

# ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER LGBTIQ+SB PEOPLES

## PART ONE

A QLIFE GUIDE  
FOR HEALTH AND  
SOCIAL CARE  
PRACTITIONERS,  
SERVICE PROVIDERS,  
AND FOLKS WHO  
CARE

Contact QLife

Health professionals wanting to know more can contact [ask@qlife.org.au](mailto:ask@qlife.org.au)

QLife is available 365 days a year, 3pm - midnight. call 1800 184 527 | webchat [www.qlife.org.au](http://www.qlife.org.au)

*QLife acknowledges the Traditional Owners of country throughout this land now known as Australia, their diversity, histories and knowledge and their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. This QGuide was developed on unceded Yugarabul lands, and Gadigal lands. QLife pays our respects to Elders and extend that respect to all Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples across this country we know as Australia.*

*This QGuide was developed in collaboration with Matika Little, Queer Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi woman, and Brendon Moorfield- Rainbow Mob.*

February 2024

*This QGuide is part one of two. See part two for information about addressing stereotypes, tips for engaging with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+ Peoples, a list of services and organisations, and resource list.*

### Introduction

The intersections of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and diverse gender and sexual identities create unique healthcare needs that require holistic and inclusive approaches that consider the relationship between multiple structural inequalities faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Gender Diverse, Intersex, Queer, Sistergirl, Brotherboy and other sexuality, gender and bodily diverse (LGBTIQ+SB) individuals. These intersectional identities can include gender identity, sexuality, age, whether or not someone has a disability, etc.

This QGuide aims to serve as a resource for support providers and their staff to ensure a commitment to delivering culturally inclusive, safe care to LGBTIQ+SB Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is important to note that this guide provides introductory information; further research and continuous learning is recommended for all individuals planning to engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+SB peoples and communities. It is recommended that practitioners and support workers connect with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and community controlled organisations, to gain an understanding of the needs, challenges and cultural protocols of the communities in which services are being provided.

### Terminology

Terms like Indigenous, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, etc., are colonial terms that largely group hundreds of distinctly unique First Nations groups, each with different languages and cultures, into one homogenous group. For this reason, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may prefer the use of traditional place/mob names over colonial terminology (e.g. Wiradjuri woman over Aboriginal woman). It is important to ensure that when engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, you ask about their preferred terminology whenever possible.

Many people place great amounts of weight identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, rather than First Nations; First Nations is primarily used in the US and is becoming more widely used by academia in Australia.

***“It’s up to the individual, the family, the community to define what they are most comfortable with and for others to respect that... Don’t tell – ask!”***

— Celeste Liddle, Arrernte woman

Source: What is the correct term for Aboriginal people? - Creative Spirits, retrieved from <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/people/how-to-name-aboriginal-people>



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## Respectful engagement glossary of terms

## Respectful engagement glossary of terms (continued)

**Sistergirl/Sistagirl** - Term that may be used by Trans-female/Transfemme Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (could also be used as a generic term that all mob use).

**Brotherboy/Brothaboy** - Term that may be used by Trans-male/Transmasc Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people (could also be used as a generic term that all mob use).

**Indigenous** – A term used to classify a subject as native to a distinct place which colonial powers in Australia and subsequent governments have used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**First Nations** – The term was coined by Indigenous groups in Canada in the 1970s and 80s in response to the ongoing use of the terms “Aboriginal”, “Native”, and “Indian” to describe the earliest known inhabitants of the Canadian lands. The term has now entered general use amongst many of the world’s Indigenous groups as an alternative to colonial derived terms. In Australia it refers to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples or inclusive of global First Nations peoples.

**Aboriginal** - Broad term grouping First Nations peoples from mainland Australia and Tasmania

**Torres Strait Islander** - Broad term grouping First Nations peoples from the islands between the northern tip of Cape York in Queensland and the southwest coast of Papua New Guinea.

