

Trauma-Informed & Culturally Safe Care & Practice

Information for Service Providers





Trauma affects a person's thoughts, feelings and behaviours. It can affect their sense of safety and emotional wellbeing and overwhelm their ability to cope with stress and connect with others. Trauma can affect a person for many years. It can also affect people in different ways. Common symptoms include feeling scared, anxious, powerless, isolated, sad, angry, numb, tired and confused. Trauma can result from a single event or a series of events that a person experiences – either directly or from seeing or hearing about trauma from a loved one or community member.¹

Trauma-informed and culturally safe care and practice is a strengths-based approach to healing that is 'guided by a shared understanding of, and responsiveness to, the impacts of trauma'. It 'prioritises cultural, spiritual, physical, psychological, and emotional safety but does not avoid addressing issues of high importance that are likely to be sensitive and triggering of trauma responses'.²

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Service Provider Responsibilities³

Support control, choice and autonomy

Service providers are responsible for:

- ✓ Understanding and respecting individual experiences of trauma and ways of coping and healing.
- ✓ Removing barriers and providing the necessary supports to enable individuals to make decisions and communicate their choices.
- ✓ Providing individuals with clear information and making time to answer questions.
- ✓ Providing options that value and respect individual experiences, knowledge and judgement.
- ✓ Asking permission before providing services or referring individuals to other services.
- ✓ Making information, forms and letters accessible and easy to understand.
- ✓ Ensuring that appropriate interpreting and translation services are made available when needed and free of charge.

Individual Rights

The right to have control, choice and autonomy

Individuals have the right to:

- ✓ Have their point of view heard, respected and valued.
- ✓ Make informed choices and meaningfully participate in developing their service, care and treatment plans.
- ✓ Be empowered and supported to make the best choices for them (and their family).
- ✓ Ask questions.
- ✓ Ask for a second opinion and seek alternate service, care or treatment.
- ✓ Be provided with interpreting and translation services that meet their specific needs and preferences.
- ✓ Access their personal information (e.g. medical records, legal documents).



Service Provider Responsibilities

Individual Rights

Provide physically and emotionally safe spaces

The right to feel physically and emotionally safe

Service providers are responsible for:

- ✓ Creating spaces where individuals feel physically and emotionally safe to talk about their experiences.
- ✓ Adequately screening for trauma and obtaining consent before discussing topics that may be upsetting.
- ✓ Actively listening and ensuring that individuals feel comfortable, safe and supported.
- ✓ Allowing space for an individual to speak without being interrupted and responding using respectful statements that acknowledge and validate their experiences and feelings.
- ✓ Promoting healing and recovery by focusing on an individual's strengths and abilities, setting forward-looking goals and connecting them with appropriate support services when needed.
- ✓ Incorporating trauma and cultural safety knowledge into the organisation's policies, procedures, and practices. This includes:
 - ✓ Providing community-led training to ensure staff are properly trained in responding to trauma using principles of trauma-informed and culturally safe care and practice.
 - ✓ Implementing supportive policies and practices for staff and people accessing services to minimise and manage personal, collective and vicarious traumas and promote wellbeing (e.g. having a dedicated workplace wellbeing or safety officer).
 - ✓ Prioritising diverse hiring across all skill sets, backgrounds and lived experiences.

Individuals have the right to:

- ✓ Feel physically and emotionally safe and be treated with respect, empathy and understanding.
- ✓ Receive services, care and treatment plans tailored to their needs, cultural background, identity and lived experience.
- ✓ Stop and take a break at any time if they feel distressed or uncomfortable.
- ✓ Include a trusted friend, family member or carer for support.



Service Provider Responsibilities

Individual Rights

Provide and facilitate integrated care

The right to receive integrated care

Service providers are responsible for:

- ✓ Responding to the whole of a person's needs (physical, psychological, social and spiritual) and connecting individuals with appropriate support and advocacy services when needed.
- ✓ Helping individuals navigate any systems and processes which are confusing.

Individuals have the right to:

- ✓ Receive comprehensive, holistic, person-centred and coordinated health and social services.

