Foundations for Culturally Safe Care in the AFL & AFLW Context - Pre-Reading Resources for the AIDA/AFL Webinar Series

AIDA Cultural Safety

Purpose

This pre-reading resource list is designed to help AFL AHPRA-registered clinicians and other healthcare professionals familiarise themselves with key ideas that underpin The Australian Indigenous Doctors' Association (AIDA) upcoming webinars and to support practical reflection on culturally safe care within the AFL context. The materials provide an evidence base for understanding Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB), strengths-based approaches, and self-determination, and they explore how systemic factors (including racism and colonisation) shape health experiences, access to care, and opportunities that influence wellbeing, alongside cultural strengths such as Family, Community, and Country.

This content sits within a Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) framework, where health is understood as holistic, shaped by Culture, identity, connection, and broader social determinants.

Key concepts introduced in this list include:

- **Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB):** holistic understandings of health shaped by Culture, identity, connection to Country, family and community, and social determinants.
- **Cultural safety and cultural humility:** recognising power, privilege, and institutional dynamics, creating environments where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people feel respected and safe.
- **Strengths-based practice:** centring resilience, cultural strengths, and protective factors rather than deficit narratives.
- **Self-determination in care:** supporting choice, voice, and community-led approaches, including Aboriginal leadership and governance in programs and services.
- **Co-design and community-led program development:** partnering with communities in the design, delivery, and evaluation of health and sport initiatives.
- **Systemic determinants and structural barriers:** understanding the impacts of racism, colonisation (historical and ongoing), geography, and resource access on wellbeing and participation.
- **Identity, belonging, and culturally anchored support systems:** the protective role of cultural identity, mentoring, family, and relational support in mainstream settings.

Across these resources, wellbeing is framed as strengths-based and self-determined, with individuals drawing on Culture, identity, and relationships to build resilience, meaning, and direction.

How to Engage with These Resources

You don't need to complete every item. Use this list for ongoing learning and aim to review **4- 8 key resources** before the webinar.

As you engage, consider:

How do these concepts relate to my clinical practice?

Where might bias or assumptions influence my decision-making?

What changes could I begin to implement?

Foundational Knowledge

Wellmob - WellMob **– Social and Emotional Wellbeing Resource Hub***Website*Provides culturally grounded resources that support holistic wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including mental health, connection to Country, and community-led healing approaches.

NACCHO **(National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation)***Website*National peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations, supporting community-led primary health care and promotes community-led, culturally safe models of care.

Lowitja Institute - Lowitja Institute*Website*

Australia's only Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled health research institute, offering evidence-based insights into health equity, cultural safety, and system reform. Focused on high-impact research, knowledge exchange, and developing Indigenous health researchers.

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*Policy framework*Provides a national, strengths-based framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, centred in Culture and informed by social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing

Academic Literature

1. Co-design, Cultural Safety, and Community-Led Programs

Bennie, A., Marlin, D., Apoifis, N., & White, R. L. (2021)*'We were made to feel comfortable and ... safe': Co-creating, delivering, and evaluating coach education and health promotion workshops with Aboriginal Australian peoples.*Annals of Leisure Research, 24(1), 168–188.https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2019.1622430

Summary: This article describes a co-designed coach education program with Aboriginal communities focused on sport and health promotion. It highlights the importance of cultural safety, Aboriginal leadership, and community-driven design in building confidence, skills, and engagement.

English, M., et al. (2022)*Exploring the voices of health promotion stakeholders concerning the implementation of physical activity programs for the social and emotional wellbeing of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls.*Sport in Society.https://doi.org/10.1080/17430437.2022.2117616

Summary: This study explores how sport programs can support Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander girls. It highlights culturally safe, co-designed, and strengths-based approaches as essential for engagement.

2. Cultural Identity, Wellbeing, and Models of Selfhood

Dudgeon, P., Derry, K. L., Mascall, C., & Ryder, A. (2022)*Understanding Aboriginal models of selfhood: The National Empowerment Project's cultural, social, and emotional wellbeing program in Western Australia.*International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 19(7), 4078.https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph19074078

Summary: This paper outlines Aboriginal models of selfhood grounded in Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing. It emphasises holistic wellbeing based on Culture, identity, connection, and community.

Sajjadi, S., et al. (2025)*Sport, self-esteem, and identity among Indigenous individuals and communities.*Health & Fitness Journal of Canada, 18(2), 20–30.https://doi.org/10.14288/hfjc.v18i2.838

Summary: This review shows how sport strengthens Indigenous self-esteem and identity through community connection, cultural participation, and positive representation.

3. Experiences of Indigenous Athletes in Mainstream Systems

Blodgett, A. T., & Schinke, R. J. (2015)*"When you're coming from the reserve you're not supposed to make it": Stories of Aboriginal athletes pursuing sport and academic careers in mainstream cultural contexts.*Psychology of Sport and Exercise.https://doi.org/10.1016/j.psychsport.2015.03.001

Summary: This article explores the lived experiences of Aboriginal athletes navigating elite sport and education systems. It highlights racism, low expectations, and structural barriers, while emphasising resilience through Culture, identity, family, and community.

