

Deadly Pharmacist quick reference guide: Alcohol and other drugs

Why does cultural safety matter with drug and alcohol treatment

- Cultural safety is determined by how safe and respected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel in pharmacy settings.
- Cultural safety is not achieved through a single training session. It is an ongoing commitment that builds trust, reduces stigma, and improves health outcomes..
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, health is holistic and deeply connected to culture, encompassing spiritual, emotional, physical, cultural, and community wellbeing. (Dudgeon et al., 2014).
- Harmful alcohol and other drug use among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is inseparable from the ongoing impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, and the wider social and cultural determinants of health.
- Culturally safe community pharmacy care creates trusted, stigma-free access to harm minimisation and Alcohol and other drugs (AOD) support.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Determinants of Health



Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly 2013. Artist: Tristan Schultz, RelativeCreative

Foundations for culturally safe service delivery: education, engagement, environment, empowerment

EDUCATION: know your community, know your impact

Build your cultural knowledge:

- Learn about local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Nations, language groups, and cultural protocols.
- Understand local health issues, gender considerations (Women's Business/Men's Business), and community dynamics.
- Engage in ongoing cultural training and reflective practice – this is a lifelong journey!
- Learn the history of colonisation and its lasting impact on health, trust, and access to healthcare.
- Advice should maybe be more direct i.e. Develop a meaningful, personalised Acknowledgment of Country to deliver at the start of staff meetings.
- Learn about traditional healing and bush medicines local to the community.

Partner in learning:

- Connect with local ACCHOs for guidance, training, and community insight.
- Seek mentorship from Elders or Aboriginal Health Workers.
- Encourage your pharmacy team to complete Aboriginal cultural capability training.

Cultural safety begins with what you learn and how that learning continues to shape your practice.

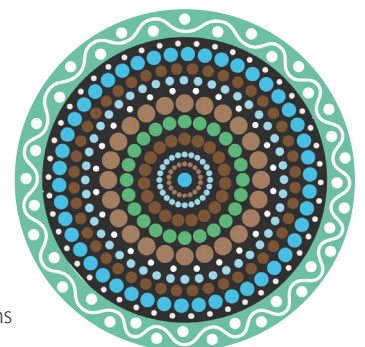
ENGAGEMENT: build trusting relationships and community connections

Engage with community respectfully and consistently:

- Introduce yourself, share who you are, and build rapport.
- Establish relationships with local ACCHOs, Elders, Aboriginal Health Workers and Practitioners.
- Attend local events and support cultural initiatives.
- Develop referral pathways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.
- Ask openly: "How can our pharmacy best support your community?"

Communicate in culturally responsive ways:

- Use clinical yarning (social, diagnostic, management yarns).
- Allow time — silence is part of communication.
- Consider language and literacy needs.
- Check preferred forms of address (e.g., Aunty/Uncle).
- Offer gender-appropriate options for sensitive topics.



Engagement is about genuine relationships, not transactions.

ENVIRONMENT: create a welcoming, safe and inclusive pharmacy

- Display a meaningful Acknowledgement of Country.
- Display local Aboriginal artwork (know the story and artist name/mob)
- Consider using and displaying culturally welcoming items such as posters, badges, counter mats or pins.
- Provide Aboriginal-specific health resources and pamphlets.
- Promote privacy and confidentiality in consultations.
- Ensure physical spaces are accessible and welcoming.
- Choose uniforms that feel approachable, not authoritative. Consider wearing Aboriginal designed shirts one day per week.
- Greet everyone warmly and ensure no one is ignored.
- Invite feedback and implement changes: Nothing about us, without us.

The environment should show respect before you say a word.

EMPOWERMENT: support autonomy, strengths and community control

Empower individuals through culturally safe care:

- Use shared decision-making in all consultations.
- Recognise cultural identity and strengths as central to health.
- Provide clear information and check understanding respectfully.
- Encourage self-determination and goal setting.

Empower the community:

- Employ Aboriginal staff and support culturally safe recruitment.
- Recognise the leadership of Elders and Aboriginal Health Workers.
- Collaborate on programs that respond to community priorities.
- Build feedback loops so community voices shape your services.

Empowerment means shifting power back to individuals and communities.

Useful resources and further learning

- Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country - Reconciliation Australia
- Locations - NACCHO
- Clinical Yarning
- Guidelines for pharmacists supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with Medicines Management
- Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre
- Alcohol and other drugs treatment guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – in a non-Aboriginal setting – NADA



CLINICAL YARNING in Drug and Alcohol treatment: culturally responsive communication to build trust and rapport with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Clinical yarning supports culturally safe, person centred care by valuing storytelling, strengthening trust, and creating space for genuine two-way communication. It improves understanding, reduces stigma, and leads to better engagement and health outcomes. Although originally developed to enhance clinical care, the same approach is equally effective for facilitating other services or addressing non-clinical issues because it prioritises relationships, shared understanding, and partnership.

Clinical yarning has three interconnected components:

1. Social Yarn – Building trust and connection

This stage focuses on creating rapport. It involves relaxed conversation, sharing something about yourself, showing genuine interest, and finding common ground. In AOD settings, relationships are often long-term. As a result, the Social Yarn occurs at every interaction, not just when a problem arises. These ongoing conversations gradually build trust, reduce stigma and shame, and create a culturally safe foundation for more sensitive discussions when they are needed.

2. Diagnostic Yarn – Understanding the person's story

When an issue does arise - whether clinical or nonclinical - the Diagnostic Yarn helps develop a shared understanding of the concern. Instead of a rigid question and answer approach, the pharmacist listens deeply and allows the person to share their experiences in their own words. The conversation is gently guided to explore the issue, concerns, context, and priorities. When exploring issues in AOD care, it is important to recognise that harmful use can affect physical and mental health, as well as the wellbeing of children, families, and the broader community.

3. Management Yarn – Planning together

The Management Yarn centres on shared decision-making. The pharmacist and patient work together to agree on treatment options, goals, or solutions to non-clinical problems, along with the next steps. This ensures the person feels informed, supported, and in control. In opioid dependence treatment, for example, plans are reviewed regularly, and the person remains actively involved in decisions about dosing, missed doses, and any other issues that arise throughout the treatment journey.

When culture is respected, care becomes deadly.