



Australian Government

Department of Health, Disability and Ageing



Webinar series: Home matters – Rethinking aged care design Questions & Answers

Webinar 7: Designing culturally safe aged care

28 May 2026

Thank you to everyone who attended and submitted their questions. This document provides answers to questions that were not addressed by the panel during the live session. If you have any further questions please contact: design.dementiasupport@health.gov.au

Design

I work in supporting aged care homes to increase use of telehealth/virtual care. Do you have any thoughts or examples of using virtual care in a culturally safe way? Thank you

Under the *Aged Care Act 2024* and the new rights-based aged care legislative framework, registered aged care providers are required to deliver care and services in a way that is culturally safe, trauma aware and healing informed. When delivering care, providers are expected to recognise and respond to an older person's background and past experiences to prevent re-traumatisation and respect their background, culture, diversity, beliefs and life experiences as part of person-centred care ([Outcome 3.2](#)).

Older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may be reluctant to engage in virtual care sessions. This is for a range of reasons including lack of trust in unfamiliar services, preference for face-to-face yarning, limited access to or experience with technology, or concerns about whether care will be culturally safe and respectful.

If an older Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person agrees to have care delivered virtually, it must be grounded in pre-existing trusted relationships and be guided by what the individual considers to be culturally safe, as this varies between individuals. Clinicians delivering virtual care should follow culturally appropriate communication styles (such as yarning). They must also have an understanding of the person's community and cultural context. Sessions should involve local support people, such as Aboriginal Health Workers, family members or nominated supporters. Support should also be provided for use of technologies.

You may also be interested to know the department is exploring a Virtual Nursing Project in residential aged care homes. The Virtual Nursing in Aged Care Project is testing a framework to deliver virtual nursing services in residential aged care. The project, which runs to 30 June 2027, is seeking to build evidence of how virtual nursing can support the delivery of person-centred, quality clinical care in aged care services. The department has contracted Ampliar Health to deliver a virtual nursing service to 30 residential aged care homes across the country. As part of their service, Ampliar has a Cultural Liaison Officer who provides each participating home with advice on how to provide culturally safe and trauma-informed care. Providers participating include those who support First Nations or culturally and linguistically diverse older people. Further information can be found at [Virtual nursing in aged care](#).

In addition, telehealth services may be used to support access to care and specialist services on Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in rural and remote locations. [Aged Care Research and Industry Innovation Australia](#) has undertaken a [First Nations case study on Telehealth](#) to highlight culturally safe care in action.

Is the guidance intended for new builds only or also refurbishments?

The [Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) is a complementary resource to the [National Aged Care Design Principles and Guidelines](#). It supports the design of aged care homes that are culturally safe, respectful and healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The guidance applies to **new builds, refurbishments or minor works**. It helps create environments that are deeply connected to Country and Island Home, culture and community, while also being trauma-aware and healing-informed places for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to live.

Can you give examples of design features or care practices that can be triggering? What should we consider doing instead?

The [Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) recognises that there is a need for trauma-aware and healing informed design in residential aged care. For Stolen Generations survivors in particular, entering aged care can be re-traumatising due to past experiences of forced removal, institutionalisation and loss of control.

Certain design features and care practices can unintentionally trigger traumatic memories. This may include institutional-looking spaces, locked or restricted areas, shared or dormitory-style rooms, loud noises or alarms, staff uniforms, loss of privacy, unfamiliar personal care practices or situations where residents feel a loss of control.

To reduce these triggers, providers and designers should focus on:

- **de-institutionalising environments by integrating culture**, local materials and home-like design elements and avoiding materials, sounds or lighting that may trigger traumatic memories (Guideline 1.4 Local Materials and 2.2 Cultural Integration)
- **supporting cultural protocols**, including self-determination in daily routines and care (Guideline 2.1 Cultural Protocols)
- **providing sensory spaces** that reduce distress and support healing (Guideline 2.8 Sensory Rooms)
- **designing for connection to community**, creating spaces that feel safe and welcoming to residents and visitors (Guideline 3.1 Community Integration)
- **reducing noise and overcrowding in communal spaces**, particularly near sleeping and quiet areas (Guideline 3.2 Community Spaces)
- **establishing trauma-aware** security measures that avoid feelings of confinement or loss of control (Guideline 3.3 Security).

How do we apply this guidance if there are only a small number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents in our home?

The [Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) guidance is intended to be applied across all aged care homes, regardless of the number of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander residents.

Culturally safe design should be embedded in how homes are designed, refurbished and operated, rather than applied in specific settings. The guidance is flexible and non-prescriptive, allowing it to be adapted to different contexts, including homes with a small number of residents.

Cultural safety is determined by the person receiving care. This means even a single resident's experience matters and homes should support their identity, wellbeing and connection to culture, community and Country or Island Home.

The guidance also recognises that many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people access

mainstream aged care services, reinforcing the importance of embedding culturally safe design across all environments, not only in Aboriginal Community Controlled services or those with a higher proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents.

What are some low-cost design changes that can make an impact?

The Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People guidance highlights that meaningful improvements do not always require major capital works. Many changes can be made through small, low-cost adjustments to existing environments.

Low-cost design changes may include:

- **integrating local cultural elements**, such as flora and fauna, artwork, colours or materials, to reflect the community and create familiarity (Guideline 1.3 Local Seasons and 1.4 Local Materials)
- **enhancing connection to the outdoors**, including access to natural light, fresh air and views of nature (Guidelines 1.1 Inside/Outside and 1.2 Country and Island Home-Centric Landscape)
- **making spaces feel more home-like**, reducing institutional features and supporting dignity, culture and belonging (Guidelines 2.6 Fire Pits, 2.7 Bedroom Configuration and 3.3 Security)
- **providing flexible spaces** for family, community and cultural activities to maintain connections (Guideline 3.2 Community Spaces and 3.1 Community Integration)
- **reducing environmental stressors**, such as noise by creating calming areas to support residents experiencing distress, including those living with trauma (Guideline 2.8 Sensory Rooms)
- **supporting personalisation**, enabling residents to reflect their identity, culture and life experiences within their living spaces (Guideline 2.7 Bedroom Configuration).

While often low cost, these changes can significantly improve how safe, familiar and welcoming an environment feels.

The guidance reinforces that culturally safe, respectful and healing environments can be strengthened through thoughtful, small-scale changes, not only major redevelopment.

David – what scope of services did KYA provide to Aunty Becky and is continuity of service important?

Kaunitz Yeung Architecture (KYA) is engaged as Lead Consultant, Architect and Project Manager / Contract Administrator.

The Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People guidance acknowledges the importance of collaborative design through working in genuine partnership with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Design approaches and responses should be led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, who best understand their communities.

Continuity of service can be important for maintaining the integrity of community-led design processes through to construction completion. Maintaining the same team across planning,

design and delivery helps to build relationships, trust and ensure the outcomes, priorities and values articulated by the community are carried through into the final outcome.

Interested in how you have balanced the need for staffing efficiencies with maintaining clinically safe environments in your design. Was there design concepts that you could achieve or had to redesign to support this?

Response from David: The balance between providing a culturally safe space and operational requirements is a key part of the process. It is a balance that the client and design team should carefully discuss, explore, and agree upon collaboratively. There were several concept design iterations. The 'Application' section of the [Designing Culturally Safe Aged Care Homes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People](#) guidance may offer further assistance.