Johnson, S. R., et al. (2021)*It's a big adjustment coming from the reserve to living in a totally different society: Exploring the well-being of First Nations athletes playing sports in an urban mainstream context.*Health & Fitness Journal of Canada.https://hfjc.library.ubc.ca/index.php/HFJC/article/view/838

Summary: This study explores First Nations athletes transitioning into urban sport environments, highlighting cultural adjustment challenges and the protective role of Culture, family, and community.

Light, R. L., Evans, J. R., & Lavallee, D. (2019)*The cultural transition of Indigenous Australian athletes into professional sport.*Sport, Education and Society, 24(4), 415–426.https://doi.org/10.1080/13573322.2017.1391085

Summary: This study examines Indigenous athletes transitioning into elite sport systems, highlighting cultural disruption, racism, and the importance of identity, mentoring, and family support.

Rathwell, M., Henry, R., & McKegney, S. (2022)*Opportunities denied: The divergent resonance of opportunity for Indigenous and non-Indigenous hockey players with the now-disbanded Beardy's Blackhawks.*Sociology of Sport Journal, 39(3), 270–277.https://doi.org/10.1123/ssj.2020-0199

Summary: This article critiques sport as an equal opportunity space, highlighting systemic barriers such as racism, geography, and financial constraints for Indigenous athletes.

4. Participation, Access, and Community Contexts

Davidson, E., et al. (2025)*'He wants to play football but not available here ...': Parent perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child physical activity and sport participation.*Annals of Leisure Research, 28(4), 482–503.https://doi.org/10.1080/11745398.2024.2376752

Summary: This study explores Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's sport participation through parent perspectives. It highlights strong engagement in sport and cultural activities, but also barriers such as access, cost, and transport.

5. Culturally Responsive Support in Sport

Hodge, K., Sharp, L.-A., & Heke, I. (2016)*Sport psychology consulting with Indigenous athletes: The case of New Zealand Māori.*Journal of Clinical Sport Psychology, 5(4), 350–368.https://doi.org/10.1123/jcsp.5.4.350

Summary: This article explores culturally responsive sport psychology with Māori athletes, emphasising Whānau, identity, and relational approaches to wellbeing and performance.

Nicholson, M., Hoye, R., & Gallant, J.*The provision of social support for elite Indigenous athletes in Australian football.*Journal of Sport Management, 25(2), 131–142.https://doi.org/10.1123/jsm.25.2.131

Summary: This article highlights the importance of culturally safe and relational support systems for Indigenous athletes in elite sport environments.

McNeair, S., Chamberlain, C., Priest, N., Evans-Whipp, T., Vassallo, S., Mansour, K., Ritland, L., Olsson, C. A., Coffin, J., & the Australian Early Relational Health Network. (2026)*A scoping review of Australian Aboriginal early relational health knowledge systems.*Clinical Child and Family Psychology Review, 1–20.https://doi.org/10.1007/s10567-026-00570-w

Summary: This scoping review synthesises Aboriginal early relational health knowledge systems and shows how relational wellbeing is strengthened through family, community, Country, and intergenerational cultural practices. It highlights the limits of Western frameworks for understanding Aboriginal relational knowledge and underscores the need for culturally valid ways of assessing and supporting children's wellbeing.

Lived Experience & Reflection

Video

Jamarra Ugle-Hagan: You've Heard The Noise, Now Hear JUH! - YouTubeA powerful reflection on identity, Culture, and resilience, highlighting the role of community and connection in wellbeing.

AFL Sir Doug Nicholls Round Honourees

These stories provide insight into the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes across generations:

- Sonny Morey – Early trauma and removal; found identity and connection through sport, Culture, and role models.
- The late Polly Farmer – Graham Farmer, a proud Noongar man, overcame institutional care and illness to become a transformative AFL leader and innovator.
- The Late Bill Dempsey - Hall of Fame Induction **-** Sport provided identity, purpose, and opportunity following removal and institutional life, Story and Video

These narratives highlight the importance of cultural identity, relational support systems, and the long-term impacts of systemic factors on wellbeing.

Other Examples:

- Stephen Michael - story and video https://www.afl.com.au/sir-doug-nicholls-round/honourees/stephen-michael
- Syd Jackson - story and video – https://www.afl.com.au/sir-doug-nicholls-round/honourees/syd-jackson
- Glenn James - story and video - https://www.afl.com.au/sir-doug-nicholls-round/honourees/glenn-james
- Michael Long - Story and video - https://www.afl.com.au/sir-doug-nicholls-round/honourees/michael-long
- Andrew McLeod - Hall of Fame induction https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xx7rBgxzl4k
- Michael Graham - Hall of Fame induction https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1EB3eWuXv2s
- Michael O'Loughlin - Hall of Fame induction https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a1uCdRgqsF0

Closing

Developing culturally safe clinical practice is an ongoing process that requires reflection, openness, and a commitment to change. These resources represent a starting point for continued learning and practice improvement.