



Collecting Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander (A&TSI) Status A Q&A resource for Pap test providers

Why is it important?

In Victoria, data is available on women's participation in cervical screening and the types and severities of cervical abnormalities they experience. However, unlike in the breast and bowel cancer screening programs, it is not possible to measure participations rates for sub-groups of the population such as A&TSI and CALD women.

Data from the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) indicates that between 2003 and 2006 the cervical cancer incidence rate for A&TSI women was double that of non-A&TSI women (ABS & AIHW, 2008) and the mortality rate was five times higher (AIHW, 2009).

Limited information on CALD women's cervical screening participation was made available by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 2001, collected as part of the National Health Survey. Among the nearly 10,000 women aged 18 plus surveyed, lowest participation rates were recorded for women who:

- spoke Mandarin, Cantonese, Vietnamese, Arabic, Italian, Greek or German as the main language at home;
- were born in South East Asian countries or Italy; or
- were born overseas and arrived in Australia since 1991.

The disparity in the cervical cancer morbidity and mortality rates of A&TSI and CALD women compared to the average female population indicates that these groups of women are under-screened, and that this is leading to health inequality.

Collecting data on the cervical screening participation of A&TSI and CALD women in Victoria would enable a greater understanding of their screening behaviour and inform targeted strategies to increase their participation in screening.

Definition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

This is the definition given by the High Court of Australia:

An Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander is a person of:

1. Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent, and
2. who identifies as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander, and
3. is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives.

How to collect A&TSI identification data

The ONLY effective and accurate way to identify someone of Aboriginal origin is to **ask** the question:

"Are you of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander origin?"

- Aboriginal
- Torres Strait Islander
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
- Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander

If the patient answers yes to this question, it is important that it is clarified with the patient whether they are Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander, or Aboriginal **and** Torres Strait Islander.

The exact wording of the question has been developed by the Australian Bureau of Statistics and has been adopted as the national standard for collecting A&TSI status in administrative datasets, such as hospital collections, the Census, Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, education, and many more.

If a patient refuses to answer or cannot answer the question, the response to the question is considered incomplete. Responses that are incomplete **MUST NOT** be recorded as 'Not Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander', but should be left blank/unanswered.



PapScreen
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Why is it important to ask the question to every patient?

Many Aboriginal people are not visually identifiable and through incorporating the question in a non-judgmental way into your practice you may identify A&TSI women that you were not aware of. Additionally, it is equally important to collect the status of women who do not identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

While you may know the patient's family background, especially if you work in a small country town, this should NOT be a reason to not ask the question. Not all members of the same family may wish to identify themselves as A&TSI.

Definition of a CALD background

"In the Australian context, individuals from a CALD background are those who identify as having a specific cultural or linguistic affiliation by virtue of their place of birth, ancestry, ethnic origin, religion, preferred language, language(s) spoken at home, or because of their parents' identification on a similar basis." (Department of Human Services Multicultural Strategy Unit, 2002)

How to collect CALD identification data

The questions that are included on the request form in relation to CALD identification are:

1. In which country was the patient born?
2. Does the patient speak a language other than English at home?

The exact wording of the question has been taken from the Australian Bureau of Statistics Census.

What do I say if a woman wants to know why they are being asked these questions?

Some possible questions and responses include:

"Why do you need that information? I have never been asked this during a Pap test before."

- The questions are now asked of all clients who attend a health service for a Pap test.
- Currently there is no data on the screening rates of CALD and A&TSI groups in Australia, but it is thought that Pap test rates for certain communities is lower than for the rest of the population. It is important for us to get reliable statistics on screening rates, so programs can be developed to increase participation.

"How is my information going to be used?"

- Your information will be collected by the Victorian Pap test Registry and is protected by the Privacy Act. Your information will be used to develop programs aimed at reducing the rate of cervical cancer in the community.

My VCS request pad doesn't have the A&TSI and CALD status questions. How do I get a new VCS request pad?

You can order a new VCS request pad by either completing the consumables order form on the VCS website <http://www.vcs.org.au/practices/consumables.html> and faxing it through to their dispatch staff on (03) 9349 1977, or alternatively you can email your request to reception@vcs.org.au.

What other things do I need to remember when collecting Identification information?

- Women have the right to refuse to disclose their A&TSI and CALD status
- Women have the right to change their status
- Some people may be sensitive about disclosing their A&TSI and CALD status
- Before asking the questions, it may be beneficial to explain why you are now asking about A&TSI and CALD status
- It is important to ask all women the CALD question even if they have previously identified as being of A&TSI descent. This will help ensure accurate data records, as well as identify those women with an A&TSI heritage that may have been born overseas
- It is important to ask the questions in the same way each and every time