

What the new psychology rules mean for all of us



Belle Selkirk

As an Aboriginal clinical psychologist, I am often approached by community members saying they are having trouble finding a psychologist who is culturally sensitive and experienced in working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It is no secret there is a shortage of Indigenous psychologists in the workforce supporting our communities. In fact, less than 1% of psychologists in Australia identify as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, which is substantially below population estimates of 3.3%: this is something the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project (AIPEP) and the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association has been actively changing.

However, we do have some good news. Starting from the 1st of December 2025, all psychologists in Australia will be required to follow new Psychology Board of Australia regulations ensuring cultural safety and health equity are core elements of a psychologists' everyday work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Cultural safety is about creating environments where people feel respected, valued, and understood, free from racism. It is a legal requirement under national law for all health practitioners who are regulated by the Australian Practitioner Health Regulation Agency (Ahpra), including psychologists, to practise cultural safety.

The changes outlined for psychologists are designed to ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are provided with services which respects our culture, history, and ways of knowing.

What does this all mean for me and my family?

Psychologists must take a health equity and rights-based approach

Psychologists must ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait



AIPEP team members and registered psychologists (left to right) Jody Kamminga, Professor Pat Dudgeon AM (Bardi), Belle Selkirk (Noongar), and Professor Jeneva Ohan welcome Psychology Board of Australia's new Professional Competencies for Psychologists and Code of Conduct.

Islander people's rights, lived experiences, and needs are respected and appropriately addressed. There must also be genuine partnership between the psychologists and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, families, and communities. This means reducing any barriers in accessing quality psychological services. Psychologists must listen to our voice and involve us in all stages of care planning and decision making.

Psychologists must understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, history and identities.

Psychologists are required to learn about the impact of colonisation, racism, the Stolen Generations, loss of land and culture, as well as to understand the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This means psychologists should know we come from different nations, speak different languages, and have different traditions and they must respect these facts throughout their work.

Psychologists must learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ways of Knowing, Being and Doing.

The new rules require psychologists to learn from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and knowledges, and to use trauma-aware and culturally-informed approaches in their work. This

means psychologists must understand how past and present experiences affect our social and emotional wellbeing, honouring our ways of understanding health and wellbeing, and ensure culture is at the forefront of psychological work.

Why do these changes matter?

These new rules are a big step forward. Psychologists can no longer treat everyone the same. Instead, they must meaningfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in fair, respectful, and culturally safe ways. It is about making sure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples receive the kind of care which will help us heal, grow, and thrive.

If you or someone you know is seeing a psychologist, you have the right to culturally safe services. If you feel it is not safe and respectful, you can speak up. You can try something like, "Feeling culturally safe and respecting my culture is important to me. Can you tell me how you include cultural safety in our work together?" If you feel you need family support, try "I'd like my family here to support me. Can we work together in a way that respects my culture's way of healing?" Yarn openly and honestly with your psychologist about how you are

feeling and what is important to you for your wellbeing journey. A culturally respectful and responsive psychologist will listen, learn, and adjust their approach to ensure you feel safe and respected.

What can I do if my requests are not listened to?

If you feel your identity, culture, or experiences were disrespected, ignored, or harmed, you have the right to take it further, such as speaking to an organisation manager or making a complaint. Depending on the situation and where you live will influence where and how you can raise your concerns. Ahpra gives guidance on where to make a complaint and under what circumstances on their website Australian Health Practitioner Regulation Agency - How to raise a concern. It is important to understand bodies like Ahpra regulate individual practitioners, not organisations.

AIPEP welcomes the new changes

Ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural safety and health equity are core elements of psychologists' everyday work is a necessary part of a bigger picture in creating a health care system free from racism. AIPEP welcomes the new changes

being implemented by the Psychology Board of Australia. AIPEP has released learning resources and conducted webinars to help psychologists prepare. Together we can work in ways that will lead to better wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Belle Selkirk is a Noongar woman living on Wadandi boodja. Belle is a clinical psychologist and a Research Fellow with the Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project. She has led innovative projects in Indigenous psychology including the Listening More suite of resources, and the Psychology: From Inquiry to Understanding university textbook. She has extensive experience in providing culturally-informed therapy, with a particular focus on Indigenous psychology, social and emotional wellbeing, and cultural safety in psychological practice. Belle was awarded the IAHA Excellence in Cultural Responsiveness award in 2024.

● If you or someone you know is in need of help or support, reach out to 13YARN on 13 92 76 (24/7 crisis support) and speak with an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander crisis supporter.