

Principles and Actions for Delivering Culturally Safe Care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

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

The KIDS Research Institute Australia | Embrace | The University of Western Australia | BOORN Kwop Boorn Djenara

Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing
www.TIMHWB.org.au

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To download a digital version of this framework, scan the QR code or visit embrace.thekids.org.au/resources/cultural-safety-resources/

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Acknowledgement of Country

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Cultural safety

Cultural safety is essential to improving the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and to addressing the inequities that continue to be experienced in mainstream services. In mental health care, cultural safety means more than awareness of culture. It requires services to recognise and respond to the ongoing effects of colonisation, racism, power imbalance, trauma, and exclusion, and to create care that is experienced as respectful, healing, and trustworthy by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

A culturally safe service is one in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural knowledges, lived experiences, worldviews, and ways of working are understood, valued, and embedded in the way care is designed and delivered. This includes strengthening relationships, supporting self-determination, recognising the role of family, kinship, Community and Country, and ensuring that services are accountable to the people they serve. Cultural safety is not achieved through a single activity or policy; it is built through leadership, governance, everyday practice, and sustained organisational commitment.

"Cultural safety is not a destination that a service reaches and then considers its work complete. It is an ongoing journey of learning, reflection, accountability and change. The accompanying audit tool supports services to reflect on where they currently stand across the dimensions of this framework, recognise their strengths and opportunities for improvement and plan the next steps in their cultural safety journey."

-Professor Helen Milroy AM

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We would also like to thank our Aboriginal Advisory Group, Moorditj Mandi Mob (Aboriginal Youth Advisory Group), and the families and young people, who all contributed their time and commitment in guiding the project and helping to ensure it remained culturally grounded and responsive to community priorities.

Project artworks

Several artworks by Indigenous artists have been created across this program of research, each representing an integral part of the journey to cultural safety. Read on to learn more.



Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHWB)

This artwork was a major focus of the Healing Hub at the World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference in 2018, held on Whadjuk Noongar Boodja (Boorloo, Perth, Western Australia (WA)). The piece reflects a collective perspective of sharing and healing together while working to produce an artwork which commemorates the gathering in the State of Wildflowers: an iconic healing reference to both the Stolen Generations in Australia and Canada and all Indigenous peoples in their trauma recovery from colonial oppression.

If you would like to learn more about these artworks and their programs, scan the QR code:

Dabakan Kooliny *('Go slowly'/ 'Walk slowly')* Valerie Ah Chee



This artwork was created for a collaborative UWA and The Kids project on improving cultural safety in mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young peoples. Noongar artist Valerie Ah Chee was commissioned to create a visual representation of what the project hopes to achieve.

Within the central layer, a sturdy and nurturing tree provides safety and connection for children sitting amongst its' branches. Layers of family, Community, and culture support the children, working as safety nets as they embark on their holistic journey towards social and emotional wellbeing. *Dabakan Kooliny* shows an Aboriginal perspective of the journey of youth mental health. According to Valerie, it represents "a journey that must be done at a slow and steady pace so we can take into consideration all the elements that impact on our wellbeing when deciding on what we need to heal and be healthy."

A Shared Vision for Cultural Safety in Mental Health Services Ronda Clarke



Ronda Clarke is a proud Nyikina woman born and raised in Derby, which is situated within the West Kimberley region of WA. Ronda's inspiration and talent evolved from many different connections. Sometimes from viewing an item, talking to people, connecting with Community, visiting different places, being back on Country, listening to people's feedback, through a feeling, or just visualising an array of different aspects or environments and then bringing them all together. This artwork showcases the Delphi Study Project group's feedback. It details the group's voices, knowledge, experiences, the gaps, what needs to be added, what's missing, present day service delivery, the cultural footprint needed and the changes needed to ensure a more culturally appropriate, safe and secure delivery of mental health and wellbeing services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their Communities. Each side of the hexagon represents a different domain, with the gecko in the middle, representing trust, holding everything together.

Executive summary

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.

About this Framework

This framework is designed to guide the development and delivery of culturally safe mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is designed for services that work with children, adolescents, adults, families, and Communities.

