



**youth affairs council**  
OF SOUTH AUSTRALIA

## The benefits of connection with Indigenous culture

### Open Your World key priority focus area: Creating connection through arts and culture

Indigenous cultures in Australia are the oldest continuing cultures on earth and as of 2016 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander citizens make up an [estimated 3.3% of the total population](#). When discussing Indigenous culture there are [five key elements](#) to consider; land, family, law, ceremony and language, all of which are interconnected to form a view point and way of existing that is distinct to the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island cultures here. Looking at these elements as parts of culture also helps to understand the damage of colonisation and the continuing effects on Indigenous culture and people in this country.

There are lots of avenues to look at the benefits of connection with Indigenous culture; mental, physical and social wellbeing can be examined in people and their communities, but we can also see how connection can drive effective and informed practice in policy and programs in a wider sense. For example, recognition and understanding of Indigenous culture, beliefs, practices and intergenerational trauma leads to [culturally responsive approaches to suicide prevention](#) which include direct measures to connect at risk groups to culture, Country and Elders.

There is also evidence that strategies that foster connection to the domains of; Indigenous connection to Country, cultural beliefs and knowledge, language, family, kinship and community, cultural expression and continuity, and self-determination and leadership is [linked to better wellbeing outcomes](#). Among these strategies are increased management of Country by traditional owners, involving students in NAIDOC Week and other cultural experiences, and including Indigenous practices in healing and biomedicine, all linking culture to health.

Students undertaking their research project have the opportunity to explore this topic further within their own communities and schools to examine a new cohort. Particularly students could add to established research by looking at how Indigenous cultural awareness benefits high school students as a whole.

Areas suitable for further research could include:

- Looking at wellbeing outcomes where Country is managed and cared for by the traditional landowners.
- Environmental benefits of connection to Indigenous culture.
- Does studying Indigenous culture have an impact on mental health?
- In what ways can Indigenous culture informed practices help high school students?

## References:

Australian Bureau of Statistics (2018). [Estimates of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians](https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release). <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/estimates-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/latest-release>

Australians Together (n.d.). [Our Cultures](https://australianstogether.org.au/education/curriculum-resources/our-cultures/). <https://australianstogether.org.au/education/curriculum-resources/our-cultures/>

Dudgeon, P., Bray, A., Smallwood, G., Walker, R. & Dalton, T. (2020). [Wellbeing and Healing Through Connection and Culture](https://www.lifeline.org.au/media/xw1hognd/full-report-final-wellbeing-and-healing-through-connection-and-culture-2020.pdf), Lifeline. <https://www.lifeline.org.au/media/xw1hognd/full-report-final-wellbeing-and-healing-through-connection-and-culture-2020.pdf>

Salmon, M., Doery, K., Dance, P., Chapman, J., Gilbert, R., Williams, R. & Lovett, R. (2019). [Links Between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Culture and Wellbeing: What the evidence says](https://mkstudy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MAK001_Links-between-culture_Brochure_A4-Online_FINAL_V6.pdf). The Australian National University and the Lowitja Institute. [https://mkstudy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MAK001\\_Links-between-culture\\_Brochure\\_A4-Online\\_FINAL\\_V6.pdf](https://mkstudy.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/MAK001_Links-between-culture_Brochure_A4-Online_FINAL_V6.pdf)

## Other links:

Bainbridge R, McCalman J, Jongen C, Campbell S, Kinchin I et al. (2018). [Improving social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: an Evidence Check rapid review](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/policy-submissions/aboriginal-programs-for-sewb_final-4.pdf?sfvrsn=157bbfea_4) brokered by the Sax Institute ([www.saxinstitute.org.au](http://www.saxinstitute.org.au)) for Beyond Blue. [https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/policy-submissions/aboriginal-programs-for-sewb\\_final-4.pdf?sfvrsn=157bbfea\\_4](https://www.beyondblue.org.au/docs/default-source/policy-submissions/aboriginal-programs-for-sewb_final-4.pdf?sfvrsn=157bbfea_4)

Brown, G., Hamilton, S. (n.d.). [Channelling Indigenous strengths to better health and wellbeing](https://www.pwc.com.au/health/health-matters/improving-indigenous-health-and-wellbeing.html). PWC Australia. <https://www.pwc.com.au/health/health-matters/improving-indigenous-health-and-wellbeing.html>

Salmon, M., Doery, K., Dance, P., Chapman, J., Gilbert, R., Williams, R. & Lovett, R. (2019). [Defining the Indefinable: Descriptors of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures and their links to health and wellbeing](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148406/8/Defining_the_Indefinable_WEB2_FINAL.pdf), Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Team, Research School of Population Health, The Australian National University, Canberra. [https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148406/8/Defining\\_the\\_Indefinable\\_WEB2\\_FINAL.pdf](https://openresearch-repository.anu.edu.au/bitstream/1885/148406/8/Defining_the_Indefinable_WEB2_FINAL.pdf)



Government  
of South Australia

Wellbeing SA



<https://creativecommons.org/licenses>  
© Wellbeing SA, Government of South Australia.  
All rights reserved.