Working together: Cultural protocols for engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in research

Queensland Health Guideline

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Acknowledgment

The Department of Health acknowledges the Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians of the lands, waters, and seas across the State of Queensland on which we work and live. Queensland Health recognises and respects both Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as the First Nations people in Queensland. Queensland Health's preference is to use 'First Nations' people and in respect of both cultural groups, still recognises 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' peoples as acceptable terms that can be used when referring to, writing with, for or about First Nations people. However, the local environment and operating context will determine your preferred choice.

About the Guide

The guide provides researchers practical advice and cultural protocols for building respectful, meaningful, and effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It emphasises the importance of understanding cultural values, traditions, and communication styles to ensure engagement is culturally safe and inclusive.

Purpose and Scope

The overall aim is to support individuals and organisations to work collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in ways that uphold cultural integrity, appropriateness, and safety throughout the research process. A key objective is also to improve the quality, impact, and tangible benefits of health research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and end-users. Employing the practical advice outlined in this guide is intended to strengthen meaningful engagement and contribute to research that responds directly to the needs and priorities identified by communities, cultivating positive and enduring outcomes.

This guideline applies to all individuals, teams, and organisations involved in consultation, collaboration, or service delivery with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It provides a framework for fostering respectful and culturally safe engagement, covering:

- **Cultural protocols**: Guidance on acknowledging Country, respecting cultural practices, and engaging with Elders and community leaders.
- **Communication and engagement**: Best practices for culturally appropriate communication, consultation processes, and ensuring meaningful community input into decision-making.
- **Ethical considerations**: Principles for informed consent, confidentiality, and cultural safety to uphold integrity and trust with all interactions.
- **Contexts of use:** Applicable across government, corporate, non-profit, and research settings where engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities occurs**.**

This guideline does not replace legal obligations or specific community agreements, it complements them by promoting a respectful, culturally responsive, and ethical approach to engagement. It emphasises the importance of co-designing research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to ensure cultural safety, inclusivity, and mutual benefit.

Aligned with the ethical standards of Human Research Ethics Committees (HRECs) and the *Ethical Conduct in Research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and Communities: Guidelines for*

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Researchers and Stakeholders, this guideline highlights the importance of meaningful engagement across all stages of the research lifecycle. It emphasises culturally safe approaches to participant recruitment, governance, dissemination of findings, and ensuring research delivers tangible benefits to communities. Central to the guideline are trust-building, shared decision-making, and transparent communication, which support genuine partnerships and uphold cultural integrity. The guideline is informed by the principles reflected in the CONSIDER Statement and supports researchers to address its reporting domains, including governance, relationships, prioritisation, methodologies, participation, capacity, analysis and findings, and dissemination.

It supports community-led research that respects self-determination and ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are genuine partners in the design, conduct, and translation of research.

Although compliance with this guideline is not mandatory, any departure from its principles should be supported by sound reasoning.

This guide should be used in conjunction with the following:

- National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC (2025)
- NHMRC Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2018)
- NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities
- Keeping Research on track II 2018
- AIATSIS Code for Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research 2020
- CONSIDER Statement (Consolidated Criteria for Strengthening the Reporting of Health Research Involving Indigenous Peoples) (Huria et al., 2019)

This guide complements existing ethical and research governance frameworks by providing practical guidance for culturally safe engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples throughout the research lifecycle.

Key Reasons for Using the Guide:

1. **Alignment with National Standards**: The guide is consistent with the NHMRC Codes, which are standard requirements for HREC applications and funding submissions. It provides specific, actionable steps to operationalise these high-level ethical principles in the Queensland context.
2. **Cultural safety and respect**: It offers detailed guidance on cultural protocols, communication, and engagement, ensuring that researchers and organisations uphold cultural safety and respect when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. **Enhanced research quality and impact**: By fostering genuine partnerships and community involvement, the guide helps ensure that research is not only ethically sound but also relevant, impactful, and beneficial to the communities involved.
4. **Support for HREC Applications**: Referencing and adhering to this guide in HREC applications demonstrates a commitment to best practices in ethical research and engagement, which may strengthen the credibility of proposals and increase the likelihood of approval.
5. **Meeting funding body expectations**: Many funding bodies, including those aligned with the NHMRC, require adherence to ethical guidelines for research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Foundational Principles

This guide is based on 8 key foundational principles. These are detailed below.

1. Sovereignty

Self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the inherent right to determine their own priorities, lead research agendas, and guide decision-making processes that affect their communities. This includes defining how research is initiated, how ideas are scoped, how knowledge is shared, and how outcomes will benefit community wellbeing, from the earliest stages of study design to the later steps of translation and dissemination.

Self-determined research should be initiated by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to address their self-identified health and wellbeing priorities.

Respecting self-determination means ensuring that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold meaningful authority throughout the research process, including planning, data collection, interpretation, reporting, and long-term management.

Self-determination also necessitates and supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' leadership, ownership, and control of the research process and any outputs. This requires recognising cultural authority and ensuring that community-led decision-making structures guide all aspects of the research. Researchers must work in genuine partnership with communities, ensuring that engagement practices reflect local governance, cultural protocols, and community expectations.

Cultural Integrity

Research must be grounded in cultural respect and guided by the local protocols, values, and traditions of each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. Genuine engagement requires working in partnership with recognised community members particularly Elders, Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, and local leaders who hold cultural authority and knowledge.

Culturally appropriate research also requires researchers to ensure culturally safe engagement, self-awareness, and a genuine commitment to building respectful, long-term relationships.

This includes involving community representatives early in the research process and collaborating with them on key aspects such as project design, consent procedures, data collection, and adherence to cultural protocols.

Researchers should:

- Take time to understand local context, history, and community experiences with past research, including diverse viewpoints within communities.
- Leverage existing relationships within the project team and collaborate with other research groups to reduce duplication and community burden.
- Seek guidance from appropriate stakeholders to ensure that research activities are culturally safe for all involved.
- Employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the project team to support community leadership and participation.

- Build knowledge of Indigenous Research Methodologies and review relevant ethical guidelines, such as those provided by NHMRC.
- Acknowledge the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the ongoing impacts of colonisation, government policies, and systemic racism.

2. Engagement and consultation

Researchers must initiate engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities from the earliest stages of project planning to ensure cultural safety and to build genuine partnerships. This includes identifying and respectfully approaching appropriate community representatives such as Elders, Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations (ATSICCHOs) and other recognised community leaders.

Begin engagement in the earliest planning stages

Transparency is essential throughout the engagement process. Researchers must clearly communicate the purpose of the research, its intended benefits, and any potential impacts on the community, building trust and ensuring that the research aligns with community priorities and values.

Initiate contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as soon as possible during the project planning phase. Early engagement ensures cultural safety and allows for genuine partnership building.