The framework draws on an Aboriginal-led program of research conducted through UWA's Kwop Boorn Djenara and The Kids, led by Professor Helen Milroy. The body of work includes co-design with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers, carers, Elders, cultural healers and mental health workers; participatory action research on cultural safety in mainstream mental health services; systematic and rapid reviews; a Delphi consensus study to identify core principles, domains and priorities for culturally safe care; and mixed-methods systems research mapping Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health journeys through psychiatric care systems. Together, these studies provide a research- and community-informed foundation for the framework [1-7].

The framework is organised around six interconnected domains, brought together through three core priority areas of cultural safety in action. **Foundation** establishes the **Leadership and Governance** required to drive lasting reform. **Care Delivery** translates cultural safety into everyday practice through **Cultural Models of Care** and **Safe Ways of Caring**. **Service Enablers** supports system-wide change through **Access & Equity, Relationality**, and **Workforce Development**.

Together, these six domains describe what cultural safety looks like in practice and how it can be embedded across services.

The six domains are arranged as connected parts of one whole, because cultural safety cannot be achieved through a single action or domain alone. Each domain plays a distinct role and all six must work together to create lasting change.

At the highest level, the framework is anchored by the aspirational goal of "Becoming Trustworthy", which is achieved when all six domains are enacted together.

How to read each principle

Within the domains are **33 principles**, each expressed through three lenses — *Knowing*, *Being*, and *Doing* — which reflect Indigenous ways of understanding, relating, and acting.

Knowing	Cultural knowledge and understanding - what services and practitioners need to know about history, culture, colonisation and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldviews of health and wellbeing.
Being	Values, attitudes and relationships - the orientation and relational commitments required of staff and services.
Doing	Practical actions and behaviours - the concrete steps, policies and partnerships that enact cultural safety every day.

The principles in this framework are applicable for practitioners and services, but some are only relevant to one. To guide this classification, symbols have been used to differentiate between the two. Some principles may apply to both practitioners and services, in which case you will see both symbols used.



Practitioner level



Service level

Applying the framework into practice

An **audit tool [8]** has been created to accompany these guidelines, based on each of the principles in this framework. This has been designed to assist services and practitioners in achieving change. Depending on the principle, you might find yourself at similar or different stages across knowing, being, and doing.

Services and practitioners can complete this audit tool to identify areas requiring change, and track their progress.

You can download this audit tool by scanning the QR code on page 2, or through the Embrace website: embrace.thekids.org.au/resources/cultural-safety-resources/

