and are in all walks of life including traditional and contemporary. Many move frequently between these ways of living.

“Person-centred care” is a way of focusing on the needs and goals of people using health and social services rather than focusing on what the service does. Person-centred care sees the person and their carer/s as equal partners in planning, developing and monitoring care to make sure it suits their needs. This means enabling people and their families to make key decisions around their treatment and care because they are the experts in their lives, working alongside professionals to get the best outcome.”²

KEY THEMES:

- Family and kinship must be acknowledged as well as broader concepts of family, such as connection, affection, sharing and responsibilities.
- There is no one Aboriginal group of people, but many diverse groups, all with a different language, dialect, traditions and customs. This will determine how to communicate with each group.
- Every Aboriginal child, youth and family will have a different story. Listen to their story, learn from and act upon what is important to them in supporting their recovery of mental health and wellbeing.
- Develop appropriate ways to engage and support healing, including pathways to appropriate programs and services outside mainstream mental health. This is important in being holistic and providing “person-centred care”.
- Consider the surroundings and environments when engaging with Aboriginal children, youth and families.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Is your organisation aware of the significant places and people in your area? Discuss and identify where you might find them.
- Discuss ways Aboriginal people heal trauma? Give examples.
- Discuss how your organisation can enhance the environment and improve ways of working with Aboriginal people?

² National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023. Available at: <https://www.pmc.gov.au/resource-centre/indigenous-affairs/national-strategic-framework-mental-health-social-emotional-wellbeing-2017-23>

Stigma, discrimination and racism entrenches social disadvantage and reinforces ongoing negative impacts and stressors on Aboriginal peoples' mental health and wellbeing.

Myths have become one of the ways of 'knowing' about Aboriginal people. In this chapter we will consider and challenge the deficit-based approaches and myths that have shaped broader Australia's perceptions of Aboriginal people. This chapter validates a strength-based approach, placing Aboriginal people as the experts of their culture and highlights the importance of self-determination.

KEY THEMES:

- Persistent perceptions and subtle underlying prejudice against Aboriginal people constrains engagement and relationships.
- There is strong evidence of links between racial discrimination and ill-health.³
- Racial discrimination occurs when there is a rule or policy that is the same for everyone but has an unfair effect on people of a particular race, colour, descent, ethnic origin or immigrant status.⁴

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Discuss the effects that racism and discrimination may have on Aboriginal people (i.e. physically, emotionally, mentally and socially)?
- Discuss ways you can continually update your skills and knowledge to work with your Aboriginal clients?
- Consider if there are ways that you deliver your service that might be a barrier or not work well for many Aboriginal people. How might you amend these processes to better suit Aboriginal people?

³ Tackling racism in Australia. Available at: https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/AHRC_RightsEd_Race_Yr9_10.pdf

⁴ Know your rights: Racial discrimination and vilification. Available at: <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/our-work/race-discrimination/publications/know-your-rights-racial-discrimination-and-vilification>



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CHAPTER



Embracing Our Strengths

This chapter explores different cultural practices and customs. It highlights strategies for working with Aboriginal people and communities.

The NSW Government is committed to working in partnership with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to address health disparities and improve health outcomes.⁵ Meaningful partnerships with Aboriginal people, communities and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services are critical to effecting positive change.

The principles of effective partnerships to improve Aboriginal health are described in the following quote by the national Close the Gap campaign. They say:

“Genuine partnership exists when two or more parties join together to work toward a common goal; it is a process of shared decision making, of negotiated outcomes and of mutual respect. It is an ongoing process and one that requires sustained effort to maintain over time. At its heart, working in partnership means that both parties have genuine influence - not only in identifying issues and developing solutions, but also in determining the form of partnership.”⁶



Key characteristics of successful partnerships include:⁷

- Respect, trust and mutual understanding between all partners
- An acceptance that different parties will have different roles and responsibilities
- Provision of adequate resources to all partners
- Realistic and specific objectives, usually ones that each partner organisation would not be able to meet by working alone
- A process of review and evaluation, which is both qualitative and quantitative and which assesses the partnership process as well as its outcomes.

KEY THEMES:

- Build respect, trust and mutual understanding between all parties.
- Listen without judgement.
- Accept the different parties roles and responsibilities.
- Understand different protocols and practices such as Men's and Woman's Business and Sorry Business.
- Spirituality and specific healing approaches can play a vital role in recovery and relationships and can occur in multiple ways.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- Review the key characteristics of successful partnerships and discuss how your service may build on or improve partnership arrangements.
- Discuss ways you may have come across matters with Men's/Women's Business.
- Discuss the limitations your service may encounter if Men's/Women's Business is not considered. If you were of opposite different gender, did you ask if it was appropriate to continue working with them?
- What healing therapies beside talk therapies does your organisation practice? What could your organisation start using?
- Have you worked with or do you know how to contact your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service (ACCHS). How do you access your local Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) and your local Aboriginal Health Service within your local health district?

⁵ NSW Aboriginal Health Plan 2013-2023. Available at:

https://www1.health.nsw.gov.au/pds/ActivePDSDocuments/PD2012_066.pdf

⁶ Close the Gap Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality. Available at:

https://www.humanrights.gov.au/sites/default/files/content/pdf/social_justice/health/partnership_position_paper.pdf

⁷ Successful partnerships are the key to improving Aboriginal health. Available at:

<http://www.phrp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/NB11057.pdf>

USEFUL TOOLS AND RESOURCES

This page directs you to the NSW Health website (www.health.nsw.gov.au), This is where you can find more information on:

- NSW Mental Health Reform 2014-2024 :
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/reform/Pages/default.aspx>
- Respecting the Difference:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/workforce/aboriginal/Pages/respecting-the-difference.aspx>
- CAMHS Competency Framework:
<https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/programs/mh/Publications/camhs-nov11.pdf>
- Amendments to the NSW Mental Health Act(2007):
<http://www.mha.nswiop.nsw.edu.au/images/factsheets/MHA-FactSheet-Clinicians-v2.pdf>
- The National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023 is intended to guide and inform Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing reforms:
https://pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/mhsewb-framework_0.pdf
- Mental Health Portal (The Portal) uses a self-registering system. Staff will need to register using the following link:
<http://mhwfd.heti.edu.au>

The Portal is available to all NSW Health organisations, targeting NSW mental health staff. A wide range of resources are available to support organisational capacity and capability planning and individual professional development. Other resources supporting Aboriginal mental health and wellbeing can also be found on the Mental Health Portal.