Transparent, respectful, and accountable engagement must underpin all stages of research. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and end-users should play a vital role in identifying research priorities and needs before research planning commences, ensuring that proposed projects are driven by community-defined aspirations rather than researcher-led agendas. Researchers must clearly communicate the purpose of the research, its intended benefits, and any potential impacts, and demonstrate how the work responds directly to community priorities and values.

Building community capacity and capability to engage in research is a critical component of this process. This includes employing and supporting community-based researchers to lead or conduct engagement activities, sharing accessible information about the health issue under investigation, and strengthening community understanding and trust in research processes and outcomes. Early, genuine engagement enables cultural safety, supports self-determination, and fosters sustainable, mutually beneficial research partnerships.

Identify and approach appropriate representatives

If you do not have established connections within the community in which you propose to undertake research, it is essential to take time to familiarise yourself with local cultural protocols, governance arrangements, and community practices. Building meaningful relationships with communities requires time and should not be rushed. This process should also include intentional investment in building research capability, such as training researchers to engage respectfully and effectively with communities and supporting the development of community-based researcher skills. These activities can be embedded within the study or trial and contribute to stronger engagement, shared understanding, and long-term community trust in research.

Respectfully engage with the right people through the following avenues:

Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians: Reach out to local Aboriginal Land Councils or Native Title Representative Bodies.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations (ATSICCHOs): These organisations have strong community ties and can provide guidance. Refer to the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) website for locations.

Aboriginal Shire Councils: Local government bodies in Queensland that represent and provide services to their communities.

Community Introductions: Seek introductions from local Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community members.

Elders and Cultural Leaders: Arrange meetings with Elders groups to begin respectful consultation and relationship building.

Research Officers and Research Planning (where available): Engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research officers, engagement officers, or community-based researchers to support or lead community engagement activities. Where possible, ensure that clear research engagement strategies or plans are developed collaboratively, outlining roles, responsibilities, communication processes, and pathways for community input and decision-making throughout the research lifecycle.

Some communities are made up of Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians (those with direct ancestral ties to the land) and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from different tribal or geographic areas who have chosen to live there. It's important to engage with both groups and acknowledge the contribution of both unique connections and perspectives.

Practice transparency and respect

Begin consultation before the project starts and prior to finalising the research topic, allowing communities adequate time to provide input and shape the direction.

Understand community priorities: Begin by asking the community about their health research priorities and any concerns they have, ensuring that potential research serves their needs and aspirations.

Your identity and role: Clearly introduce yourself and explain your position, background, and the organisation you represent.

Research purpose: Co-design the research purpose and objectives in plain language, ensuring they reflect community priorities and shared goals rather than being predetermined.

Potential benefits and risks: Describe both the potential positive outcomes and any possible risks or impacts the research may have on the community.

Community involvement and acknowledgement: Explain how the community will be engaged throughout the research process, how their knowledge and contributions will be recognised, and what measures are in place to ensure cultural safety and proper attribution. Ideally this would be provided to the community in plain language before the project design is finalised. When the project is finalised, the project will be submitted for HREC approval.

Develop a simple and easy-to-read fact sheet that clearly presents the key information. Focus on highlighting the main points using plain language and a clean layout.

Free, prior, and informed consent in research design

Consent to participate in activities that inform the design of a research project must be obtained respectfully and prior to the submission of the HREC application. This ensures that the research is co-designed with the community in a culturally appropriate and ethical manner.

Key principles include:

- **Respectful Engagement**: Consent must be sought in a way that respects cultural protocols and community values.
- **Plain Language Communication**: Information about the purpose, scope, and nature of the design activities must be clearly explained using plain language to ensure understanding.
- **Ongoing Consent**: Consent is not a one-time event; it must be maintained throughout the design process and can be withdrawn at any stage without consequence.

Researchers should document all engagement and consent activities undertaken during the design phase and include this documentation in the HREC application. This demonstrates transparency and accountability in the research process.

Case Example:
While conducting meetings to inform the design of a health research project, a member of Dr Smith's research team notices a pattern among several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants: they consistently respond "yes" to questions without hesitation. Some appear eager to end the conversation quickly, and when asked follow-up questions, they show signs of uncertainty or discomfort.

Dr Smith reflects on the cultural context and recognises that within many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, agreeing to a question may not always indicate genuine consent. "Yes" can sometimes be used out of politeness, cultural obligation, discomfort, or a desire to avoid conflict. It may also be a way to quickly end a conversation when the participant feels unsafe, unsure, or unheard.

Understanding that **genuine informed consent** must be **free, prior and informed**, Dr Smith and her team revise their approach to strengthen cultural safety and ensure participants are genuinely comfortable with their involvement.

Adjustments made by the research team include:

Including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander representation: Ensure the research team includes an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person or a community member in a 'peer researcher' role to strengthen cultural safety and community trust.

Building rapport before formal discussions: Time is taken to establish trust, allow informal conversation, and help participants feel at ease before any research-related questions are asked.

Providing clear, accessible information upfront: At the start of each session, the team explains what the discussion will involve, how long it will take, and that participants are free to ask questions, pause, or withdraw at any time without consequence.

Checking for understanding respectfully: When participants respond quickly or repeatedly with "yes," researchers gently follow up by asking participants to explain what they understood or to summarise the question in their own words. This is done in a culturally sensitive way to avoid shame or discomfort.

Encouraging two-way dialogue: Researchers prioritise listening and adapt their language and communication style to match the participant's comfort and communication preferences.

Cultural guides and translators

Each Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has its own cultural protocols, communication styles, and decision-making processes often known as the community's "Way." To engage respectfully and effectively, researchers must recognise that these ways are often not explicitly stated, but instead communicated through observation, relationships, and experience.

Engaging local cultural guides can support researchers to learn and navigate the "Way." These individuals are embedded within the community and have earned trust and respect. They can provide insight into:

- Local customs and leadership structures.
- Appropriate communication protocols.
- How decisions are made and when conversations can take place.

Engaging cultural advisors or translators who are respected by the community is essential to the success of any project. Their role goes beyond language translation, they interpret non-verbal communication such as body language, gestures, silence, and other subtle cues that may be missed by outsiders.

Cultural advisors can:

- Ask questions on your behalf in culturally appropriate ways.
- Seek permissions from the right people, at the right time.
- Let you know when it is appropriate to leave or pause engagement.
- Help you understand when answers will come in the community's own time

Case Example:
While facilitating yarning circles as part of a HREC approved community-based research project, a local community member informs Dr Amelia Smith that a respected Elder has recently passed away.

