



# Working with Aboriginal clients and Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation

- Help Aboriginal clients feel welcome to your service by displaying posters and Aboriginal symbols of welcome and acceptance.
- When an Aboriginal client, or an Aboriginal worker on their behalf, contacts you it is usually to address an immediate need. Can you do your best to make a time that day?
- What the client is coming to see you for may only be a small part of the problem, not the underlying issue. It takes time to build rapport with someone so be aware that you may not get the full story at the initial meeting.
- Be prepared for kids to be running around the office during an appointment.
- Generalist services tend to refer Aboriginal clients to Aboriginal workers or organisations. Talk to the client and ask if they would like support from an Aboriginal worker.
- If your client does not want support from an Aboriginal organisation but you would like some assistance to support you with cultural issues that arise, it is still OK to seek general advice from Aboriginal organisations whilst being very careful to maintain the client's confidentiality.
- Some Aboriginal organisations can offer transport and to come along to the appointment to support the client. Talk to the organisation if transport and support is required.
- Services need to be delivered at a place that is comfortable for the client.
- If you deliver a service at the Aboriginal organisation, do it regularly. This builds trust and visibility in the community. People don't tend to come along if it is irregular.
- Take the time to develop working relationships with Aboriginal workers and organisations. They can introduce clients to your service.
- Generalist services also need to keep up to date with what Aboriginal services and workers offer.
- By developing a close working relationship with one worker, you can ask them to direct you to other services and workers when needed.
- Relationship building can help you understand culture and connections in the community.
- Attend important Aboriginal events and get involved e.g. NAIDOC week.
- You can't always identify an Aboriginal client by looks. It's important to always follow the procedures and to ask.
- Consider a policy to always give an 'acknowledgement of traditional owners and Elders past and present' statement at the commencement of any event your service runs.
- At large generalist agencies, consider having an 'Aboriginal Liaison Worker' or a contact person for your agency. Ideally this should be an Aboriginal person, but a dedicated non-Aboriginal worker would also be fine.

Why might Aboriginal clients not come, or not come back to your service? Consider the next four points:

- Lack of transport affects many. Have you asked about transport? Have you asked if they would like an Aboriginal worker to attend with them?
- 'Shaming' – feeling great shame about the issue they are coming about and having to use the service. It takes a great deal of courage to walk through the front door.
- One bad experience with a generalist service means the Aboriginal client may be reluctant to use any generalist services.
- Word about a bad experience with a service spreads like wild fire. It can influence others opinions and they may also be reluctant to use the service.

Mungabareena Aboriginal Corporation was established as a focal point for Australian Indigenous people living in the Wodonga area. The organisation provides a range of services and supports to meet community needs and to re-establish and strengthen our cultural values and connection to the area.

21 Hovell St, Wodonga 3690  
Phone: 02 6024 7599  
Email: [reception@mungabareena.com](mailto:reception@mungabareena.com)

