



Cultural Supervision Guidelines

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce



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Using this guide

This guide is a practical tool to embed cultural supervision as a routine and valued element of professional practice, promoting cultural safety, connection, and empowerment for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce (HWF).



Purpose

Queensland Health recognises the cultural responsibility and expertise of the HWF workforce. These Cultural Supervision Guidelines provide information to ensure the HWF workforce has access to cultural supervision and supports Department of Health and Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) to understand the need, expectations, and benefits of this practice.

The purpose for cultural supervision is to ensure cultural safety and ethical practices that prioritise the well-being and self-determination of the HWF workforce. Cultural supervision develops a strong, sustainable, and capable health workforce and aims to achieve better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees, families, and communities. This is achieved by supporting HWF employees in fostering cultural awareness and promoting best practices that align with the needs and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This guide may also be used by other workers outside the HWF stream where appropriate.

Background

Queensland Health agrees that the retention of the skills and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce employees helps overcome barriers found in mainstream health services to attract employees with such skills and experience to work in Queensland Health's public system. As part of negotiations for *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement (No. 2) 2023* (HWFEB2) the parties agreed to rights to cultural supervision for HWF classification employees. This right continues on in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce (Queensland Health) Certified Agreement (No. 3) 2025* (HWFEB3). The Cultural Supervision Guidelines were co-designed in partnership with the Cultural Supervision Guidelines Working Group, in alignment with the HWFEB2 to continue the enhancement for the HWF workforce. Employees covered under the HWFEB2 include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Practitioners
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Liaison Officers
- Executive Directors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health, Alcohol and/or Other Drugs roles

What is cultural supervision?

Cultural supervision provides Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees with regular feedback that supports professional and community strengths and identifies challenges from a cultural perspective, assisting employees to explore alternative solutions to issues that may be affecting them. Cultural supervision is a voluntary, trust-based mutual relationship between two or more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queensland Health employees or with an external person. Cultural supervision enables HWF employees access to support from a peer of their choice to foster cultural support, advocacy and promote best practices that align with the needs and values of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



Right to access cultural supervision

HWF employees have a right to access cultural supervision as part of their workplace support and benefits. Queensland Health is committed to ensure that HWF employees will be supported to access cultural supervision, during their ordinary hours, to access a cultural supervisor, participate in, or provide cultural supervision, separate from operational, clinical and professional supervision.

The HWF employee is accountable for participating in cultural supervision. While the content of cultural supervision remains confidential between the supervisee and supervisor, details such as the timing and frequency of formal and informal sessions may be shared with HWF line managers or leadership for scheduling and support purposes. All Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees may be supported to access cultural supervision. This support may also extend to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees and or supervisors from other streams and the opportunity for cultural supervision should be encouraged.

Organisation

The organisation, including team leads and line managers, are responsible for supporting access to cultural supervision during the HWF employee's working hours, provided that disruption to service delivery and work requirements are minimised. When an employee expresses the need for cultural supervision, the employer is accountable for actively supporting and encouraging this practice. Importantly, participation in cultural supervision is the choice of the HWF employee, who should, where reasonably practicable, be supported to select their preferred supervisor. The details of cultural supervision are confidential with the supervisee and cultural supervisor. Information can be shared with team leads and line managers on the frequency of meetings.

Benefits to HWF employee

Cultural supervision reduces isolation, supports navigating the health system, enhances well-being, and fosters cultural knowledge sharing. Additional benefits include:

- Strengthening staff relationships and promoting sustainable practices
- Debriefing after an emergency or critical incident
- Reducing cultural load and burn-out on workforce
- Supporting personal and professional development
- Providing local cultural protocol guidance
- Promoting collaboration, feedback and debriefing
- Offering mentorship and information sharing

Benefits to organisation

Cultural supervision promotes equitable outcomes, strengthens organisational culture and supports the complexities in the workplace that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees often experience. Organisational benefits include:

- Meeting legislative and governance requirements including health equity
- Improving mental health and psychosocial wellbeing
- Enhancing patient and client care, journey and best practice outcomes
- Identifying service gaps and supporting continuous improvement
- Addressing cultural load
- Enhances the organisations understanding and respect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures

Queensland Health recognises the importance of cultural supervision that contributes to improving the health, well-being and retention of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce.