- Dr Smith turns to a local cultural guide who has been supporting the project. As someone who holds trust and respect within the community, the guide can:
- Explain the local customs and expectations associated with Sorry Business.
- Clarify which activities should be paused, and when it may be appropriate to resume engagement.
- Interpret subtle cues and community sentiment such as body language, silence, or avoidance that indicate when the timing is not right to continue.
- Advise when and how to communicate respectfully with key decision-makers during this sensitive time.

Through her guide, Dr Smith is informed that the yarning circles should be suspended until after the funeral and associated ceremonies are complete. She is also advised not to directly seek updates but to wait until the community reopens communication. Respecting this advice, Dr Smith pauses the project and ensures her research team understands the significance of this moment and the need for patience.

Sorry Business is a term used by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to describe the period of mourning following the death of a community member. This time involves significant cultural responsibilities, including attending funerals, participating in ceremonies, and supporting family and kin. It is customary for non-essential activities such as community meetings, research, or service delivery to be paused out of respect.

Engagement process flowchart

The engagement process flowchart below provides a structured framework for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, ensuring that ethical, respectful, and culturally appropriate practices are embedded throughout the research lifecycle. It outlines key phases, from identifying community-led research priorities to sharing findings and reflecting on outcomes, with a strong emphasis on collaboration, transparency, and accountability.

Early and transparent engagement

Initiate contact with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities as early as possible during the project planning phase. communicate the purpose of the research, its intended benefits, and any potential impacts on the community. This transparency helps to build trust and ensures alignment with community priorities and values.

Request introductory meetings with local Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, Elders committees, Aboriginal Medical services and recognised community groups. When reaching out, clearly identify yourself, where you are from, who you represent and the purpose of your request to meet. Keep in mind that most committees and groups meet infrequently, often only once a month. When planning consultation meetings, ensure appropriate remuneration is considered and meeting location is culturally appropriate for the topic that will be discussed.

Community-led research topic identification

Rather than approaching communities with a pre-determined research topic, researchers should collaborate with community members, Elders, and other key stakeholders to identify health issues or priorities that warrant research. This ensures the research is relevant and meaningful to the community and reflects their needs and aspirations. Researchers should facilitate discussions that allow communities to guide or inform the research topic, rather than merely providing feedback on pre-existing ideas.

Co-design of research questions and proposals

Collaborate with the community to co-design research questions, protocols, and methods. This includes ensuring that the methods align with the cultural values and preferences of community members. For example, if randomised controlled trials (RCTs) are proposed, discuss and adjust the methodology to address community preferences. This step ensures that the research approach is culturally appropriate and inclusive.

Develop research proposal

After drafting your study protocol, return to the community to present your proposal and seek their support to proceed. Use this opportunity to ask for guidance on engaging participants, including following the appropriate cultural protocols for data collection. Build engagement, review, and feedback mechanisms into every stage of the research process. This includes:

Reviewing research questions and protocols with the community to ensure they align with community priorities.

- Collaborating on methods for conducting the research, ensuring they are culturally safe and respectful.
- Engaging the community in the analysis of data and interpretation of preliminary findings.
- Seeking feedback on reporting and dissemination plans to ensure the results are shared in a way that is accessible, culturally appropriate, and beneficial to the community.

Establish research agreement

If the community is in support of your proposal, outline the roles, responsibilities and benefits in the study protocol.

Conduct research

Keep communication channels open throughout the project to ensure the community knows who to contact and where to go with any questions, concerns, or issues during the project's duration.

Share findings

After completing the research, compile the data into a format that is easy for the community to understand. Arrange a meeting with Elders, community groups, and all participants involved in the project. Present the findings clearly, explaining how the results will be used, who will have access to them, how they will be shared, and how the data will be protected. Ensure the community's intellectual property rights are respected and acknowledge everyone who contributed or collaborated on the project.

Evaluate and reflect

Always request feedback after the project's completion and document key lessons learned to enhance future collaborations.

The following table outlines a detailed engagement process for conducting research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, aligning with the principles set out by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS). This process emphasises the importance of community leadership, transparency, co-design, and ongoing collaboration to ensure that research is ethical, culturally safe, and meaningful.

Each phase builds on the foundational principle of self-determination, recognising the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to define their own research priorities, guide methodologies, and retain ownership of their knowledge. By embedding these principles into every stage of the research process from identifying topics to sharing findings and reflecting on outcomes this framework fosters respectful, reciprocal, and sustainable partnerships that deliver tangible benefits to communities.

The table also provides practical steps and examples to operationalise these principles, ensuring alignment with AIATSIS guidelines and promoting best practices in Indigenous research.

Phase	Process	Alignment with AIATSIS principles:
Community-led research topic	Rather than approaching communities with a pre-determined research topic, researchers should collaborate with community members, Elders, and other key stakeholders to identify health issues or priorities that warrant research. Researchers should facilitate discussions that enable communities to guide or inform the research agenda, rather than seeking feedback on pre-existing ideas.	This step reflects the AIATSIS requirement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have the right to define their own research priorities and guide the research agenda. By collaborating with communities, Elders, and key stakeholders to identify issues that warrant research, the process supports self-determination and positions communities as leaders rather than consultees. Ensuring topics reflect community aspirations also strengthens research impact and relevance.
Early and transparent engagement	Request introductory meetings with local Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, Elders committees, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Health Organisations (including Aboriginal Medical Services), and other recognised community groups. When reaching out, clearly identify who you are, where you are from, who you represent, and the purpose of your request. Researchers should be mindful that many committees meet infrequently (often monthly), and sufficient time must be allowed for decision-making. When planning meetings, ensure appropriate remuneration is considered and meeting locations are culturally appropriate for the topic being discussed.	Early, transparent engagement recognises local governance structures, cultural authority, and leadership. Allowing adequate timeframes, using appropriate protocols, and providing remuneration aligns with AIATSIS expectations for accountable and respectful engagement. Transparency at this stage supports informed decision-making and avoids extractive or rushed research relationships.
Co-design of research questions and protocols	Work collaboratively with the community to co-design research questions, protocols, and methods. This includes ensuring methodologies align with cultural values, preferences, and community priorities. Where specific study designs (e.g. randomised controlled trials) are	Co-design directly operationalises First Nations leadership by embedding community decision-making into research design and methods. Adapting methodologies (including questioning the appropriateness of RCTs or other designs) reflects respect for Indigenous

