Let's yarn about ageing well



Culturally safe language guide

Supporting respectful communication in aged care

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We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Country on which this organisation operates, and pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. This tool is grounded in the principle that community control is a governance strength, and that Elders are at the centre of all decisions made in their name.

Culturally safe language guide

Language plays an important role in creating culturally safe aged care environments. The words staff use when speaking with Elders, families and community can build trust, show respect and support culturally safe care.

This guide provides simple reminders to support respectful communication with First Nations people.

1. Use respectful and inclusive terms

Where possible, use the language that people use to describe themselves.

Generally respectful terms

- First Nations people
- Aboriginal people
- Torres Strait Islander people
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

Better practice

- Use the name of the local Nation or community where appropriate.

> **Example**
>
> **Instead of:** "Indigenous residents"
>
> **Try:** "Aboriginal residents from the local community" or the specific Nation name.

Avoid outdated or offensive terms such as:

- "Aborigines"
- "ATSI"
- "half-caste" or similar historical terms.

2. Recognise diversity

First Nations people are not one group. Australia has hundreds of Nations, languages and cultures.

Avoid language that assumes all communities are the same.

> **Example**
>
> **Instead of:** ""The Aboriginal way of doing things"
>
> **Try:** "Different communities may have different practices and preferences."

3. Use strengths-based language

Avoid deficit language that focuses only on problems or disadvantage.

Avoid

- "Vulnerable Indigenous people"
- "Disadvantaged communities"

Try

- "Elders and community members"
- "Strong community connections"
- "Supporting independence and wellbeing"

4. Respect Elders and community roles

In many communities, Elders are respected knowledge holders and leaders.

Good practice includes:

- addressing Elders respectfully
- recognising family and community involvement
- acknowledging cultural knowledge and experience.

5. Speak in ways that support trust

Communication styles may differ across cultures. In many Aboriginal communities:

- Conversations may take the form of yarning rather than direct questioning.
- Silence may be part of respectful listening.
- Relationships and trust are important before discussing sensitive topics.

Good practice:

- speak clearly and respectfully
- avoid rushing conversations
- allow time for people to share stories and experiences.

6. Ask rather than assume

The most culturally safe approach is to ask people how they prefer to be addressed and what matters to them.

Example questions staff can ask:

- “How would you like us to refer to your community or culture?”
- “Is there anything we should know to make sure care is respectful for you?”
- “Are there cultural practices that are important for us to understand?”

Key reminder

Culturally safe language is not just about the words used, it is about respect, listening and recognising the cultural identity of each person receiving care.