Cultural load

Cultural load refers to the additional responsibilities Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may carry, especially when they are one of few or the only Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee. These added expectations are usually unofficial and not part of their formal job description, yet they can significantly impact workload and wellbeing.

Additional workplace demands may include but not limited to:

- Expectations to educate non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander colleagues about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, share personal stories relating to culture, family and history, or to educate people about racism
- Expectations to talk on behalf of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples on matters relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples





When to access cultural supervision

Cultural supervision can be accessed as frequently as needed. There are some other situations where it may be important to access cultural supervision including but not limited to:

Resolving community concerns

A clinician unknowingly contacts an unintended person/s, causing community tension. This may be caused by a breakdown in the process and lack of knowledge and/or understanding of cultural ways. As a result, a HWF employee becomes involved/tasked with assisting with the resolution.

Impact of ad hoc support on workload

A HWF employee is called upon at short notice as a cultural mediator or interpreter across various areas, due to lack of culturally safe practices, contributing to ongoing pressure and strain in addressing culturally unsafe situations.

Managing after a culturally challenging event

A cultural unsafe practice or racism occurred and a HWF employee is requested to mitigate conflict between clinicians and families.

Addressing patient or community conflict from lack of co-design

A HWF employee is relied on to address Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and/or stakeholder conflict due to lack of consultation.

Supporting isolation

An Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander employee is the only identified employee in their team or location who feels isolated, overwhelmed or impacted by cultural responsibilities in their role.

Cultural supervision provides connection, cultural reflection, and support from someone who understands their lived experience.



Delivery of cultural supervision

Queensland Health supports access to cultural supervision during ordinary work hours. Cultural supervision is voluntary, confidential, and the cultural supervisor is selected by the HWF employee.

Examples that may support internal supervision include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers, Practitioners and Liaison Officers
- Cultural Capability Officers
- Executive Directors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health
- Other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employees within Queensland Health

External cultural supervisors may be considered as an alternative to internal cultural supervisors, however, funding of external supervision will be at the discretion of the HHS.

Examples of external supervisors may include:

- Elders and Community members
- persons from Prescribed Body Corporations (entities who represent traditional owners)
- persons from Land Councils
- persons from Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations

Cultural supervision is grounded in trust, respect, and autonomy. These relationships are confidential and self-managed by the participants, allowing each person to define their own expectations, needs, and availability. This approach enables supervisees to grow both culturally and professionally, while being meaningfully supported by their employer. Refer to Appendix 1 – Characteristics of a Cultural Supervisor for further guidance on the qualities and values that underpin effective cultural supervision relationships.

Structure of cultural supervision

To support a sustainable practice, participants should agree on a suitable approach to cultural supervision, which may be formal or informal, noting flexibility is often required. Scheduling should prioritise culturally safe spaces to support yarning and self-reflection.

The following table provides examples for delivery:

Informal	Could be as short as 5-minute yarns.
Formal	Formal cultural supervision is a more focused approach, where levels of support are documented only between the participants, to identify the goals and what is to be achieved using structures, such as agreements and templates.
One-to-one	One-to-one cultural supervision is the most common practice; this can be provided in-person, online, or via phone. This allows the cultural



	supervisor and cultural supervisee to develop a relationship and provides individual support.
Group yarns	Group cultural supervision can consist of several participants who choose to meet at the same time and support one another. As yarns commence all participants can listen, reflect and share experiences insights and advice.

Formal Supervision

If participants prefer a formal approach, Appendix 2 *Cultural Supervision - Formal Agreement* and Appendix 3 *Cultural Supervision - Formal Template/Action Plan* provides structured tools to clearly define and document the steps required to achieve the desired cultural supervision outcomes.

