

### Background

To mark NAIDOC week, in November 2020, Australia Post updated their 'addressing guidelines' to include Traditional Place names on letters and parcels. Their intention was to celebrate and recognise the history and connection of First People to country. This prompted discussion in cohealth about whether we should also include Traditional Place names on correspondence, the website and signage.

cohealth envisages a time where the rights, sovereignty, cultures and lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised and respected by all Australians. Our vision for reconciliation is where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have social, health and wellbeing equity, achieved through an understanding of our shared history, deep listening, ongoing learning, and reflection.

As a large community health service, we understand our responsibility to improve the health and wellbeing inequity that exists between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people. Over 200 years of dispossession and colonisation has had significant and well documented detrimental impact on the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

cohealth consulted with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff, community and elders about whether cohealth should also include Traditional Place Names on letter templates, envelopes, website and location signs. We sought to first listen to the voices that mattered most, and better understand the potential impacts of implementing this change on our First Nations clients, staff and community.

### Our discussions:

Discussions centred around how cohealth recognises and acknowledges country and ensures clients and community, irrespective of mob, feel safe. And how we, as a health service, continue to work towards closing the gap. As a mainstream health service our priority is to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients, staff and community always feel safe and welcomed at all cohealth sites.

The feedback from discussions was clear. While including traditional place names may increase awareness, the move was not the right one for cohealth.

- The risks and challenges with implementing this change centred on how to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients felt safe accessing services. The Aboriginal Land Council has now registered an Aboriginal party to represent traditional owners interests in all areas cohealth covers. Whilst we acknowledge the process of registration and traditional owners, through hearing the voices of our staff, community and elders we felt it was important to acknowledge First Nations people as a whole rather than specifying a particular group. Including Traditional Place names could still alienate some First Nations clients. However, acknowledging the traditional lands and community as a whole would be a welcome and more culturally safe approach.
- The inclusion of place names as per the Aboriginal Land Council could be a potential barrier to First Nations clients accessing, or feeling safe within, cohealth services.

As a health service, cohealth must first and foremost work towards closing the gap by ensuring all First Nations people are able to freely engage with our services without fear of discrimination.

Recognising First Nations people on places where you typically find addresses and locations, like envelopes, letters and websites was seen as important, however using non-political messaging or artwork was seen as more appropriate and inclusive for a health service.

For more information about the action cohealth is taking on reconciliation and ensuring our services and workplaces are inclusive of First Nations peoples go to [www.cohealth.org.au/walking-together](http://www.cohealth.org.au/walking-together)