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Summary Snapshot

Delivering Culturally Safe Mental Health Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Summary Guidance Framework for Child, Adolescent and Adult Mental Health Services



This framework provides an Aboriginal-led, community-informed framework for child, adolescent and adult mental health services to embed culturally safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across service design and delivery.

Why reform is needed

Cultural safety is essential to improving mental health and social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to addressing the inequities that continue to be experienced in mainstream mental health services. In this framework, culturally safe care means recognising and responding to the ongoing effects of colonisation, racism, power imbalance trauma and exclusion, so that care is respectful, healing and trustworthy.

What the framework sets out

The framework translates research evidence into six interconnected implementation domains, sequenced across three priority stages, that guide services from foundational reform through to system-wide, sustained cultural safety. The key message is that cultural safety requires sustained organisational reform through leadership, governance, care delivery and service-wide enablers.

What leadership must commit to

- Endorse the framework as the organisation's model for cultural safety reform and make this a leadership priority.
- Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and governance structures with real decision-making authority as the first, non-negotiable step.
- Invest the required resources — funding, time and designated roles — to support staged implementation across the six domains.
- Hold the organisation accountable through routine executive and board reporting on implementation progress and outcomes.

PRIORITY: FOUNDATION – *Must be embedded before other reform can succeed*

DOMAIN 1
LEADERSHIP & GOVERNANCE
Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, governance and self-determination as the precondition for all other reform.

PRIORITY: CARE DELIVERY– *Translates cultural safety into everyday clinical practice*

DOMAIN 2
CULTURAL MODELS OF CARE
Care is centered in traditional healing practices, healing on Country and is responsive to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews of health and wellbeing.

DOMAIN 3
SAFE WAYS OF CARING
Embed culturally safe, holistic and trauma-informed care, in ways that recognise the central role of family, kinship, community and strengths in healing and wellbeing.

PRIORITY: SERVICE ENABLERS – *Service-wide conditions for lasting change*

DOMAIN 4
ACCESS & EQUITY
Barriers to access, racism and inequity are addressed so services are more reachable, fair and responsive.

DOMAIN 5
RELATIONALITY
Services embed self-determination and the role of family, kinship, community and Country in care, while building lasting, accountable partnerships with families, communities and cultural leaders.

DOMAIN 6
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
Build a skilled, culturally safe workforce, and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through training and retention.

When these six domains are embedded together, services become **trustworthy.** Trustworthy services are those in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledges, lived experiences, worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing are understood, valued and meaningfully integrated into practice. When this occurs, care is likely to be experienced as culturally safe, respectful and worthy of trust.

The full framework provides the detailed principles and actions to guide implementation.

To learn more and download the framework, scan the QR code, or go to embrace.thekids.org.au/resources

Developed from Aboriginal-led research conducted through the School of Indigenous Studies, The University of Western Australia, and The Kids Research Institute Australia