Facilitate feedback and complaints processes

The right to seek help and make a complaint

Service providers are responsible for:

- ✓ Ensuring that people accessing services and staff are informed about complaints processes, that these processes are easy to navigate and information is accessible and easy to understand.
- ✓ Ensuring that individuals have access to support services if needed.
- ✓ Maintaining an individual's privacy and confidentiality and ensuring that they feel safe (e.g. reassuring them that making a complaint will not negatively impact the quality of care and services being provided or any other consequences).
- ✓ Ensuring that reviews of complaints are conducted in collaboration with people who have lived experience of trauma, reflect trauma-informed principles and respect diversity.
- ✓ Ensuring that complaints outcomes are responsive and provide genuine remedy and redress opportunities where appropriate.
- ✓ Ensuring that any actions and outcomes are clearly documented and shared promptly with the complainant and used to inform reforms to policies, procedures, and practices where necessary.

Individuals have the right to:

- ✓ Raise any concerns and have those concerns addressed meaningfully and promptly.
- ✓ Feel comfortable approaching staff when making a complaint.
- ✓ Feel respected, supported and safe throughout the complaints process and have a trusted support person involved.
- ✓ Be kept informed throughout the process.
- ✓ Seek help and/or make a formal complaint if they feel their concerns have not been properly heard or addressed.



COMMUNITY-BASED APPROACHES TO TRAUMA-INFORMED & CULTURALLY SAFE CARE & PRACTICE

Some community groups, including First Nations Peoples, people living with disability, refugees and people seeking asylum and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds often experience overlapping and intersecting forms of racism and discrimination when accessing human services. When accessing services, individuals have the right to the highest standard of care that is trauma-informed and culturally safe. Because trauma and crisis often go hand in hand, service providers are responsible for interacting with people accessing services in a way that minimises the possibilities of re-traumatisation and harm and support individual journeys of healing and recovery.





First Nations Peoples

Providing trauma-informed and culturally safe care and practice to First Nations people requires acknowledging the intergenerational and interpersonal traumas that directly stem from colonisation and ongoing government policies that perpetuate systemic racism and breed distrust of institutions.⁴ It requires acknowledging differences in understanding of concepts such as disability and family responsibilities and avoiding use of deficit and disempowering language. It also requires respecting the diversity of First Nations cultures and incorporating cultural and traditional healing practices into service, care and treatment plans where possible.

People living with disability

Misconceptions about people with disability are common despite the prevalence of disability in the community. For people with disability, experiences of trauma are often compounded by stigma and ableism.⁵ Lack of awareness and knowledge about disability among service providers increases the risk of harm and re-traumatisation when people with disability access services.⁶ Providing trauma-informed care and practice to people with disability involves being responsive to individual needs and preferences and facilitating access to appropriate supports and services necessary for individuals to make informed decisions and communicate their choices.

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds

People from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are at risk of experiencing trauma and discrimination when interacting with services. Providing trauma-informed and culturally safe care and practice to people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds requires respecting and understanding cultural and spiritual differences. It requires acknowledging differences in understanding of concepts such as trauma, mental health, disability, LGBTQIA+ and gender roles and fears around disclosing personal information.⁷ It also requires understanding, respecting and incorporating cultural practices (e.g. Chinese Herbal Medicine) into care and treatment plans where possible.

Refugees and people seeking asylum

Refugees and people seeking asylum have often been through multiple traumatic experiences – including being subjected to torture, persecution and other human rights violations in their home country and the systemic injustices of Australia's onshore and offshore immigration detention systems. Providing trauma-informed and culturally safe care and practice to refugees and people seeking asylum requires understanding and respecting individual responses to trauma (e.g. reluctance to talk about trauma experiences, distrust and fear of institutions and authority figures, fear that disclosure may impact visa status etc.) and fostering relationships built on safety, trust and independence.