Managing Conflict

If challenges arise within the cultural supervision relationship, it should be addressed constructively to maintain the integrity of the relationship. In the first instance, it is recommended that participants engage in direct discussion to seek a mutually acceptable resolution.

Participants are encouraged to consider how they can work effectively as a team by being respectful, non-judgmental and supportive of one another. When determining how to deal with difficulties, it is helpful to understand common attitudes towards conflict and the ways these may be approached in the cultural supervision relationship:

Avoidance	Some people avoid conflict, at times agreeing to actions and/or decisions they do not fully support, in order to maintain harmony.
Collaboration	Seeing conflict and disagreement as opportunities to work together towards resolving issues.
Compromise	Seeking a middle ground with each party making concessions to reach agreement.
Competition	Approaching conflict situations with a strong focus on proving one's position is right.
Directness	Considering conflict as a constructive process that allow issues to be raised openly, encourage all parties to express their views.

If further support is required, the appropriate escalation pathway is to approach the Executive Director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health within their own HHS, along with the option for a support person of the individuals choosing. They should inform and/or include the other participant in this discussion.



Definitions

Cultural safety	Cultural safety is determined by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities. Culturally safe practice is the ongoing critical reflection of knowledge, skills, attitudes, practicing behaviours and power differentials in delivering safe, accessible and responsive healthcare free of racism.
Cultural obligation	Cultural obligations refers to the responsibilities and expectations grounded in kinship, tradition, and cultural practices that shape behaviour, relationships, and roles within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Supporting cultural obligations is vital to supporting the HWF workforce and delivering culturally safe, respectful, and quality healthcare within Queensland Health.



Appendix 1 – Characteristics of a Cultural Supervisor

A cultural supervisor's skillsets may include but are not limited to:

- Knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, customs, lore, traditions, health and lands
- Knowledge and understanding of the community they are working within
- Knowledge to inform health care in Queensland Health systems and the health equity reform
- Able to provide effective support and leadership to encourage self-determination, advocacy, and strength-based approaches
- Ability to share strategies and approaches to support the supervisee in their roles
- Knowledge of cultural load
- Good listening skills
- Understanding cultural differences
- Leadership skills
- Conflict resolution
- Ability to build trust and rapport
- Maintain confidentiality
- Ability to provide constructive feedback

Appendix 2 – Cultural Supervision Formal Agreement

Cultural Supervisor Name:	Contact:
Cultural Supervisee Name:	Contact:
<p>We agree to enter this cultural supervision relationship with trust, openness and confidentiality. We agree to build and support knowledge, skills, strengths, and resilience. We agree that:</p>	
<p>1. We will meet every _____ at _____ (meeting times, once agreed, should not be cancelled unless this is unavoidable). At the end of each meeting, we will agree a date for the next meeting.</p>	
<p>2. Meetings are preferred to be held by <u>online meeting/in-person?</u> (please select)</p>	
<p>3. Each meeting will last _____. (insert duration)</p>	
<p>4. Between meetings, we will contact each other by telephone/email? (please select)</p>	
<p>5. We agree that the role of the Cultural Supervisor is to:</p>	
<p>6. Please document anything of importance to the Cultural Supervision relationship e.g., if you prefer to provide agendas or pre-meeting information:</p>	
<p>7. We agree to keep the content of these meetings confidential, however where behaviour is identified that may be harmful (e.g., harassment or racism), we will discuss a suitable and agreed escalation pathway.</p>	
<p>8. Please discuss how the Cultural Supervisor can best support the Cultural Supervision relationship including conflict:</p>	
Cultural Supervisor Signature:	
Cultural Supervisee Signature:	



Appendix 3 – Cultural Supervision Formal Template/Action Plan

Cultural Supervisee:	Cultural Supervisor:
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Cultural Supervision Topic/Discussion
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Desired Outcome

Action Plan (<i>What actions can be taken to achieve these goals?</i>)

Timeline (<i>Write out a timeline for the plan and when to follow up</i>)
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