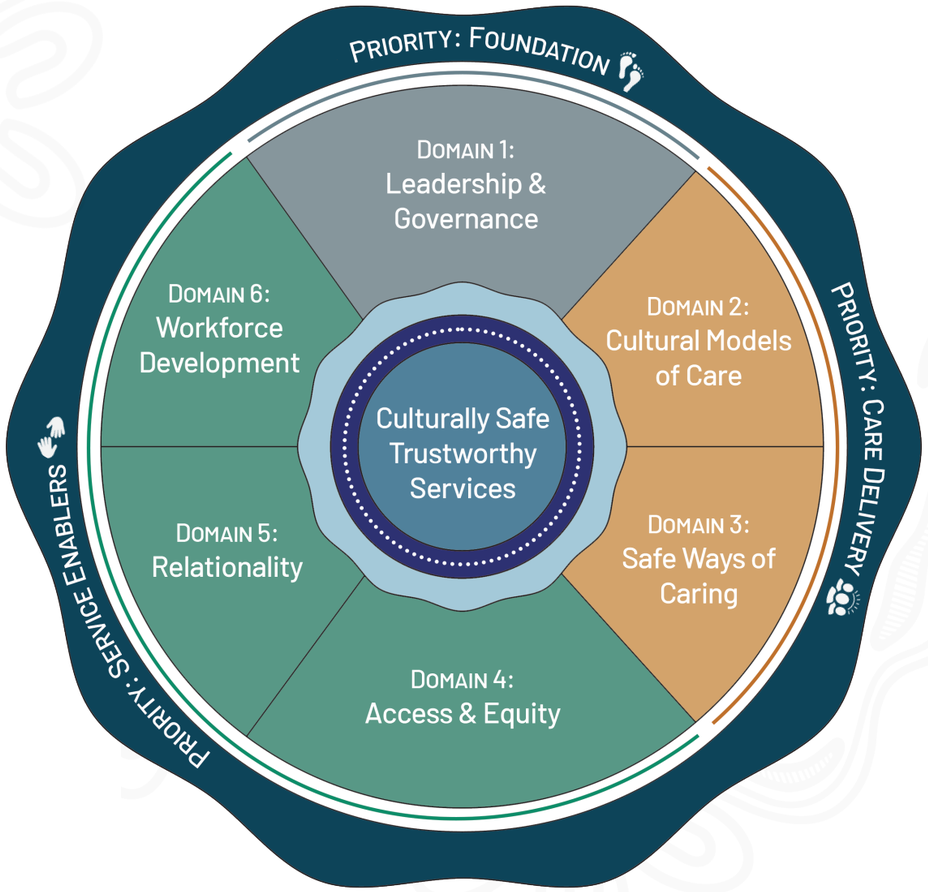


Figure 1. Priorities need to be addressed for mainstream mental health organisations to support cultural safety. The outer ring indicates the three priority areas, with the domains of care embedded within them. Once all priority areas and domains are addressed and supported, the outcome is a culturally safe and trustworthy service.

CULTURAL SAFETY IN ACTION	
	PRIORITY: FOUNDATION **DOMAIN 1: Leadership & Governance** The prerequisite for all other cultural safety reforms. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making authority and governance must be in place before any other domain can succeed.
	PRIORITY: CARE DELIVERY **DOMAINS 2 & 3: Cultural Models of Care | Safe Ways of Caring** Holistic, Country-centred, trauma-informed care. These domains are enabled by strong governance and translate cultural safety into everyday clinical practice.
	PRIORITY: SERVICE ENABLERS **DOMAINS 4, 5 & 6: Access & Equity | Relationality | Workforce Development** Three interconnected streams — removing barriers, building Community relationships, and developing the workforce — implemented together as a unified effort.
All six domains are equally critical. No single domain can stand alone — they must be implemented together as a connected framework.	

THE ASPIRATIONAL OUTCOME

Trustworthiness



Trustworthiness does not sit within any single domain.

It is the outcome of structural change — earned by services that implement all six domains together.

It is something services must earn, not claim.

Aspirational outcome from applying all 33 principles across six domains: Trustworthiness

Knowing	Trustworthiness comes from learning about historical challenges and learning to listen deeply and show consistency through actions.
Being	Being trustworthy is necessary for building the therapeutic relationship over time and cannot be assumed.
Doing	Builds respectful, lasting relationships by showing transparency, listening openly, keeping promises and maintaining clear communication.

Power must shift first	**Trust can shatter quickly**	**Trust is a lifelong relationship**
"It's always us... we're always expected to give up power completely first and then expected to just trust the system."	*"It can be shattered pretty quickly and swiftly, depending on who's in leadership."*	*"Trust is a lifelong relationship and not contractual."*

Leadership & Governance + Cultural Models of Care + Safe Ways of Caring + Access & Equity + Relationality + Workforce Development

= A trustworthy service

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

DOMAIN 1

Leadership & Governance

The foundational domain — Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-making authority and governance must be embedded before any other reform can succeed. This domain encompasses Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, governance, self-determination and the central role of Elders.

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership across the whole system is essential.
Being	Values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' right to self-determination and leadership.
Doing	Supports and embeds Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culturally informed concepts of leadership. Approaches situations with humility and respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wisdom and lived experiences.

2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance enhances accountability and effectiveness and respects Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural frameworks.
Being	Values cultural governance models alongside clinical and corporate governance.
Doing	Develops and implements governance structures led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders, co-designed with Communities, and aligned with cultural values. Prioritises Community decision making and cultural authority.

3. Self-determination

Knowing	Understands that self-determination allows Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to shape mental health care for families and Communities.
Being	Values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities' right to lead decisions about mental health care.
Doing	Works together with Communities to support self-determination, ensuring a reflection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values and priorities.

4. Recognising the role of Elders

Knowing	Understands that Elders provide wisdom, cultural guidance, and mental health support.
Being	Values the wisdom and leadership of Elders.
Doing	Engages with Elders to guide, advise, and support culturally safe mental health care.

5. Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as emerging leaders

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people have unique cultural and developmental needs, and that their voices are essential to shape child and youth mental health services.
Being	Values and respects the perspectives, rights, and lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people as active participants in shaping care.
Doing	Engages Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people in the design, delivery and evaluation of mental health services in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways.

