



CATSINaM

## Welcome and Acknowledgement of Country Cultural Guidance Protocol

### Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide broad advice for nursing and midwifery organisations and the industry in which they work:

- How, when and why to arrange for a local Aboriginal Elder to give a Welcome to Country, and
- How, when and why to give an Acknowledgement of Country.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are recognised as the traditional owners of the land and as having ongoing spiritual relationships with the land and seas.

CATSINaM adopts these protocols as a measure of respect for this cultural and historic relationship. By practicing Welcome to Country and Acknowledgement of Country, we are also strengthening relationships with the community and increasing understanding of the Aboriginal cultural practice.

### Scope

This document is to provide guidance only on how to arrange a Welcome to Country or give an Acknowledgement of Country correctly at CATSINaM's organised gatherings. The following information is not explicit and local knowledge should always be sought, and CATSINaM board of directors (see CATSINaM website for details) can be contacted for connection / referral to local bodies that provide specific advice and local elders

## Definitions

### Welcome to Country

Where a recognized local Aboriginal Elder opens an event by welcoming guests on to his or her traditional Country.

### Acknowledgement of Country

Where a non-Aboriginal person, or an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person who is not a traditional owner or custodian of the land, acknowledges the traditional Country upon which the event is taking place.

### Aboriginal Elder

A recognised Elder is an older member of an Aboriginal community who has gained respect and recognition as a holder of knowledge and wisdom. They may be important influencers within their community. Age alone does not qualify an individual as an Aboriginal Elder.

## Process Description

### Welcome to Country or Acknowledgement of Country?

An Aboriginal Elder should be invited to conduct a *Welcome to Country* at major functions such as opening ceremonies, conferences and other events where official guests and dignitaries are in attendance.

An *Acknowledgement of Country* is appropriate for minor functions such as in-house training, seminars, public lectures and meetings.

If there is uncertainty as to which is appropriate, please contact the CATSINaM office.

### The order of the Welcome/Acknowledgement in the program

The *Welcome to Country* or *Acknowledgement of Country* should take place at the opening of an event. The Chair, Speaker or Master of Ceremonies should either give an *Acknowledgement* or introduce the Elder to perform the *Welcome to Country* as the first item on the program.

It is not necessary for each successive speaker at an event to give an *Acknowledgement of Country*, but it is out of respect that many of the speakers do so.

## Welcome to Country

ONLY locally recognised Aboriginal Elders, a locally recognised Aboriginal community spokesperson or a locally recognised cultural service provider undertakes the Welcome to Country ceremony

Welcome to Country is also known as the Traditional Welcome. It allows the Traditional Owners of the region to give their blessing for the event to take place on their land.

Including a *Welcome to Country* as part of official CATSINaM events allows us to:

- Recognise and pay respect to Aboriginal peoples, cultures and heritage
- Promote respect and understanding of Aboriginal cultural practices to the broader community
- Build relationships and partnerships through recognition of Aboriginal people's unique position in the community.

There is no set form for a Welcome to Country ceremony. It is important to discuss the nature of the event with the Aboriginal Elder so that they can think about what would be appropriate to include in the Welcome ceremony. Generally, the Aboriginal Elder will share personal or local stories and historical and cultural information and then will go on to welcome the dignitaries and guests to their Country.

The Welcome to Country ceremony can also be arranged to include dance or music performance. In most communities there are performance artists who can be available for these occasions.

## Arranging the Welcome to Country

Sufficient time will need to be allowed for making initial contact and for discussions and arrangements to take place. Initial contact should commence around one month prior to the ceremony.

It is important for the Aboriginal Elder giving the Welcome, to feel comfortable with the arrangements. Allow enough time and forward information to the Aboriginal elder about your organisation, the event, and the people attending on the day.

Aboriginal Elders can be contacted through Aboriginal Medical or Health Services, Local Aboriginal Land Councils and Local Councils.

If a Welcome to Country cannot be arranged for any reason, then an Acknowledgement of Country should be given at the minimum.

### Responding to the Welcome to Country

The speaker who follows immediately after the Welcome to Country ceremony should give a response. They should acknowledge and thank the person who gave the Welcome and also acknowledge Country and Aboriginal Elders.

See below for examples of Acknowledgements. The Aboriginal Elder who gave the Welcome can also guide you as to correct protocol.

### Acknowledgement of Country

As with a Welcome to Country, an Acknowledgement of Country should be given as one of the first items on the event's agenda.

Giving an Acknowledgement of Country is a way for non-Aboriginal people and for Aboriginal people who are not traditional owners of the local region to show respect for the relationship traditional owners have with the land or sea. It also demonstrates the organisation's respect for and understanding of Aboriginal protocol.

All people, children and adults can perform an Acknowledgement of Country.

### Acknowledging Aboriginal Elders and other Aboriginal people in attendance

It is important that speakers also acknowledge Elders, both past and present, in attendance, and other Aboriginal people who may be present in the audience.

## An Example of Acknowledgments of Country

The following sample formats may be used as appropriate

I would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name if known) land upon which we are meeting. I would also like to pay respect to Aboriginal Elders both past and present and extend that respect to other Aboriginal people here today.

I would like to acknowledge the traditional owners of the \_\_\_\_\_ (insert name if known) land we are meeting on and remind people that we are on Aboriginal land. I also acknowledge the Aboriginal Elders, and in particular those attending today's event.

## Smoking ceremony

A smoking ceremony is a purification ritual, undertaken to cleanse a space. Only Aboriginal people with specialised cultural knowledge conduct smoking ceremonies. Smoking ceremonies are usually only performed at major events. They may also be used to symbolise a clearing out of the old and bringing in of the new.

## Fees for services

In providing cultural services such as Welcome to Country, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are using their intellectual property. As such providers of these services should be appropriately remunerated. Remuneration usually takes into consideration travel to and from the event and the public profile of the event. Discussion of fees and transport for the Elder/s should be part of negotiations prior to the event.

As a current indication CATSINaM suggests that an Elder performing a Welcome to Country should be paid \$300 to \$500.00 at the minimum, depending on the size and importance of the meeting. For example and a minimum fee of \$500 for a smoking ceremony and between \$300.00 and \$500.00 for other performances.

## Displaying flags

When the Australian National Flag is flown with state and/or other flags, including the Aboriginal Flags, the Australian National flag should be on the far left (based on a straight line of flag poles of equal height) followed by the Aboriginal Flags. The Australian Aboriginal Flag and the Torres Strait Islander flag may be flown in either order, as they are equal in precedence. The same order applies when the flags are hung on a wall.

When the flags are to be displayed on a three-posted floor-standing flagpole, the centre flagpole is slightly higher so has the position of precedence. The Australian flag should therefore be flown on the centre pole.

Permission is not required to fly these flags.

## How to implement a Welcome to Country Ceremony

As part of the organising process for your event or function start with contacting the local traditional owners through the local land council, reconciliation group or local Aboriginal organisations.

It is important to invite the local Aboriginal representatives into any planned proposal at the beginning to discuss and decide the format of the ceremony, who should be invited, who should perform the *Welcome to Country* and *how that person will be recognised for their time and commitment*.