

Appropriate and Safe Terminology and Language Guide

AIDA 2026 Conference

Abstract Submissions and Presentations

Introduction

The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association requires all abstracts and presentations to follow the use of appropriate and safe terminology and language as outlined in this guide. Authors and presenters must ensure that their abstract/s and presentation/s meet these requirements prior to submission and to going on stage.

Language plays a powerful role in experiences and interactions. Whether intentional or unintentional, the use of disrespectful, exclusionary, or inappropriate language not only negatively impacts individuals' wellbeing and sense of belonging but contributes and perpetuates systemic racism. The words we choose are important, language matters.

While we may not always get it right, it is our responsibility to continue to learn – **AIDA have created this guide to ensure the safety of our reviewers, and to ensure our annual conference is a safe place for discussions to flourish that value diversity, are respectful, and are culturally safe.**

It is important that abstracts and presentations are developed in genuine collaboration with First Nations peoples. This means actively involving First Nations voices in the creation and delivery of content rather than simply referencing perspectives.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples represent diverse cultures, perspectives, and language preferences. There is no single approach to terminology as preferences differ between Communities.

If you are uncertain about the appropriate language to use, we encourage you to ask.

This guide highlights common terminology considerations and is not to be treated as exhaustive.

Terms

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' is the preferred term to use. 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' are both acceptable terms, depending on the context used.

The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' is a collective name for the original people of Australia and their descendants.

The term 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' emphasises the diversity of languages, communities, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

First Nations

Terms such as 'First Nations' or 'First Peoples' are acceptable and appropriate to use as broad terms, as they encompass the diversities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity and culture.

Indigenous

It is best to avoid the term 'Indigenous' when referring to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as it can diminish the many identities of cultural groups. However, the use of 'Indigenous', capitalised, is appropriate when referring to non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australian people (non-Indigenous) or when referring to an existing name, job title, service or organisation.

Global Context

When referring to First Nations Peoples globally, please be as specific as possible by using the names of Nations or Communities when known. When referring broadly to First Nations Peoples globally, please use Indigenous Peoples, First Nations Peoples and First Peoples as respectful terms.

Capitalisation

'Indigenous' and 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' must always be capitalised.

The use of lower case 'indigenous' is only appropriate when referring to indigenous plants or animals.

The following terms must also be capitalised as a show of respect:

- Elders
- Acknowledgement of Country and Welcome to Country
- Traditional Owners / Traditional Custodians
- Country (and terms such as 'Land,' when used in place of 'Country')

Inclusivity

It is inappropriate to only use the word 'Aboriginal' when also referring to Torres Strait Islander peoples. Unless you are referring specifically to Aboriginal peoples, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander' should be used to ensure inclusivity of Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Acronyms

The acronym 'ATSI' or 'A&TSI' should not be used under any circumstance. Using acronyms is offensive and does not respect diversity or identities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities and cultures. If you are trying to save characters in your abstract word count, please use 'First Nations' or 'First Peoples' and always avoid acronyms.

Other Unacceptable Terms

- × Straight (when misspelling Torres Strait Islander)
- × Aborigine(s)
- × Aboriginals
- × Native
- × Shortening First Nations to 1st Nations
- × Blood quantum definitions ('full blood', 'half caste', 'quarter caste')

Language

Avoid Deficit Language

Historically, deficit language has been used to refer to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, which fails to reflect the strength, resilience, and rich cultures of communities.

Examples of deficit language:

- Using 'they' or 'them,' which creates a sense of separation.
- Terms like 'help' or 'give,' which may imply dependence rather than partnership.
- Words such as 'disadvantaged' or 'marginalised,' which frame communities through a deficit lens.

Use Strength-Based Language

To foster respect and empowerment, it is essential to adopt the use of strength-based language, as this style highlights and acknowledges the resilience and agency of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Examples of strength-based language:

- Instead of saying "disadvantaged communities," it is more appropriate to say "communities with strong cultural knowledge facing systemic challenges".
- Rather than "helping" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it is better to say "working in partnership with" Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.