	proposed, these should be discussed openly and adapted where necessary to reflect community perspectives.	ways of knowing and ensures that research methods deliver meaningful value to the community.
Ongoing engagement and feedback mechanisms	After drafting an initial study protocol, return to the community to present the proposal and discuss whether and how the research should proceed. Engagement, review, and feedback mechanisms should be embedded at every stage of the research process, including: • Reviewing research questions and protocols to ensure alignment with community priorities • Collaborating on research methods to ensure cultural safety and respect • Involving community members in data analysis and interpretation of preliminary findings • Seeking guidance on reporting and dissemination to ensure findings are shared in accessible, culturally appropriate, and beneficial ways	Embedding iterative review, engagement, and feedback throughout the project demonstrates accountability to the community beyond initial consent. Involving communities in data analysis and interpretation ensures Indigenous knowledges shape findings, strengthening validity, relevance, and shared ownership of outcomes.
Establish research agreement	If the community supports the research proceeding, formalise agreed roles, responsibilities, decision-making processes, benefits, data governance, and knowledge use within a research agreement or documented protocol. See section 3 3. First Nations Data Sovereignty	Formalising agreed roles, responsibilities, benefits, governance, and data ownership supports community control over how research is conducted and used. Research agreements are a key mechanism for upholding self-determination and ensuring researchers remain accountable to community expectations over the life of the project.
Conduct research	Maintain open and accessible communication channels throughout the project so community members know who to contact and how concerns or issues can be raised. Prioritise ongoing relationship-building by respecting existing relationships between the community and other researchers, organisations, or institutions. Coordinate with other research initiatives to avoid duplication, minimise participant burden, and reduce community fatigue.	Maintaining open communication, respecting existing relationships, and coordinating with other initiatives reflects ethical responsibility and long-term relationship building. This step reinforces that ethical research conduct is ongoing, not confined to approval stages, and that community priorities remain central throughout implementation.
Share findings	On completion of the research, present findings to the community in clear, plain-language formats. Arrange meetings with Elders, community groups, and participants to share results, explain how findings will be used, who will have access to them, how they will be disseminated, and how data will be protected. Ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander intellectual property rights are respected and appropriately acknowledged and recognise all contributions in line with community preferences.	Returning findings in plain language and culturally appropriate formats ensures communities benefit directly from the research. Respecting intellectual property, acknowledging contributions, and agreeing on data access reflects community control over knowledge and supports meaningful, non-extractive outcomes.
Evaluate and reflect	Seek feedback from the community following completion of the project. Document lessons learned, reflect on what worked well and what could be improved to strengthen future partnerships and research practice.	Seeking community feedback and documenting lessons learned demonstrates accountability beyond project completion. Reflection supports continuous improvement in research practice and contributes to more ethical, respectful, and sustainable future partnerships.

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3. First Nations Data Sovereignty

Data Ownership and Control

First Nations data sovereignty refers to the right of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to control the collection, ownership, access, and use of data related to their communities, lands, and cultures. It ensures that data reflects community values and priorities, protects against misuse, and promotes community benefit.

First Nations Data includes all forms of information whether it be recorded, digital, oral, or otherwise that relate to or affect First Nations individuals or communities and their rights, interests, or wellbeing. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples retain control over their data, and its use must align with community priorities and cultural protocols.

Data Governance

First Nations Data Governance refers to the right of First Nations people to autonomously decide what, how and why First Nations Data are collected, accessed, and used. It ensures that data on or about First Nations people reflect their priorities, values, cultures, and protocols. Establish clear governance for data collection, access, and use by identifying and involving community nominated data custodians.

Researchers should clearly document agreements relating to data ownership, access, storage, future use, and intellectual property in accordance with First Nations Data Sovereignty principles relating to governance and protection of Indigenous knowledge.

Data Access and Privacy

Researchers must establish formal data access and sharing agreements that clearly define how information will be managed, ensuring that privacy and confidentiality protections meet both community expectations and legal requirements. This approach safeguards sensitive data and respects the community's rights over their information throughout the research process. For more information on Queensland Health Information Security Management System ISMS Framework - Cyber Security.

Cultural Preservations	Community Empowerment	Informed Policy Making	Privacy and Security
Communities retain control over cultural heritage and intellectual property, protecting traditional knowledge and practices from misuse.	Grants Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' control over their data, enhancing self-determination and empowerment in decision making.	Supports policies and programs that reflect communities' needs using accurate, culturally relevant data.	Protects sensitive data from misuse, respecting community privacy, and security standards.
Economic Development	**Health and Well-being**	**Cultural Competency**	**Historical Justice**
Enables economic growth by empowering communities to use data for community led projects.	Improves targeted health and social interventions in communities using reliable data.	Encourages culturally respectful research that aligns with community values and avoids harmful stereotypes	Redresses past data misuse, supporting reconciliation and rebuilding trust with communities.

Cultural safety in data collection

When collecting data, it is essential to co-design the process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders to ensure cultural safety and relevance. This involves using strengths-based, culturally appropriate methods such as yarning, partnering with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers where possible, ensuring informed consent is ongoing and clearly understood, and respecting local leadership, cultural protocols, and languages throughout the process.

Methodological Alignment

- Co-design data collection methods with community input.
- Use culturally appropriate approaches (e.g., yarning, visual storytelling).
- Partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers where possible.

Informed Participation

- Provide participants with clear, accessible information.
- Respect languages, cultural boundaries, and traditional knowledge.
- Ensure participants understand the purpose and their rights.

A yarning circle is a traditional Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander method of communication that brings people together in a respectful, inclusive space to share stories, knowledge, and experiences. Participants sit in a circle to promote equality and connection, allowing everyone to speak and listen without interruption.

In research and community engagement, yarning circles offer a culturally appropriate way to gather insights, encourage participation, and strengthen relationships, often leading to richer, more authentic information than formal interviews or surveys.

4. Research governance and accountability

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research Leadership

Strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research leadership is fundamental to culturally safe, ethical, and high-quality research and is a standard expectation in contemporary research funding and governance frameworks. Leadership is distinct from, and cannot be replaced by, cultural competence training of non-Indigenous researchers. At a minimum, research involving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must demonstrate meaningful First Nations leadership and authority throughout the research lifecycle.

This includes Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Chief Investigator(s) leading or co-leading the research project and holding meaningful decision-making authority across all stages of the research process, including design, implementation, analysis, interpretation, dissemination, and translation of findings. It also requires clear demonstration of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership shapes the research purpose, priorities, methodologies, and intended outcomes, ensuring the research remains responsive to community values, aspirations, and needs.

Research Advisory Committees

In addition to community-level governance arrangements, projects should establish a Research Advisory Committee to provide expertise and strategic guidance at a study level. This committee is distinct from local community governance structures and should include:

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers.
- Content or methodological experts.
- Where appropriate, community representatives and industry or health service partners.

Cultural Safety

Cultural safety relates to the capability and conduct of the wider research team including research leadership to ensure that communities report that their experience involved in the research was culturally safe. Culturally safe engagement recognises cultural authority and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and cannot occur when this is not present.

Researchers are expected to demonstrate ongoing cultural competence, recognising that cultural knowledge, authority, and leadership stem from lived experience and community-based expertise.