Key actions

- Embed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership at all organisational levels through permanent, non-removable structural positions with clear decision-making authority.
- Establish Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory groups with direct executive and board influence, including representation from Elders, children and young people, carers and other Community members.
- Secure dedicated, protected funding streams for governance positions and structures to ensure sustainability against political or administrative changes.
- Mandate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander data sovereignty and information governance protocols ensuring Community control over health data collection, analysis and dissemination.
- Provide comprehensive education to all staff and leadership on the importance and authority of cultural governance structures.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

DOMAIN 2
Cultural Models of Care

Holistic, culturally grounded healing that centres traditional healing practices, Healing on Country, and the cultural determinants of health. Services must partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-controlled organisations and traditional healers to achieve meaningful change.

6. Cultural determinants of health

Knowing	Culture directly shapes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing by influencing identity, connection, spirituality, and belonging, and can support healing.
Being	Values culture as a source of health and values the healing role of cultural practices, language, and knowledge.
Doing	Actively embeds and supports cultural practices (e.g., language, connection to Country and Community and other relevant healing approaches).

7. Inclusion of traditional healing practices

Knowing	Traditional healing is a vital aspect of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing, drawing on lived cultural knowledge.
Being	Values and respects traditional healing practices.
Doing	Integrates traditional healing practices, and where possible, works with traditional healers to include their practices into mental health care.

8. Healing on Country

Knowing	Connection to Country is key to wellbeing and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Being	Values the deep connection between Country and mental health in every aspect of care.
Doing	Creates pathways for people to heal on Country as part of their care.

9. Culturally safe physical spaces

Knowing	Understands that people feel safer accessing mental health care when spaces respect their culture and identity.
Being	Values creating environments that are welcoming, inclusive, and culturally respectful.
Doing	Actively collaborates with Communities to design spaces that honour Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander traditions and values.

10. Valuing lived experiences

Knowing	The lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples hold invaluable insights into resilience, survival, and Community strength, and are deeply connected to cultural identity and history.
Being	Values lived experiences as essential knowledge for shaping culturally safe care through genuine respect, humility and openness to learn.
Doing	Actively engages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities to integrate their lived experiences into service delivery.

Key actions

- Enable traditional healing practices and Healing on Country as recognised clinical options through formal partnerships with traditional healers and cultural practitioners.
- Resource Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to deliver cultural healing programs within mainstream settings with appropriate funding, space and institutional support.
- Develop holistic care approaches that integrate mind, body, spirit and Country connections as fundamental to mental health and wellbeing.
- Develop child-, youth- and family-centred care pathways that recognise the role of family, kinship, and Community, and support culturally safe, developmentally appropriate engagement with children and young people.
- Conduct regular Community-led cultural accountability reviews to guide continuous service adaptation and improvement.
- Establish formal pathways for incorporating cultural knowledge, practices and healing modalities into standard care protocols.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

DOMAIN 3
Safe Ways of Caring

Translates cultural safety into concrete everyday care practices. Guides how services interact with clients, structure care environments, and respond to trauma, crisis, youth and diverse priority groups within mainstream settings.

11. Cultural humility in care

Knowing	Addressing power imbalances and expressing cultural humility is crucial in providing culturally safe care.
Being	Reflects on position of power and values opportunities to learn from the cultural knowledge, experiences, and perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Doing	Regularly seeks opportunities to learn and adapt practice to reflect learning, and address power differentials and knowledge sharing.

12. Holistic care

Knowing	Mental health is deeply connected to social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.
Being	Values the Social and Emotional Wellbeing framework.
Doing	Incorporates the Social and Emotional Wellbeing model into practice and policy.

13. Family-centred and inclusive care for diverse and blended family structures

Knowing	Family in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contexts extends beyond nuclear definitions to include kinship, Elders, carers, and Community, with these diverse and blended structures vital to identity, belonging, and resilience.
Being	Respects and accepts different family and kinship structures and caregiving roles.
Doing	Uses a kinship model of 'family' in care planning, recognising and supporting diverse family structures (e.g., kinship care, foster families, LGBTQIA+ members, and intergenerational carers).

14. Compassionate care that builds healing relationships

Knowing	Respecting relationships, culture, and connectedness is essential to providing compassionate care and building a healing relationship.
Being	Values culture and connections as essential to respectful and compassionate care and therapeutic relationships.
Doing	Provides care that expresses compassion and builds healing relationships through respecting and incorporating culture and connection in practice.

