

Aged Care Diversity Framework

Resource Sheet 5 Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander People

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were the first Australians arriving here over 40,000 years ago. Their cultures are diverse, multi-nation, multi-language and dynamic. There is a strong connection to country, family and spirituality. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population estimated at 670,000 in 2011 is expected to grow to just over a million in 2031, from 3% to 3.8% of the total Australian population. While the indigenous population will grow about 59% in this period, the over 65s should grow about 200%.

European colonisation of Australia has had devastating and long lasting effects on Australia's indigenous peoples and has led to complexity of disadvantage. The life experience of indigenous people is strongly

influenced by a range of social, historical, economic and political factors.

Australia's First Nations' People experience higher rates of chronic disease, poorer health outcomes and lower life expectancies compared to other Australians. There is an increased risk of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and respiratory disease. Almost 90% over 55 year old indigenous people have long-term health problems. This has resulted in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged over 50 being eligible to access the aged care system.

Poverty, racism, geographical isolation, past negative experiences with government and bureaucracies and multi-generational trauma associated with cultural dispossession and forced separation of children from their families affects almost all indigenous families in some way.

For further information, see **Resource Sheets 11 and 12 of this resource.**

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While around 75% of the indigenous population live in urban areas, many live in remote and very remote areas with less access to employment, education, transport, hospitals and health and community services.

Australia's First Nations People are resilient and resourceful. The celebration of culture and spirituality that is so essential to overall wellbeing continues. Elders, people acknowledged by their communities as having made a contribution, continue to be role models and hand down knowledge to younger generations. Older people continue to play important caring roles for their grand and great grandchildren.

General Strategies to address access and engagement challenges

- Create culturally safe spaces with matching website and social media presences. Include the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and culturally appropriate images, posters, pamphlets and literature.
- Ensure staff have completed cultural competency workshops and regular refreshers delivered by experienced indigenous trainers.
- Actively seek the advice of elders and community leaders in the co-design of policies, procedures, consultation processes and culturally significant events like NAIDOC Week.
- Take the necessary time to develop genuine, trusting relationships with clients. Have conversations about connections to family, culture, community and spirituality.
- Provide culturally safe care through offering choice, including specific programs targeting indigenous clients, well supported indigenous staff and culturally safe venues.

For links to further information and resources, see **Sheet 17: Resources Nos. 3, 4, 7, 12, 14, 15, 20, 24, 32, 37, 42**