

Protocols for use of 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander'

This information sheet provides a guide for Queensland Health staff on using the terms 'Aboriginal' and 'Torres Strait Islander'.

Definition of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person

According to s51 (25) of the High Court of Australia (1983): 'An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (person) and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.'

Collective names used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The collective names used to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are commonly used in reference to the distinct and diverse nations and peoples of the First Australians. The term 'Aboriginal' is not inclusive of Torres Strait Islander people as the term 'Torres Strait Islander' is not inclusive of Aboriginal people. In respect of both cultural groups, Queensland Health's preference is for 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' to be used when referring collectively to Indigenous Australians.

- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders

The lowercase word 'aboriginal' refers to an indigenous person from any part of the world, and does not necessarily refer to an Aboriginal Australian. Queensland Health's preference is that 'Aboriginal' always be capitalised when referring to Aboriginal Australians.

- ✗ aboriginal
- ✓ Aboriginal

Ensure that the use of the term 'Australian' does not infer exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- ✗ The median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 21 years compared to the median age of Australians at 37 years.
- ✓ The median age of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is 21 years compared to the median age of Australians of other descent at 37 years.

Abbreviations

When forming part of an acronym to describe such entities as organisations, abbreviations are used extensively.

- ✓ A&TSIHB (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Branch)

However, the abbreviation to 'ATSI' when used to describe people may cause offense and should not be used in internal or external documents or in conversation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- ✗ ATSI
- ✗ A&TSI
- ✓ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Correct use of 'Aboriginal'

Although it is grammatically correct, the term 'Aborigine(s)' has negative connotations and should be avoided. 'Aboriginal' should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

- ✗ an Aboriginal/Aboriginals
- ✓ Aboriginal person/people
- ✗ Many Aboriginals came to the health clinic
- ✓ Many Aboriginal people came to the health clinic

Correct use of 'Torres Strait Islander'

A Torres Strait Islander person is a descendant from one of the Torres Strait Islands located to the north of mainland Queensland. 'Torres Strait Islander' should be used as an adjective, not as a noun.

- ✗ Many Torres Strait Islanders came to the health clinic
- ✓ Many Torres Strait Islander people came to the health clinic

'Torres Strait Islander' must always be capitalised.

- ✗ torres strait islander
- ✓ Torres Strait Islander

The term 'Torres Strait Islander' should never be abbreviated, as to do so may cause offense.

- ✗ TSI
- ✗ Islander/s
- ✓ Torres Strait Islander

Correct use of 'Indigenous'

As 'indigenous' is not specific, some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel the term diminishes their identity and should be avoided; however, in certain circumstances 'Indigenous' with capitalisation is acceptable.

- ✓ Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders (preferable)
- ✓ Indigenous Queenslanders (acceptable)

The lowercase word 'indigenous' is used when referring to people of any region or country; therefore, when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is highly recommended that it is capitalised.

- ✗ indigenous
- ✓ Indigenous