

1 Introduction

Looking after women's health 6

Looking after women's health

In traditional Aboriginal Law, women's health and birthing are sacred and strictly women's business. Traditionally, older Aboriginal women looked after women's business and were responsible for teaching younger women. If the woman agrees, it can be helpful to involve in clinic visits, a female ATSIHP, ACW, or Strong Women, Strong Babies, Strong Culture (SWSBSC) worker, a senior community woman, grandmother or family member. They should be of the right skin group, as required by Aboriginal Law.

Health staff can learn about skin groups and other cultural practices by talking to Aboriginal staff in their community or health service, visiting one of the following organisations, or as advised by their community.

- Local organisations — Land Council, language centre, women's centre, health advisory group, interpreter service
- Regional services — Institute for Aboriginal Development (Alice Springs), NPY Women's Council, Tangentyere Council, Banatjarl Strongbala Wumin Grup (Katherine), Dhimurria Aboriginal Corporation (Nhulunbuy)

Traditional Aboriginal cultural practices often differ from the values and attitudes of the clinician they are working with. Be careful not to impose your own views. Aboriginal women's cultural attitudes to pregnancy, birth, contraception, and other aspects of women's health vary and continue to evolve. By being aware of these differences, you show respect for Aboriginal women's choices and knowledge, allow for full and open consultation, and may get better results in clinical care.

Try to offer Aboriginal women a consultation with a female clinician for women's business. Remote health clinics should have a separate room only used for women's business. Try to make it quiet, private, and self-contained. Women should be able to enter the room without being seen from the main waiting area. The room needs at least an examination couch, light, sink with hot and cold water, and private access to a toilet and shower. It is a good idea to have a screen around the couch for more privacy.

Have equipment in this room for health checks, health education, birth, and newborn resuscitation. Keep a small supply of medicines used to treat women's problems, so you can finish a consultation without leaving the room.

Other sections of the manual consider cultural aspects of women's health issues in greater depth. Reading these will provide a more comprehensive overview — Pregnancy ([p82](#)), Labour and birth ([p154](#)), Postnatal care ([p194](#)), Gynaecology ([p268](#)), Infertility ([p309](#)).