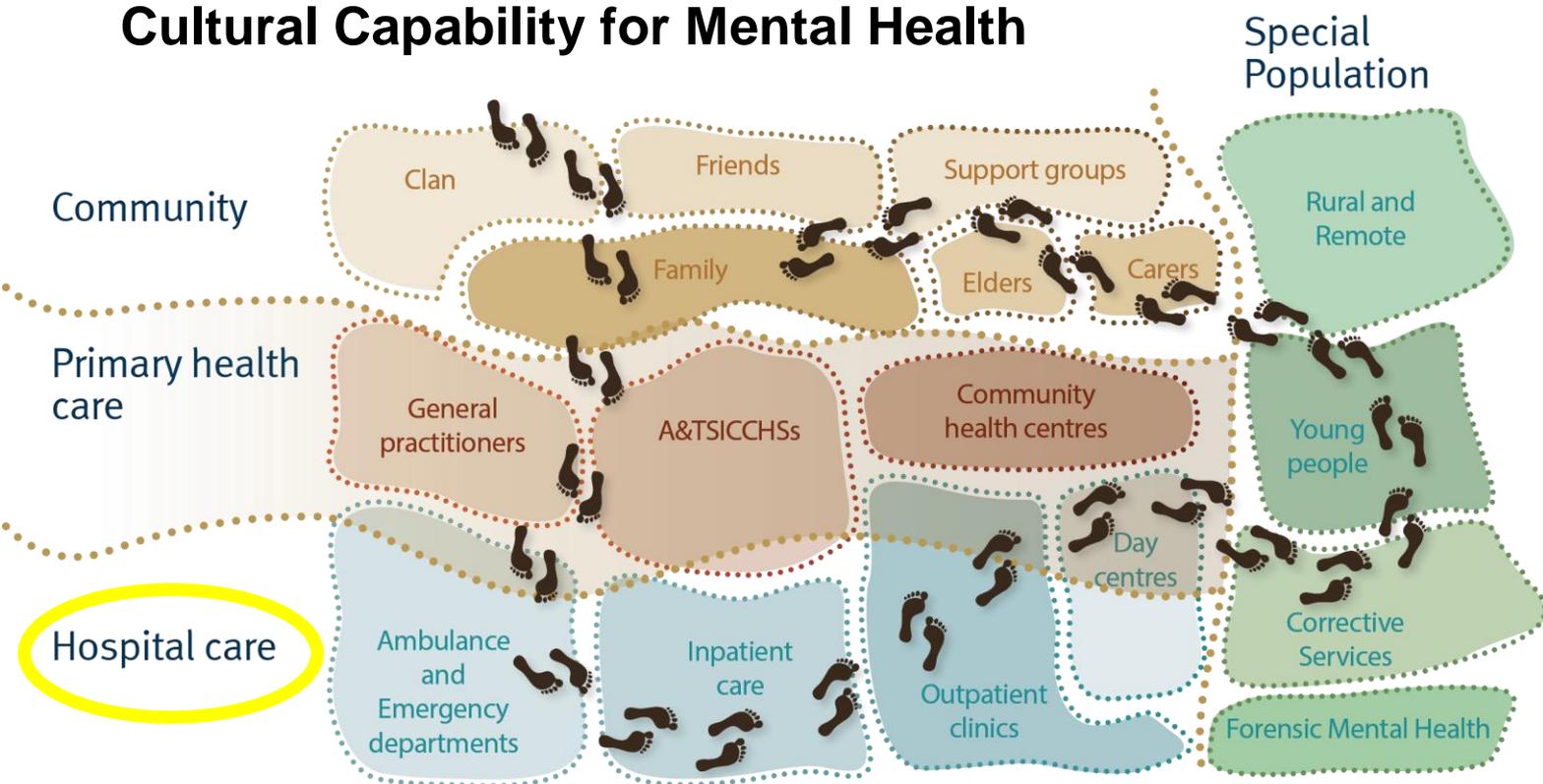


# Cultural Capability for Mental Health



## Hospital Care

### Emergency departments

Emergency departments are busy environments, often marked by people in distress, discomfort and pain. Providing culturally capable mental health services can be challenging within acute settings.

- Ambulance services are often the first contact point for people in crisis. Work with the family and the person to gather information required to focus on the person's needs. Think about your communication style, your approach, and ways to show respect for everyone involved.
- Always ask "Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?" This could be followed by "Where are you from?" and a brief chat about the person. While time is a major factor in ED, a minute or two of human contact can make a big difference to a person's perception of his or her safety and care.
- Consider the environment and waiting times. A person who is distressed or suicidal may need someone to check up on them every now and then to assure them that they haven't been forgotten. Use these brief moments as opportunities for human engagement (e.g. "Hey, did you see that the footy is on the telly? Would you like to watch the game?")
- If there is a space for a person to stand or pace without impacting on others, encourage that as a safe coping strategy.
- Think about how the triage system may be perceived by the person. A Torres Strait Islander man who presents with suicidal intent may be waiting for some time, and then an older Caucasian man may be triaged ahead of him (with symptoms of cardiac problems, for instance). How may that be interpreted from a racial or cultural perspective? Whilst it is not easy to explain the triage system to every person who presents, and confidentiality means you can't justify a person's triaging over another, it may be useful to consider how you provide culturally capable responses to questions.



For instance, you could say “I know it’s tough. We have some waiting to do, things can take some time. Some people might be seen before you because they’re not strong, they need a doctor quickly. What can we do to keep you going strong for a bit longer?”

- Talk to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Worker about ways that they can provide support. Be aware of limitations to their support. They are not clinicians, and may not be trained in mental health. Consider a person who is becoming agitated and aggressive; putting any staff member in a situation of risk requires planning, support, mitigation strategies and options.

### Inpatient Care

Inpatient mental health units can be places of safety, but also containment – which can increase the distress for some people. Consider ways to improve the experience from a cultural perspective.

- How are people brought to the unit? Take a walk from ED or the admission point, to the unit. Imagine being scared and distressed, coming to it for the first time, with people taking you to the unknown. How could the environment be improved? What could people say to alleviate the distress?
- Talk about the unit as a safe place, for healing and making people strong, and dealing with worries. Acknowledge the person’s fears and concerns. Consider the impact of stigma, shame and guilt for a person who has been admitted to hospital.
- How are people greeted on admission? How are they shown around? Are there places on the unit that provide a feeling of cultural safety? Can people access outdoor spaces?
- Consider how the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workers are engaged in the most meaningful way for the person.
- Support the person’s cultural and spiritual beliefs and values during his or her stay.
- Link in early with supports in the community that will assist with a smooth transition.
- Culture isn’t an ‘add on’ for treatment plans and recovery plans – ensure that the planning and team communication processes include an understanding of cultural needs and values throughout.

### Day Centres

Some communities may have day centres that provide other approaches that support social and emotional wellbeing. These may include learning skills for daily living, prevocational skills, creative skills, and social support groups and activities, or drop-in centres like [Headspace](#). Find out what is in your local areas and how they can help.