




Introduction to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their health

By Dr Karen Nicholls

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples](#) were the first to occupy Australia. Aboriginal peoples have a 60,000+ years history of connection to this country which is a living and continuing connection. It was estimated that the population living on mainland Australia was over 1 million at the time of contact with the British. It is also believed that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples enjoyed good health. Sometimes referred to as First Nations people, they have been adversely impacted by the effects of colonisation. This has been the result of introduction of disease, frontier wars, taking of lands, government policies of protection, assimilation, stolen generations etc.

As approximately 60% of First Nation Australians people engage private general practice for their health needs, it is important for registrars to understand their local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community within the national context and also within the context of the local community. This teaching plan provides an opportunity for the registrar to focus learning on the local community and services in the area.

TEACHING AND LEARNING AREAS 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Proportion of First Nation Australian people in your local area compared to other areas and nationally • Name and geography of the local nation or language group in your area • First Nations health service providers in your local area • Other First Nations organisations in your local area • Local cultural mentor/elder who could provide cultural education to your registrar or yourself
PRE- SESSION ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look up the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and services available • Look at the map of Aboriginal Australia
SESSION ACTIVITIES 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, culture and services available • Discuss the Aboriginal flag, who designed it and what it represents • Discuss the Torres Strait Islander flag, who designed it and what it represents • Discuss Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander broad beliefs on health (holistic model)
RESOURCES 	<p>Read</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Spatial Source – Four maps uncovering Aboriginal history and culture • Gambay First Languages map • ABS Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians • AIHW Profile of Indigenous Australians • GPSA guide: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health in General Practice: an introduction to Teaching and Learning
FOLLOW UP & EXTENSION ACTIVITIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Undertake an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural awareness course • Identify prominent First Nations Australians including doctors, lawyers, academics, artists etc • Identify national days of celebration and recognition of significance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people