Cultural competence is understood as a continuous process of learning, reflection, and adaptation, and includes:

- Awareness of one's own cultural assumptions, biases, and power.
- Understanding local cultural protocols, histories, and contemporary contexts.
- Commitment to working in ways that uphold cultural safety, trust, and respect.

Building Culturally Safe Practice

- Attend cultural capability and safety training facilitated by local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander facilitators before commencing research activities. (Engage with local community organisations, recognised community Elders and or Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians to determine whether cultural capability training is available in the area, noting that availability and providers will vary between locations.) Queensland Health offers an online training via iLearn.
- Learn about the history, cultural practices, and current issues relevant to the specific community you are working with.
- Approach all engagement with respect, patience, and a willingness to be guided by community authority.

Project Team members

Researchers should actively employ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across all levels of the project team and ensure their involvement includes genuine leadership and decision-making authority. Recruitment should prioritise local community members where possible and support mentoring, training, and career progression opportunities.

Establish Community Advisory Groups

Researchers should establish a community advisory group comprising Elders, Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, representatives from local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs), and other key stakeholders, engaging them from the earliest planning stages through to the final sharing of results.

Ongoing Relationship Building

Researchers must prioritise ongoing relationship building by respecting and honouring existing connections between the community and other researchers, organisations, or institutions. This involves maintaining consistent, transparent communication and regular check-ins to maintain trust and ensure community priorities remain central throughout the project. Researchers should also actively coordinate with other research initiatives to avoid duplication, minimise the burden on participants, and reduce community fatigue.

Dr. Amelia Smith and her research team began their project by attending a cultural induction led by the community's Elders to understand local protocols and priorities before planning activities.

Guided by the community advisory group, the team advertised an expression of interest for an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person to join as a research assistant. The successful candidate was trained and supported to co-facilitate focus groups and later took a leadership role in presenting findings alongside the principal investigator. The advisory group, which met quarterly, reviewed all participant materials to ensure plain language and cultural appropriateness. They also advised on the most respectful way to share results, recommending a community barbecue over a formal launch, ensuring the process was accessible, culturally safe, and led by community priorities.

5. Reporting and dissemination

Community Validation and Review

Before publishing your report, it is essential to give the community an opportunity to review the research findings and provide feedback. Established governance structures and local community organisations should guide this process to ensure respectful and culturally appropriate engagement.

Sharing findings in an open and accessible way allows contributors to:

- Validate interpretations and ensure cultural accuracy.
- Identify any potential risks or unintended impacts.
- Confirm how they contributors wish to be acknowledged.
- Protect traditional knowledge and intellectual property.

Sharing Results Respectfully

Research results should be shared with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a way that is relevant to their community. Researchers should use dissemination and knowledge translation approaches agreed with communities and report how findings have been returned to participants and community stakeholders.

Translate findings into accessible formats:	Avoid jargon and technical language. Use plain language, visuals, and storytelling to convey key messages.
Share results in multiple formats:	Consider community meetings, cultural events, and other culturally relevant platforms.
Prioritise Indigenous languages:	If possible, translate findings into local Indigenous languages.

Be mindful of cultural sensitivities:	Avoid language or imagery that could be offensive or disrespectful.
Provide opportunities for feedback and discussion:	Allow community members to ask questions, share their perspectives, and offer feedback on the research.



Host a community event to recognise and thank the community for their contribution.

6. Cultural protocols in practice

Welcome to Country

Queensland is home to approximately 150 distinct Aboriginal tribal groups, each with recognised Traditional Owner groups and defined Country boundaries. “Country” is more than a geographic location; it reflects the deep cultural, spiritual, ancestral and relational connections Aboriginal peoples have with the lands, waters and skies to which they belong.

When conducting official business with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, it is customary for a Welcome to Country to be delivered by the recognised Traditional Owners or Cultural Custodians of the local area. A Welcome to Country is not a welcome to Australia as a nation. Rather, it is a cultural protocol that welcomes visitors onto the specific Country of the Traditional Owners and acknowledges their enduring custodianship, authority and connection to that place.

Each tribal group has its own customs, governance structures and cultural protocols, and engages with others through mutual respect for each group’s distinct “Way” of conducting business and upholding cultural practices on their Country. To engage respectfully and effectively with First Nations peoples, it is essential to understand the significance of Country from a First Nations perspective and to take the time to learn and follow the local protocols and decision-making processes of the community with whom you are working.

Permissions

When conducting business on Country, it is essential to seek permission and obtain approval from the community through their recognised leaders. This process is not a formality; it is a demonstration of respect and recognition of the community’s authority over their land and cultural practices.

There are no blanket permissions across or within communities. For example, being granted permission to visit or stay on Country does not imply automatic consent to commence conducting research or initiate other activities. Each type of engagement requires separate, explicit approval.

7. Community conduct standards

Observing cultural protocols is the essential first step in building respectful and effective relationships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Once the appropriate permissions have been sought and cultural practices honoured, it is equally important to maintain this respect in all interactions. The following section outlines the community conduct standards that guide behaviour, communication, and engagement throughout the duration of your work with community.

Community members will expect you to come prepared with a clear understanding of both the background and current issues relevant to your visit or the purpose of your engagement.

In some communities, people may view government as a single entity and may not distinguish between different agencies, departments, or levels of government. As a result, you may receive questions or requests that extend beyond your specific role or area of responsibility. Where appropriate, it can be helpful to provide general guidance or assist community members in identifying the most relevant agency or service.

If you are unable to answer a question, be open and transparent about the limits of your knowledge and, where possible, commit to seeking further information. While this may not always be feasible, staff should make reasonable efforts to direct enquiries to the most appropriate contact, provide relevant referral information, or facilitate connections with the relevant agency or representative where suitable. This approach helps build trust and demonstrates a commitment to supporting community members in navigating government processes.

Photography and Media Use

Always seek clear verbal and written consent before taking or using photographs, particularly when working in culturally sensitive contexts. It is essential to avoid photographing sacred or restricted sites without explicit permission, as doing so may breach cultural protocols and cause harm or offense. Respect for community guidelines and cultural practices must guide all documentation efforts.

Example templates refer to appendix 3.

Non-verbal and verbal cues

Avoid interpreting silence, body language, or lack of eye contact as definitive cues, and instead respect pauses and indirect communication styles as valid forms of expression

Silence

Silence is a respected and valued part of communication in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Long pauses in conversation may be used to reflect, listen, or express mutual understanding. Silence should not be mistaken for confusion, disagreement, or disengagement.

- Pay attention to silence and body language.
- Respect these pauses and allow the person time before continuing the conversation.
- Confirm that key points have been understood and ask gently if clarification is needed.

Time limits

- In Western cultures, punctuality and deadlines are often prioritised. However, in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, time is viewed differently, with greater importance placed on family, community responsibilities, and relationships. Be flexible when scheduling meetings or consultations and allow adequate time for discussion and explanation. Avoid rushing decisions or expecting immediate responses, allowing time for thoughtful and culturally appropriate engagement.