15. Strengths-based approaches

Knowing	Strengths-based approaches help build resilience and empowerment.
Being	Values the importance of shifting from a deficit-based approach to one that is strength-based and solution-focused.
Doing	Incorporates strengths into practice to empower people and create positive outcomes.

16. Developmentally appropriate support

Knowing	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples face unique developmental challenges shaped by intergenerational trauma, systemic barriers, cultural disconnection, and social inequities.
Being	Believes in providing a safe, understanding, and developmentally appropriate space.
Doing	Uses developmentally appropriate programs, supports, and resources that empower people and strengthen connections to family, culture, and Community.

17. Promoting wellbeing in diverse priority groups

Knowing	Understands the diversity and priority groups within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities with differing needs and challenges.
Being	Values fostering inclusive environments that are respectful of diversity and responsive to developmental needs.
Doing	Embeds co-designed programs that address the specific needs of each group, with involvement and leadership from representatives of those groups.

18. Cultural awareness in crisis intervention

Knowing	Understands that cultural and historical knowledge is essential for effectively responding to crises.
Being	Values approaching crises with calmness, respect, and an understanding of cultural needs.
Doing	Works with families and Communities to ensure crisis responses respect cultural values and traditions, involving Community leaders in planning.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

DOMAIN 4
Access and Equity

Addresses both immediate service delivery improvements and broader systemic reforms. This domain tackles racism, mental health inequity, barriers to access, and the social, political and economic determinants of health as structural legacies of colonisation.

19. Enhancing telehealth with cultural safety

Knowing	Understands that cultural and historical knowledge is essential for effectively responding to crises.
Being	Values ensuring that telehealth services are welcoming, culturally respectful, and build trust in a virtual setting.
Doing	Works with Communities to design telehealth services that include voices, languages, and cultural knowledge.

Key actions

- Undertake comprehensive cultural and family context assessments for all clients, incorporating kinship networks, cultural connections and traditional support systems, using culturally appropriate tools.
- Adapt crisis response protocols to include Community members and Elders in planning and intervention processes while respecting cultural protocols.
- Provide staff training in culturally informed trauma approaches that recognise historical, intergenerational and contemporary trauma impacts.
- Ensure physical spaces are designed and maintained as culturally safe environments with appropriate symbols, artefacts and spatial arrangements.
- Integrate strength-based approaches that build upon existing cultural resources, resilience factors and Community assets.

20. Addressing racism

Knowing	Understands that racism and colonisation deeply affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.
Being	Values self-reflexivity and challenging personal and institutional biases.
Doing	Creates and applies anti-racism policy and mandates regular training for all staff.

21. Mental health equity

Knowing	Understands that systemic barriers cause inequity in mental health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Being	Values fairness, inclusion, and access for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities.
Doing	Co-designs programs to address inequities and meet the needs of Communities.

22. Accessibility

Knowing	Understands the range of barriers which prevent many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from accessing mental health care.
Being	Values welcoming, inclusive, accessible and culturally safe services.
Doing	Provides practical solutions including transport, telehealth, and culturally safe spaces to ensure care is within reach.

23. Systems navigation

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples interact with multiple fragmented systems, creating barriers to access, continuity of care, and culturally safe support.
Being	Values supporting coordinated, culturally safe care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
Doing	Develops integrated service approaches and cross-sector partnerships that improve coordination between all human service systems.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

24. Flexibility

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities have diverse needs shaped by location and culture.
Being	Values openness and adaptability to meet individual and Community needs.
Doing	Works with Communities to design and deliver services that can be adjusted to suit different locations, traditions, circumstances, and developmental needs.

25. Accountability in service delivery

Knowing	Understands that accountability means ensuring services are effective, and responsive to Community needs.
Being	Values openness to feedback, takes responsibility, and commits to ongoing improvement.
Doing	Sets clear goals, assesses outcomes regularly, and involves Communities in reviews to guide improvements.

26. Social, political and economic determinants of health

Knowing	Understands that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health is shaped by systemic factors including racism, poverty, housing access, education, and political exclusion — legacies of colonisation that require structural change.
Being	Values honesty about when systems perpetuate harm or inequality.
Doing	Advocates for structural reforms to improve income security, housing, education, and legal justice through policies co-developed with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership. Supports holistic programs that address upstream causes of distress and inequity.