**Deadly** - Synonymous with Good/Great (opposite of how the word deadly is often used in a healthcare space)

**Stolen Generations**- The Stolen Generations are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who were forcibly removed as children from their families and communities through race-based policies set up by both State and Federal Governments from 1910 to the 1970s: see

<https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2019/12/Working-with-Stolen-Generations-GP-fact-sheet.pdf>

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**Colonisation**- When the British invaded Australia from 1788 onwards, they started what’s known as a settler colony. This means that the British came to stay and create their own society by stealing the lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The foundation of Australia, including its laws and customs were created during these colonial times and many of them are still in place today: see [https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/Standing\\_Strong](https://deadlystory.com/page/culture/articles/Standing_Strong)

**Client centred** - The client or person-centred approach treats each person respectfully as an individual human being, and not just as a condition to be treated: See <https://www.safetyandquality.gov.au/our-work/partnering-consumers/person-centred-care>

**Trauma informed** - Trauma-informed care is an approach that recognises the widespread impact of trauma on individuals and focuses on creating an environment that promotes safety, trust, and empowerment while addressing the specific needs and experiences of those who have experienced trauma: see <https://www.health.nsw.gov.au/mentalhealth/psychosocial/principles/Pages/trauma-informed.aspx>

**Cultural humility** – Cultural humility acknowledges that we are not the “expert” about someone else’s experience. See [the QLife Anti-Oppressive Practice Qguide](#) for further reading on cultural humility and anti-oppressive practices.

**Mob** - Synonymous with family or traditional country/clan group (e.g. Wiradjuri mob). This terminology is useful to remember when creating forms, etc., that include mob, short for mobile.

**Rainbow Mob** – Term used by LGBTIQ+ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to refer to themselves.

**Kinship** – The concept of kinship describes a person’s responsibilities towards other people, the land and natural resources. Kinship is a system that determines how people relate to one another and their surroundings, with the aim of creating a cohesive and harmonious community. It determines not only responsibilities towards others, but also how one relates to others through marriage, ceremony, funeral roles and behaviour patterns. People who hold a position in the kinship system have a responsibility to adhere to kinship principles through their actions. (Watarrka Foundation: <https://www.watarrkafoundation.org.au/blog/the-role-of-family-kinship-in-aboriginal-culture>)



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Some Numbers

## Statistics

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who are a part of LGBTIQ+SB communities are largely underrepresented when it comes to research on emotional and physical health outcomes; however, some statistics can provide an initial insight into health and peer support needs.

Statistics below show disparity of suicide-related behaviour between communities. While data shows statistically high poor mental health and suicide-related behaviour results when compared with non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups and non-LGBTIQ+SB groups, it is important to note that this is not the result of any inherent vulnerability that comes with being an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who identifies as LGBTIQ+SB, but rather these statistics are the outcomes of increased experiences of racism, discrimination, marginalisation, homophobia and transphobia (Mulé et al. 2009).

Recent research reported in Walkern Katatdjin/Rainbow Knowledge Breaking the Silence report indicated over 20% of Aboriginal &/or Torres Strait Islander LGBTQA+SB respondents felt unaccepted/ not fully accepted by their Aboriginal communities, and one-third felt invisible in their community. Within queer spaces, less than half responded to feeling a sense of belonging to the queer community, with 40% experiencing regular microaggressions from the queer community, 50% feeling tokenism within their work or in groups. Over 60% felt burdened having to educate their queer peers on Aboriginal issues.

The high rates of suicide-related behaviour among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, combined with evidence relating to LGBTIQ+ Australians having higher rates of suicide-related behaviours, suggests a compounded risk among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTIQ+SB+ people. This risk may be increased when other intersecting factors are added (for example, youth, disability, and incarceration) (Phelan and Oxley 2021).

- [For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who died between 2011 and 2020, Suicide was the fifth leading cause of death, compared with 13th for non-Indigenous Australians \(ABS 2020\).](#)
- [In 2021, suicide accounted for 5.3% of all deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people while the comparable proportion for non-Indigenous Australians was 1.8% \(ABS 2022a\).](#)
- **The [Walkern Katatdjin Rainbow Knowledge report](#) indicates that one in five Rainbow Mob youth have attempted to take their lives.**
- [For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, the suicide rate has increased between 2011 and 2020, from 31.7 to 42.9 deaths per 100,000 \(ABS 2020\). For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, the suicide rate has remained relatively stable over time \(ABS 2020\).](#) **It should be noted that such statistics generally only record sex in binary terms of male and female (rather than gender).**
- [For non-Indigenous Australians, suicide rates were lower than for Indigenous Australians in all 5 states and territories throughout the period 2017-2021 \(ABS 2022a\)](#)

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