Eye Contact

In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, avoiding direct eye contact is a sign of respect, particularly when speaking with someone older or in a position of authority. In contrast, Western norms

often interpret lack of eye contact as disinterest or dishonesty. Some community members may feel uncomfortable with direct eye contact, especially with unfamiliar people.

- Watch for cues in the other person's body language.
- Follow their lead and adjust your eye contact to ensure your approach is respectful and culturally appropriate.

Titles

In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, the titles ‘Aunty’ and ‘Uncle’ are used as a sign of respect for older community members. These terms are not limited to blood relatives or Elders but are extended to those who are respected for their age, knowledge, and experience. Only address people with these titles if approval is given and/or a positive relationship exists.

Case scenario: Application in practice

Dr. Amelia Smith, a dedicated oncologist and researcher with a strong background in cancer epidemiology, has recently come across concerning cancer rates in several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the North Queensland area. Despite her passion for health equity, Dr. Smith has limited experience working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and lacks existing contacts within the community. Driven by the need to address these alarming cancer rates, she decides to embark on a research study to understand the prevalence, risk factors, and perspectives on cancer within this group.

From the outset, Dr Amelia Smith recognises the importance of community consultation to ensure her research aligns with local priorities and receives genuine interest and support. To ensure **reciprocity** she actively engages with community members to identify shared goals and designs her project to deliver clear benefits to the community.

Dr Smith respectfully familiarises herself with the local area by identifying the Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians, key Elders, and community members. She reaches out to the local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (ACCHO) and consults a range of local stakeholders. Referring to the ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander quality appraisal tool’ (developed as part of the CREATE Project see appendix 1), she shapes her study protocol based on this input. After presenting the proposal, she receives community endorsement.

To support **cultural continuity**, an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory group is established, led by a local Aboriginal researcher. Together, they co-design the research question and methods. Interested community members are invited to join the project team, reinforcing local leadership and decision-making. Before commencing data collection, the team consulted with the advisory group to ensure culturally safe protocols were followed showing **respect** for the community's traditional knowledge.

To promote **equity**, Dr Smith ensures inclusive engagement by holding yarning circles in neighbouring towns and involving Elders and Custodians from surrounding regions. To uphold **spirit and integrity**, non-Indigenous team members complete cultural awareness training to understand local customs and avoid causing unintentional harm.

After collecting and analysing the data, Dr. Smith demonstrates **responsibility** by sharing the findings with the community, offering opportunities for questions and feedback, ensuring the results are used meaningfully and respectfully, contributing positively to the community.

Resources

First Nations Health Office Guidelines and Info sheets

The First Nations Health Office Guidelines and Info sheets resource on QHEPS provides a collection of frameworks, guidelines and information sheets that support culturally capable, equitable and person-centred healthcare for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The First Nations HHS engagement profiles resource provides key information for each HHS.

Some Hospital and Health Services (HHSs) may have locally adapted versions of these documents, so always follow the guidance applicable to your specific area.

Informative Websites

National Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation	www.naccho.org.au
The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA)	https://www.niaa.gov.au/resource-centre/framework-governance-indigenous-data
National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (NHMRC (2025)	https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/national-statement-ethical-conduct-human-research-2025
NHMRC Ethical conduct in research with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities	https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/ethical-conduct-research-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples-and-communities
Keeping Research on track II 2018	https://www.nhmrc.gov.au/about-us/publications/keeping-research-track-ii
AIATSIS Code for Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research 2020	https://aiatsis.gov.au/sites/default/files/2020-10/aiatsis-code-ethics.pdf
CONSIDER Statement (Huria et al., 2019)	Consolidated criteria for strengthening reporting of health research involving indigenous peoples: the CONSIDER statement | BMC Medical Research Methodology | Springer Nature Link

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Appendices

Appendix 1: CREATE Quality Appraisal Tool (for researchers)

The CREATE project developed a **Quality Appraisal Tool** to enable researchers to assess the **quality of health research** not only through a scientific lens but also through an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural lens. The Quality Appraisal Tool was published in 2020. The published paper can be found at: Harfield, S., Pearson, O., Morey, K., Kite, E., Canuto, K., Glover, K., Streak-Gomersall, J., Carter, D., Davy, C., Aromataris, E., & Braunack-Mayer, A. (2020). Assessing the quality of health research from an Indigenous perspective: the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander quality appraisal tool. *BMC Medical Research Methodology* 20, 79 (2020). https://doi.org/10.1186/s12874...

ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER

QUALITY APPRAISAL TOOL

Answer either "Yes", "Partially", "No" or "Unclear" to each question

Article citation: _____ Date: _____

Reviewer's name: _____

Question	Yes	Partially	No	Unclear
1. Did the research respond to a need or priority determined by the community?				
2. Was community consultation and engagement appropriately inclusive?				
3. Did the research have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research leadership?				
4. Did the research have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance?				
5. Were local community protocols respected and followed?				
6. Did the researchers negotiate agreements in regard to rights of access to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' existing intellectual and cultural property?				
7. Did the researchers negotiate agreements to protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' ownership of intellectual and cultural property created through the research?				
8. Did the protect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' and communities have control over the collection and management of research materials?				
9. Was the research guided by an Indigenous research paradigm?				
10. Does the research focus on the strengths-based approach, acknowledging and moving beyond practices that have harmed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the past?				
11. Did the researchers plan and translate the findings into sustainable changes in policy and/or practice?				
12. Did the research benefit the participants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals?				
13. Did the research demonstrate capacity strengthening for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities?				
14. Did everyone involved in the research have opportunities to learn from each other?				

Appendix 2: Cultural protocol checklist

Before Consultation: Preparation

- ☐ **Understand the context:** Research the community's history, language, culture, governance structures, and recent events.
- ☐ **Acknowledge sovereignty**: Recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as the Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians of the land and holders of knowledge.
- ☐ **Identify the right people**: Contact Elders, Traditional Owners, or authorised representatives (not just general community members).
- ☐ **Engage early:** Begin consultation at the earliest stage of project planning. not after decisions are made.
- ☐ **Clarify purpose:** Be clear about why you are engaging, what you are seeking. and how community input will shape the research.
- ☐ **Learn protocols:** Understand and respect cultural protocols, including gender-specific practices, kinship systems, community hierarchies, and traditional knowledge sharing.