Service providers are responsible for:

- ✓ Creating a safe, respectful, inclusive, and accessible space – for example by:
 - ✓ Displaying signage that reflects diversity and promotes translation and interpreting services
 - ✓ Responding to an individual's language and communication needs and addressing any physical and/or environmental barriers
 - ✓ Providing community-led training for staff on disability awareness, cultural competency and trauma-informed practice, and
 - ✓ Hiring staff with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.
- ✓ Ensuring that appropriate interpreting and translation services are made available when needed. This includes:
 - ✓ Asking people accessing services the right questions before booking interpreting services – for example, preferred language (including Auslan/ English, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and international sign languages), gender, ethnicity, cultural background, or other identity of the interpreter.
 - ✓ Ensuring that services are respectful of community and cultural sensitivities.
- ✓ Where possible, providing essential information and forms in multiple languages and ensuring that the information is current and translations are sector-specific and community-led and -reviewed.
- ✓ Ensuring that any online resources and electronic communications are accessible and compatible with assistive technology.
- ✓ Adequately screening for trauma, asking permission before discussing potentially difficult or upsetting topics and providing service, care and treatment plans that are comprehensive, holistic, person-centred and tailored to meet individual needs.
- ✓ Understanding and respecting different cultures and incorporating traditional practices where possible (e.g. First Nations cultural and traditional healing practices, Traditional Chinese Medicine).
- ✓ Ensuring that individuals have access to qualified and experienced staff with diverse backgrounds and lived experiences.
- ✓ Ensuring that people accessing services have been given all the information they need, understand fully the information provided and are supported to complete any next steps.

Service providers should not:

- ✗ Make assumptions about an individual's needs, literacy level (including health literacy), age, disability (or ability) or cultural or other identity.
- ✗ Make assumptions about an individual's language preferences, stage of healing, who their trusted support person is or who they would like their information shared with.
- ✗ Use deficit (or non-strength-based) language.
- ✗ Dismiss an individual's feelings or experiences and their impact (e.g. 'move on').
- ✗ Use technical jargon or acronyms.⁸
- ✗ Ask an individual's family member or support person to act as interpreter.



Support Services

Helplines

13YARN: Call 13 92 76 or visit www.13yarn.org.au

BeyondBlue: Call 1300 22 46 36 or visit www.beyondblue.org.au/get-support/get-immediate-support

Kids Helpline: Call 1800 55 1800 or visit www.kidshelp.com.au

Lifeline: Call 13 11 14 or visit www.lifeline.org.au

MensLine Australia: Call 1300 78 99 78 or visit <https://mensline.org.au/>

National Disability Abuse & Neglect Hotline: Call 1800 880 052 or visit www.jobaccess.gov.au/service-providers/making-complaint-and-reporting-abuse-and-neglect

Sexual assault, family & domestic violence Line: Call 1800 424 017 or visit www.1800respect.org.au

Advocacy & Support Services

Australian Patients Association provides patient advocacy, information and support.

Call 03 9274 0788 or visit www.patients.org.au

Berry Street (Vic) provides trauma services to children, young people and their families in Victoria.

Call 03 9429 9266 (or for National Relay Service, call 03 9450 4700) or visit www.berrystreet.org.au/what-we-do/trauma-services

Disability Gateway assists people with disability, their families and carers to locate and access services across Australia. Call 1800 643 787 or visit www.disabilitygateway.gov.au

Disability Housing Advocacy Service provides advocacy services for people in supported accommodation. Call 1800 843 929 or visit <https://pwd.org.au/get-help/housing-and-accommodation/disability-housing-advocacy-service/>

Multicultural Disability Advocacy Association provides individual advocacy for people from non-English speaking backgrounds with disability in NSW. Call 1800 629 072 or visit <http://mdaa.org.au/>

National Counselling and Referral Service – Disability: Run by Blue Knot Foundation and provides short-term and trauma-informed counselling services: Call 1800 421 468 (or for National Relay Service, call 133 677 and give 02 6146 1468) or visit <https://blueknot.org.au/national-counselling-referral-service-disability/>

STARTTS (NSW) provides trauma-informed and culturally safe information, treatment and support for refugees and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in NSW: Call 02 9646 6700 or visit www.startts.org.au

