

Why is it important to ask your patients “Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?”

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have the lowest health status of any identifiable group in Australia.

- Life Expectancy is 15-20 years less than the Australian average
- Prevalence of chronic disease is 12 times higher than the Australian average.

Deciding if a person is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on looks alone, is not reliable.

What are the barriers to asking?

- Lack of understanding about why information is collected
- Seen as of little or no benefit to the practice
- Seen as discriminatory to ask
- No identified patients in the practice
- Lack of confidence in asking.

There are approximately 16,768 people currently self identified in Tasmania as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ABS 2006 Census).

How to ask?

The recommended question is:

Are you Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander?

- No
- Yes, *Aboriginal*
- Yes, *Torres Strait Islander*
- Yes, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*

Always use the above when asking the question.



Questions and answers:

1. Why should I ask?

- To have accurate patient records
- General practices need to be able to provide improved and specific health care services
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders continue to suffer a greater burden of ill health than the rest of the population
- Incomplete recording of status gives an incomplete picture of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Tasmania.

2. How do I ask the question?

- Use the Medical Records Update form (accessed on the General Practice South website at www.gpsouth.com.au – click 'Aboriginal Health' in the Fast Find Index)
- This form states that the practice is updating patient medical records, the information will be added to the patient file and treated as confidential.

Sample patient questions and possible responses:

1. *Who needs to know?*

We are currently updating all of the patient records held within the practice. One of the questions generally overlooked, is a person's Aboriginality. The information collected is used to review services and to have a better understanding of the demographics of our practice.

2. *Do I look Aboriginal?*

Deciding if a person is Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander on looks alone is unreliable. This information is collected on all patients.

3. *It's none of your business!*

You are not, of course obliged to answer the question. This information is collected on all patients.