During Consultation: Conduct

- ☐ **Formal acknowledgement:** Open meetings by acknowledging the Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians of the land.
- ☐ **Gain consent properly:** Ensure Free, Prior, and informed Consent (FPIC), explain rights; processes, risks, and benefits clearly.
- ☐ **Use plain language:** Avoid academic jargon; use simple, understandable terms.
- ☐ **Be patient and flexible:** Allow time for community processes - decisions may require extensive consultation within the community.
- ☐ **Respect knowledge holders:** Acknowledge the authority of Elders and cultural leaders.
- ☐ **Offer reciprocity**: Consider what benefits or outcomes the research will deliver for the community, not just for-or the researcher
- ☐ **Respect confidentiality:** Some Information may be sacred or restricted. Confirm permission before recording, sharing, or publishing.

All research should be guided by:

- **Respect** – for people, Country, and cultural knowledge
- **Reciprocity** – ensuring mutual benefit and value
- **Responsibility** – acting with care, integrity, and accountability
- **Recognition** – of sovereignty, rights, and identity

Appendix 3: Photography and media consent form example template

Photography & Media Consent Form

For use with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, and organisations.

Purpose of this form

This form seeks informed consent from individuals and/or communities for the creation and use of photographs, video, audio, and related media. It recognises cultural protocols, including the role of Elders/Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians and protections for Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property (ICIP).

1) Project Details	
Project/Activity Title:	
Organisation/Agency:	
Project Lead/Contact:	
Phone/Email:	
Date(s) of Recording:	
Location/Country:	

2) Consent Type (tick all that apply)	
Individual consent (Adult)	
Individual consent (Young Person under 18) **–** Parent/Guardian consent required	
Group consent (multiple identifiable people**)**	
Community/Collective consent (authorised representative, Board, Elders group, or Traditional Owner/Trustee body)	
Cultural materials/ICIP present (artworks, stories, language, song, dance, knowledge) additional approvals may be required)	

3) Participant Details (for each identifiable person)
Full Name: _____ **Language/Clan/Community (if preferred to share):** _____ **Postal/Email Contact:** _____ **Is the participant a child/young person under eighteen? (circle)** **Yes** (Complete Section 7 – Parent/Guardian) **No**

4) Cultural Protocols & Sensitivities Please indicate any cultural considerations (Tick all that apply):	
Do **NOT** publish or broadcast the name, image, or voice in the event of Sorry Business.	
Restricted content (gender/men's or women's business)If yes, please specify:	
Seasonal/cultural timing restrictions If yes, specify:	
Territory restrictions (e.g., local/regional only) – If yes, specify:	
Other cultural directions:	

5) Purpose & Scope of Use (Tick all that apply):					
Intended purpose(s)					
Education/training materials		Print materials (brochures, reports)		Government	
Internal communications		Media/press		Archival/heritage preservation	
Public website/social media		Conferences/events		Other:	
Media types:		**Geographic scope:**			
Photography		Local/regional only		Other:	
Video		National (Australia)		Online (global access)	
Audio/Podcast		International			
Transcripts/Quotes					

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Duration of consent:	
One-time use only (specify where/when):	
Time-limited until (date): ____ / ____ / _____	
Ongoing use (revocable – see Section 9)	

6) Acknowledgement & Attribution	
Attribute **Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians** and **Country** where content was created.	
Attribute **participant(s)** by name.	
Attribute **community/organisation** (e.g., ACCO, Elders Group).	
Content to remain **anonymous** (no names/faces).	

Preferred wording for acknowledgements (if any):

7) Parent/Guardian Consent (for Participants under 18)

Child/Young Person's Name: _____
Parent/Guardian Full Name: _____ **Relationship to Child:** _____
Contact Phone/Email: _____

I, the Parent/Guardian named above, have read and understood this form, and I **consent** to the creation and use of the child/young person's image/voice as set out in Sections 5 and 6, subject to cultural protocols in Section 4.

Signature (Parent/Guardian): _____ **Date:** ____ / ____ / _____

8) Community/Collective Consent (if applicable)

Authorised Representative Body: _____
(e.g., Local Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation, Prescribed Body Corporate, Elders Advisory Group, Registered Native Title Body Corporate)

Authorised Person's Name & Role: _____
Contact Details: _____

On behalf of the community/collective named above, I confirm that community-level consent is provided for the creation and use of media as set out in this form (Sections 5–6), including any ICIP considerations in Section 10, and subject to protocols in Section 4.

Signature (Authorised Person): _____ **Date:** ____ / ____ / _____

9) Withdrawal of Consent (Revocation)

Participants (or guardians) may withdraw consent at any time by contacting the Project Lead (Section 1). On withdrawal, the Organisation will cease future use and make reasonable efforts to remove content from active publications and platforms. **Note:** It may not be possible to retract materials already printed, distributed, or archived by third parties.

10) Indigenous Cultural & Intellectual Property (ICIP)

Where recordings/images capture **cultural expressions, language, stories, designs, artworks, performances, or knowledge**, the Organisation agrees to:

- Seek appropriate permissions and respect **collective ownership**.
- Use materials **only** for the agreed purposes and duration.
- **Not** alter, distort, or use out of context.
- Consult on sensitive or restricted content and implement **protocols** specified in Section 4.
- Attribute cultural sources appropriately (Section 6).

Where commercial or widespread public use is proposed, negotiate **additional permissions and benefits** (e.g., fees, licensing, cultural clearances).

Appendix 4: Key directory

Organisation	Contact	Region	Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians / Additional Information
Torres and Cape			
Apunipima Cape York Health Council	(07) 4037 7100 Communications@apunipima.org.au Website: www.apunipima.org.au 186 McCoombe Street Bungalow QLD 4870 P.O. Box 12045, Westcourt QLD 4870	Torres Strait	Kaurareg (Horn Is) Tjungundji (Mapoon) Anggamuthi, the Atambaya, the Wuthathi, the Yadhaykenu and the Djagaraga (Northern Peninsula) Kuuku Yau, Wuthathi, Kanthanumpu, Uutaalnganu, Umpila and Kaanju (Lockhart River) Wik and Wik Waya (Pormpuraaw and Weipa) Guugu Yimithirr (Cooktown) Kuku Yalanji, Kuku Nyungul and Jalunji (Wujal Wujal / Mossman Gorge)
Aurukun Shire Council	(07) 4053 9222 info@cylc.org.au	Aurukun	Visitors seeking to access country outside the residential area of Aurukun, require permission from Traditional Owners. Please contact Cape York Land Council who can provide assistance in contacting appropriate Traditional Owners with respect to your request.
Pormpuraaw Aboriginal Shire Council	(07) 4060 4601 Admin@pormpuraaw.qld.gov.au	Pormpuraaw	Thaayorre people are the traditional owners of Pormpuraaw and surrounding country. The country of the Kugu people connects to the northern boundary. Wik people belong to the coastal country north of Kugu country and inland to the north-east.
Ngarnal Community Health Centre	0447 287 598 Lardil Street, Gununa Mornington Island QLD 4892	Mornington Island	The Lardil people are the Traditional Owners and original custodians of Mornington Island and are the largest tribal group within the Wellesley Islands region. Traditionally, Lardil Country encompasses the northern Wellesley Islands, including Mornington Island, Sydney Island, and Wallaby Island. The Yangkaal people are the Traditional Owners of the islands situated between Mornington Island and the mainland, while the Kaiadilt people are the Traditional Owners of the southern Wellesley Islands, including Bentinck Island and Sweers Island. Each of these groups maintains distinct
Mornington Shire Council	(07) 4745 7800 info@mornington.qld.gov.au	Mornington Island	