Synapse provides support services for people who have been impacted by brain injury and disability: Call 1800 673 074 or visit <https://synapse.org.au/our-services/support-services/>

Additional Resources & Links

Self-care & Wellbeing

BeyondBlue provides information about self-care and wellbeing tips and strategies: www.beyondblue.org.au/personal-best/pillar/wellbeing

Headspace provides young people aged between 12-25 information relating to general mental health, physical health, work and study and alcohol and other drugs: <https://headspace.org.au/explore-topics/for-young-people/wellbeing/>

Healthtalk Australia provides self-care strategies and real-life patient, carer and health professional stories on film and audio: www.healthtalkaustralia.org/supported-decision-making/self-help-strategies/

ReachOut provides information about different mindfulness, coping and self-care strategies – <https://au.reachout.com/mental-wellbeing/self-care>

WellMob provides social, emotional and cultural wellbeing online resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: <https://wellmob.org.au/>

Other useful links

Children and Young People with Disability Australia provides webinars for parents and caregivers to learn how to navigate the system and support inclusion for young children with disability: <https://www.cyda.org.au/resource/videos>

Disability Advocacy Network Australia provides a list of advocacy organisations available in each state and territory: <https://www.dana.org.au/find-an-advocate/>

Inclusion Australia provides resources for people with intellectual disability and their families: <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/resources/>; and real stories about discrimination, abuse and neglect faced by people with intellectual disability: <https://www.inclusionaustralia.org.au/intellectual-disability/real-stories/>

Tech4Justice provides a list of national, state and territory-based complaints pathways, advocacy organisations and useful links for different types of complaints (e.g. health care, discrimination, disability, NDIS, policing etc.): www.tech4justice.org.au/

Trauma-Informed & Culturally Safe Practice

Blue Knot Foundation provides a range of resources and information about trauma and trauma-informed practice: <https://blueknot.org.au>

Carmen Cubillo, 'Trauma-informed care: Culturally responsive practice working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities': <https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/ipsych/2021/august-special-issue-3/trauma-informed-care>

Department of Health WA video – 'Journey of health and wellbeing': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cDYGjkjUdg>

Emerging Minds video – 'Explainer – what is trauma and adversity': <https://vimeo.com/243599162>

First Peoples Disability Network provides cultural competency training programs and resources for mainstream disability services: <https://fpdn.org.au/>

Healing Foundation: is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and provides a wide range of resources on trauma and healing: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/>

Healing Foundation provides a glossary of terms related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healing: https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2020/07/HF_Glossary_of_Healing_Terms_A3_Poster_Jul2020_V1.pdf

Healing Foundation provides resources for GP, dental and aged care services on working with Stolen Generations: <https://healingfoundation.org.au/working-stolen-generations/>

Healing Foundation video – 'Improving the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations children': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MUVgXxa3wK8>

Healing Foundation video – 'Intergenerational Trauma': <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vlqx8EYvRbQ>

Indigenous Allied Health Australia provides culturally responsiveness training for professionals, individuals, service providers, and/or organisations: <https://iaha.com.au/iaha-consulting/cultural-responsiveness-training/>

Judy Atkinson, 'Trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children': <https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/ctg-rs21.pdf>

Lowitja provides practical guides, tools and templates for program and policy evaluators and commissioners who want to change their practices and ensure they are working in a more culturally safe manner: <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/tools/evaluation-toolkit>

Mental Health Coordinating Council – 'Recovery Oriented Language Guide': <https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide-Mental-Health-Coordinating-Council-2022.pdf>; and 'Recovery Oriented Language Guide: Quick Reference': <https://mhcc.org.au/2021/10/recovery-oriented-language-guide-quick-reference/>

Mental Health Coordinating Council – 'Trauma-Informed Care and Practice - Organisational Toolkit': www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TICPOT-Stage-1.pdf

Migration Council Australia provides online e-learning courses, including Aged Care and LGBTQIA+ specific courses, on delivery of trauma-informed and culturally responsive practice: <https://www.myauslearning.org.au/>

