



## **Code of Ethics**

# **Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association**

**November 2009**

## **Preamble**

These ethical guidelines are aspirational. The principles have been developed to guide the development of shared values for the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA) and the conduct of its members. These are grounded in the Vision Statement of AIPA, and drawn from the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being (2004) to provide philosophical background for the aims, strategies and actions of AIPA.

## **Philosophical Framework**

The AIPA is committed to improving the social and emotional well-being and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities by increasing the number of Indigenous psychologists and by leading the change required to deliver equitable, accessible, sustainable, timely and culturally safe psychological care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in urban, regional, rural and remote Australia. Furthermore, AIPA is committed to supporting Indigenous psychologists through undergraduate and post graduate courses; and providing professional development to Indigenous and non-Indigenous psychologists to increase the cultural safety of Indigenous clients and expand the skills of psychologists to work with Indigenous clients. By maintaining a high standard of practice and engaging in Indigenous psychological research, AIPA is committed to being on the forefront of Indigenous psychology in Australia.

AIPA commits to working within the following philosophical framework:

### ***Holistic Perspectives***

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health should be viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health, as well as physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land, family and spirituality are central to well being. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity, family and kinship must also be recognized.*

### ***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Diversity***

*There is no single Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes as well as ways of living. There is great diversity within the group and also between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These differences need to be acknowledged and valued.*

### ***Self-determination***

*Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health, particularly mental health issues.*

### ***Acknowledging a History of Colonisation***

*The following principles must underpin any dialogue about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues: consideration of the human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people; recognition that experience of trauma and loss are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural well being, and that racism stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors with negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing.*

*(Social Health Reference Group for National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Council and National Mental Health Working Group, National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being 2004-2009).*

## **Shared Principles**

***Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists are committed to a recognition of history***, in which Australian Indigenous people have suffered processes of colonisation that have created an array of social, political and psychological disadvantages and contributed to the diversity in the cultures and identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

***Indigenous psychologists are committed to social justice and reconciliation***

and as such will seek shared partnerships with non-Indigenous colleagues so that we can work together in culturally informed ways. Reconciliation and social justice is about power and addressing the disadvantage and lack of power experienced by Indigenous Australians. Achieving social justice is a prerequisite for reconciliation. Indigenous psychologists recognise that Australia is a shared country and has a shared future, and therefore in the process of reconciliation we need to work together in respectful relationships to bring about positive social change that will create a better future for all Australians.

***Indigenous psychologists are committed to improving holistic wellbeing approaches in psychology,***

and believe that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health should be viewed in a holistic context that encompasses social and emotional wellbeing, as well as physical, cultural and spiritual health, and that land, family and spirituality should be recognized as central to well being. It is also necessary to acknowledge the history of colonisation and its consequences: that all social environments, including health, housing, education, employment, cultural safety and affirmation (cultural and spiritual health), and experiences of racism, create the living context of any Indigenous individual and must be considered at all times.

***Indigenous psychologists respect the integrity and diversity of Indigenous cultures and peoples.***

That is, we embrace the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and cultures found in urban, rural, regional and remote Australia. We do not adopt negative judgements based on colonial and western standards that have been applied to Indigenous people in recent history. Indigenous psychologists treat Indigenous and non-Indigenous peers, clients and students with respect and equality.

***Indigenous psychologists support the purposes and principles of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and demonstrate a conscious commitment to cultural maintenance for Indigenous people.***

Maintaining our cultures influences the quality of life of all Indigenous people, and this commitment affirms our obligation to protect the fundamental human rights and diversity of all cultures, particularly those of Indigenous peoples with inherent rights as first peoples. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html>

***Indigenous psychologists contribute to the development of theoretical perspectives that are grounded in Indigenous realities and which challenge colonial versions.*** We support the assertion that ‘all doctrines, policies and practices based on or advocating superiority of peoples or individuals on the basis of national origin or racial, religious, ethnic or cultural differences are racist, scientifically false, legally invalid, morally condemnable and socially unjust’ (United Nations, Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, 2007). Indigenous psychologists actively work to deconstruct colonial representations of Indigenous people and continually challenge racist ideologies by ensuring their practice and academic work adopts a critical approach to non-Indigenous theories and practices.

***Indigenous psychologists are sensitive to cultural constraints placed on sharing sacred and secret knowledge of Indigenous cultures and adopt appropriate behaviours in relation to such matters at all times.*** That is, we strive to be grounded, honest and wise in discussing cultural issues; to avoid exceeding any limitations placed on us by our elders; to not violate the privacy and integrity of other Indigenous individuals or groups in public forums; to not share information about specific cultural practices without seeking the appropriate permissions to do so; and to not disclose material that we would not be entitled to discuss, for instance gender-specific issues.

***Indigenous psychologists are committed to working towards the empowerment of Indigenous people and groups*** and as such, support community controlled, locally led, strengths-based research. As well as adhering to the NHMRC and APS Guidelines for research, we will actively include appropriate Indigenous community members at relevant levels in the initiatives we undertake. Further we will respect and adhere to community and other consultation protocols and give primacy to Indigenous concepts of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health. At the same time we recognise and accept that we will need to take a leadership role in some instances.

***Indigenous psychologists respect the intellectual property rights of members and communities.*** Indigenous cultural and intellectual property rights belong collectively to Indigenous people as part of their ongoing survival and we discourage the commercialization or commodification of Indigenous intellectual property at the expense of Indigenous communities, cultures and individuals. We also recognize that some AIPA members may own or be held accountable for cultural information and the contexts in which it is used. No information provided by an AIPA member

will be used without first seeking their permission. AIPA will adhere to academic conventions to acknowledge the input of members into discussion papers, submissions, position papers and other scholarly work. AIPA also recognizes the moral rights of members, including the right to be named as author of a work (the right of attribution) that they have contributed to or developed on behalf of AIPA, and the right to object to derogatory treatment of any such work, that may be seen as prejudicial to the author's honour or reputation (the right of integrity).

## **AIPA members**

As members of AIPA we will ensure the following:

**Voice Within the Group.** I offer my opinion in a constructive manner; in turn I respect the opinions of other members, appreciate our differences, relish debate and will accept and represent the final outcomes of our discussions when representing the views of AIPA.

**Support.** I request support from the group when necessary and provide support to other members, whether this is in the form of informal mentoring, sharing resources, or ensuring that members with relevant expertise are included into appropriate conferences, boards, projects and other activities.

**Honesty.** I expect to be treated fairly and with integrity and extend this to other members. I expect that AIPA will provide a safe environment which facilitates open and honest discussion among members and allows the freedom to voice opinions and concerns.

**Sharing.** I am generous with my knowledge and contribute formal and informal professional support and mentoring to members. I am sensitive to the needs of others and provide constructive feedback if this is requested. I share opportunities and acknowledge the successes and achievements of members and appreciate that as members of AIPA, when one rises, we all rise.

**Representing AIPA.** When representing AIPA or the views of AIPA, I will represent those contained in position papers, or where these do not exist, where possible I will canvas the views of members and endeavour to present a consensus view. Where my opinion differs from that of AIPA, I will present AIPA's views or articulate how these are separate to my own. I will be supported to represent AIPA with

background information, support, feedback and guidance. When I represent AIPA in public forums I will have followed procedures to represent the body with authority.

## References

Social Health Reference Group (SHRG) (2004). *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being 2004-2009*. Australian Department of Health and Ageing, Canberra.

General Assembly (2007) United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. <http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/en/drip.html> Accessed August 2009.