			cultural identities, languages, customs, and connections to their respective Countries, with enduring responsibilities for caring for and preserving their lands and waters.
Cairns and Hinterland			
Gurriny Yealamucka Health Services Corporation	(07) 4226 4100 1 Bukki Road Yarrabah QLD 4871 GYHSAC.org.au	Yarrabah	Yarrabah was established on the traditional lands of the Gunggandji people at Mission Bay on the Cape Grafton Peninsula, just south of Cairns.
North West			
North and West Remote Health – Community and Outreach Healthcare Services in Queensland	(07) 4744 7600 53 Enid Street Mount Isa QLD 4825 info@nwrh.com.au https://www.nwrh.com.au		Townsville, Mount Isa, Longreach, Normanton, Doomadgee, Cairns, Cloncurry, Mornington Island and Mackay.
Townsville			
TAIHS - Townsville Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Health Service	(07) 4759 4000 PHCadmin@taihs.net.au	Townsville and Surrounds	Bindal (Birri Gubba) and Gurrumbilbarra Wulgurukaba (Townsville); Manbarra Bwgcolman (Palm Island) Juru and Bindal (Ayr) Gudjal (Charters Towers) Nywaigi and Warrgamay (Ingham) Bandjin (Hinchinbrook), Girramay (Cardwell), Wanamara/Woolgar Valley (Richmond) Yerunthully (Hughendon)
Elders for Change	0491 202 446 admin@eldersforchange.org.au	Townsville and Surrounds	**Elders for Change** is a collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders who guide and lead *Justice Our Way*. The collective includes respected Traditional Owners, Community Elders, and knowledge holders from across the North-West region. Together, they advocate for justice that recognises the power of culture, prioritises healing, and restores community-led decision-making.
Mackay			
Mudth-Niyleta Aboriginal and Torres	(07) 4956 2509 0418 874 865	Sarina	A locally run Indigenous non-government organisation that works to improve access to essential services and support the wellbeing of the Sarina Aboriginal and

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Strait Islanders Corporation	35 Central Street Sarina Qld. PO Box 460 Sarina Qld Sarina. https://www.mudth-niyleta.com/ enquiry@mudth-niyleta.com		Torres Strait Islander community. The organisation operates multiple funded services focused on community wellness, guided by a Board that identifies local needs and develops strategies to address them. Traditional Owners and Cultural Custodians: Yuwi, Yuwibara, and Yuibera
Central West			
North and West Remote Health – Community and Outreach Healthcare Services in Queensland	(07) 4744 7600 9 Duck Street, Longreach info@nwrh.com.au https://www.nwrh.com.au		NWRH Longreach is the base for Allied Health and Mental Health and Wellbeing.
Central Queensland			
North and West Remote Health – Community and Outreach Healthcare Services in Queensland	(07) 4744 7600 53 Enid Street Mount Isa QLD 4825 info@nwrh.com.au https://www.nwrh.com.au		Townsville, Mount Isa, Longreach, Normanton, Doomadgee, Cairns, Cloncurry, Mornington Island and Mackay.
South-West			
Cunnamulla Aboriginal Corporation for Health	(07) 4655 8800 26/28 John Street Cunnamulla QLD 4490 reception@cphcc.com.au	Cunnamulla	The **Kunja** people are the primary custodians of the immediate Cunnamulla town area (with "Cunnamulla" meaning "long waterhole" in their language), the surrounding Paroo Shire region is associated with several groups: Kunja: Primary custodians of the Cunnamulla township and immediate surrounds. Kooma: Associated with the broader Paroo region. Budjiti: Associated with the Paroo region.

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			Kullilli: Often identified within the broader Paroo Shire. Mardigan: Identified with the region. Bidjara: Identified with the region. Murrawarri: Identified with the region.
Southeast Queensland			
Knowledge and Research Centre Institute for Urban Indigenous Health	(07) 3828 3600 22 Cox Rd, Windsor QLD 4030 https://www.iuih.org.au/ reception@iuih.org.au	Southeast Queensland	Institute for Urban Indigenous Health – a not-for-profit Community Controlled Health Service leading the planning, development, and delivery of comprehensive health and social support services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Southeast Queensland.
Metro South			
Inala Indigenous Health Service - Centre of Excellence	(07) 3101 4222 Inala_ResearchEducation@health.qld.gov.au	Inala and surrounding suburbs in southeast Queensland.	Inala Community Jury meets six times per year. Projects specifically in the Inala community or being conducted at the Southern Queensland Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care. Please reach out via email for more information.
MSH Community Jury for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research	MSHFirstNationsCommunityJury@health.qld.gov.au	Any research being conducted in any Metro South Health facility.	MSH Community Jury meets six times per year. Please reach out via email for more information.
Gold Coast			
KALWUN Level 1, 14 Cassia Drive, Varsity Lakes QLD PO Box 2588, Burleigh Waters QLD 4220	(07) 5578 3434 headoffice@kalwun.com.au	Gold Coast	Yugambeh / Kombumerri

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Queensland Wide			
Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet*	Edith Cowan University 270 Joondalup Drive Joondalup WA 6027 (08) 9370 6336 healthinfonet@ecu.edu.au	The Australian Indigenous Health*InfoNet* Queensland Portal, provides health information and resources to support anyone working or studying in First Nations health in Queensland, including students, academics, and policy makers. The Portal is located on the Health*InfoNet* website under the Learn tab and under the Locations subheading. Visit the Queensland Portal to access up-to-date information and culturally appropriate resources on First Nations health in Queensland.	

* This directory is not exhaustive and will be updated progressively. The organisations listed are not responsible for reviewing research applications; rather, they are suggested initial points of contact that can provide advice and guidance on the most suitable and appropriate stakeholders to engage with. If your organisation would like to be included in the directory, please contact the Governance, Ethics and Trials Unit.

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Approval details

Custodian	Contact Details	Approval Date	Approval
Director, Governance, Ethics and Trials Unit, Health Service Evaluation, Research and Translation Branch, Clinical Excellence Queensland	GETU@health.qld.gov.au	3 November 2026	Deputy Director-General, Clinical Excellence Queensland

Review:

This guideline is due for review: 19 November 2029

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