National Disability Service provides resources specifically for trauma-informed support for people with disability: <https://www.nds.org.au>

STARTTS (NSW) provides trauma-informed and culturally safe training, information and support for refugee and culturally and linguistically diverse communities in NSW – www.startts.org.au

Phoenix Australia provides trauma awareness training and resources: <https://www.phoenixaustralia.org/your-recovery/effects-of-trauma-life-relationships/>; and trauma awareness training and resources specific to older people: <https://phoenixaustralia.org/aged-care/resources/>

We Ai-Li is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation and provides Culturally Informed Trauma Integrated Healing Approach (CITIHA) training for individuals, families, communities and organisations: www.wealii.com.au/

WellMob provides training resources to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community workers look after their wellbeing as well as training resources to support non-Indigenous workers who want to learn more about culturally secure practices: <https://wellmob.org.au/e-health-topics/training-resources/>

World Health Organization, 'Refugee and migrant health: Global Competency Standards for health workers' (2021): <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240030626>

End Notes

1. Healing Foundation, 'Glossary of Healing Terms' <https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2020/07/HF_Glossary_of_Healing_Terms_A3_Poster_Jul2020_V1.pdf>.
2. Healing Foundation, 'Working with Stolen Generations' <<https://healingfoundation.org.au/working-stolen-generations/>>.
3. These guidelines are based on the Mental Health Coordinating Councils (MHCC) eight core values of trauma-informed care and practice: MHCC, 'Trauma-Informed Care and Practice Organisational Toolkit (TICPOT): An Organisational Change Process Resource, Stage 1 - Planning and Audit' (Report, 2018) <<http://www.mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/TICPOT-Stage-1.pdf>>; MHCC, 'Recover Oriented Language Guide' (2022) <<https://mhcc.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/Recovery-Oriented-Language-Guide-Mental-Health-Coordinating-Council-2022.pdf>>.
4. Nicole Tujague and Kelleigh Ryan, 'Ticking the box of 'cultural safety' is not enough: why trauma-informed practice is critical to Indigenous healing' (2021) 21(3) Rural and Remote Health, 6411 <<https://doi.org/10.22605/RRH6411>>; Judy Atkinson, 'Closing the gap: trauma-informed services and trauma-specific care for Indigenous Australian children' (Resource Sheet no.21, Australian Government Institute of Health and Welfare, July 2013) <<https://earlytraumagrief.anu.edu.au/files/ctg-rs21.pdf>>; Carmen Cubillo, 'Trauma-informed care: culturally responsive practice working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' (2021) 43(3) InPsych <<https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2021/august-special-issue-3/trauma-informed-care>>.
5. Traumatic Stress Institute, 'Trauma and Developmental Disabilities' (Report) <https://traumaticstressinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/10/Trauma_and_Developmental_DisabilitiesF.pdf>.
6. Cathy Kezelman and Julie Dombrowski, 'Disability Guidelines for Trauma-Informed Practice: Supporting People with Disability who have experienced Complex Trauma' (Blue Knot Foundation, 2021) <<https://blueknot.org.au/resources/blue-knot-publications/guidelines/>>; Mental Health and Developmental Disabilities National Training Center, Plain Language Summary - Trauma-Informed Care for People with Developmental Disabilities (6 April 2020) <<https://www.mhddcenter.org/trauma-informed-care-for-people-with-developmental-disabilities-plain-language-summary>>.
7. Royal Commission into Violence, Abuse, Neglect and Exploitation of People with Disability, 'Culturally and linguistically diverse engagement principles' (Report, June 2020) <<https://disability.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-08/Culturally%20and%20linguistically%20diverse%20engagement%20principles.pdf>>.
8. Healing Foundation, 'Working with Stolen Generations: Understanding trauma: Providing effective GP services to Stolen Generations survivors' (2019) <<https://healingfoundation.org.au/app/uploads/2019/12/Working-with-Stolen-Generations-GP-fact-sheet.pdf>>.