27. Political bipartisanship

Knowing	Understands that improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health requires lasting, consistent commitment across all political parties.
Being	Values united and ongoing commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health programs.
Doing	Works with governments to secure consistent funding and policies that prioritise culturally safe mental health care.

Key actions

- Create welcoming physical environments that authentically reflect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture through artwork, languages, flags and culturally appropriate design elements.
- Implement flexible service delivery models, including walk-in appointments, Community outreach, telehealth, after-hours access, and out-of-clinic or Community-based sessions, where preferred by children and young people.
- Systematically remove access barriers including cost, transportation, referral complexity and administrative requirements that impede service utilisation.
- Develop and implement comprehensive anti-racism strategies with regular cultural safety audits and transparent accountability mechanisms.
- Establish robust feedback systems that actively seek and respond to Community needs, particularly for rural and remote service contexts.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

Domain 5
Relationality

Emphasises authentic, sustained Community connection rather than transactional service provision. Relationships are central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing — this domain encompasses Community engagement, partnerships, reciprocity, respect for culture, and privacy and confidentiality.

28. Community engagement

Knowing	Community engagement makes services more accessible and culturally appropriate.
Being	Values building authentic and respectful relationships with Communities.
Doing	Actively involves Communities in planning and designing their care and consistently seeks their feedback.

29. Partnerships

Knowing	Understands that strong partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Communities improve care.
Being	Respects and values the knowledge, leadership, and insights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Communities.
Doing	Works together with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and Communities to design and deliver culturally appropriate services.

30. Reciprocity

Knowing	Reciprocity is foundational to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, and involves mutual respect, shared benefits, and ongoing exchange between people, Communities and systems.
Being	Values building relationships through mutual care and learning from Community while giving back.
Doing	Gives as much as you can learn or take. Establishes feedback loops, cultural supervision, and shared decision-making.

31. Privacy and confidentiality

Knowing	Understands that privacy and confidentiality are crucial for building trust.
Being	Respects cultural values and practices when handling personal information.
Doing	Develops policies and trains staff to safeguard personal and cultural information, including clear protocols for consent, information sharing across services, and mandatory reporting requirements.

Key actions

- Build genuine long-term Community relationships extending beyond consultation to sustained partnership and collaboration frameworks.
- Invest in Community mental health literacy initiatives and hope-building programs that promote resilience, strength, and recovery perspectives.
- Implement systematic reciprocal activities including capacity building, knowledge sharing, Community celebrations and resource development.
- Maintain consistent Community presence through dedicated staff and resources rather than fly-in/fly-out service delivery models.
- Develop culturally appropriate privacy and confidentiality protocols that respect Community preferences and provide choice in service provider characteristics.

Practitioner level principle

Service level principle

Domain 6
Workforce Development

Addresses both recruitment and retention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander professionals and the cultural responsiveness development of all staff. A strong, well-supported Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is essential, and cultural responsiveness must be built and maintained across every staff level.

32. Strengthening the Aboriginal workforce

Knowing	Understands that a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce is essential.
Being	Respects and values Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and staff at all levels.
Doing	Actively recruits, mentors, and provides pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff to grow and lead.

33. Cultural responsiveness

Knowing	Understands that every staff member's worldview and cultural position influence the care they provide — and biases can prevent access to appropriate care.
Being	Values reflective practice that challenges one's own culture, worldview and position of power.
Doing	Provides staff with continuous learning opportunities from Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders to build and sustain culturally safe practice.

Key actions

- Implement affirmative action policies including designated 50(d)/51(d) positions that prioritise qualified Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander candidates in recruitment and advancement processes.
- Establish school-based traineeships and early career pathway programs to develop long-term Aboriginal health workforce capacity.
- Provide continuous, Aboriginal-led cultural responsiveness training for all staff with regular competency assessment and professional development requirements.
- Develop formal partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to support workforce development through mentorship, placement and career advancement opportunities.
- Address cultural load on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff through appropriate supervision, recognition, workload distribution and professional support systems.

For a detailed example of how this domain can be implemented under a specific discipline (Psychology), please see the AIPEP Framework for Cultural Safety, Anti-Racism and Indigenous Leadership in Psychology Educations, Training and Professional Practice [9].

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