



Curalo Medical Clinic: creating a culturally safe care space

Pictured from left Samantha Walsh, Taneka Longbottom, Rebecca Armstrong (RN) and Judy Thompson (PM) with the new welcome sign at Curalo Medical Clinic. Giyong means welcome in the local Aboriginal language.

Listening first

When Curalo Medical Clinic set out to improve cultural safety for Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander patients, the team soon learnt that subtle inclusions, such as meaningful visual artwork in local language, acknowledgement of the land that we gather on and being greeted with a smile at the reception desk, communicated respect and effort in ways that were valued. COORDINARE provided a Culturally Safe Care grant as part of funding from the Australian Government PHN program which enabled the Clinic to engage in genuine consultation with a representation of Aboriginal patients that attended their practice.

Feedback from 12 Aboriginal patients shaped a wish list of changes, from creating a welcoming reception area to improving access to care. COORDINARE's Aboriginal Health Consultant, Taneka Longbottom facilitated the interviews and assisted in establishing trust, authenticity and rapport that enabled honest feedback and participation.

Samantha Walsh, Curalo Medical Clinic's Nurse Team Leader and Project Lead said: "Engaging with the community strengthened our understanding of how intergenerational trauma, discrimination, and past negative experiences with healthcare systems influence the complex health needs our patients present with today. This insight reinforced the importance of empathy, connection, and cultural humility in every interaction."

Improving access

One practical barrier identified was the lack of 24-hour blood pressure monitoring in Eden. The Clinic has purchased its own monitor, to overcome the need for patients to travel 40 minutes to the nearest hospital on consecutive days.

Embedding cultural safety

The clinic introduced several initiatives:

- Welcome signage in local language and Aboriginal artwork at the front desk
- Acknowledgement of country plaque developed in consultation with local Elders
- Cultural awareness training embedded in staff orientation and policy
- A charter of commitment to culturally safe care, co-created by the team.

Building relationships

Staff confidence in delivering culturally safe care has grown significantly, and feedback from the community has been overwhelmingly positive. At two recent community meetings, Elders have publicly acknowledged Curalo's efforts to create a culturally safe space.

"I've worked here for 22 years and I've never had this level of connection with our Aboriginal patients. A local Elder told us: 'You did good, you got this right' at the opening of the yarning space," Samantha said.



"You did good, you got this right"

Taneka Longbottom, community members and Curalo Medical Clinic staff gather in the new yarning space during the project update. Uncle BJ Cruse (third from left back row) gave the welcome to country and Uncle Ossie Cruse (front centre) is holding the new plaque.

The Yarning Space

Consumers asked for a space where they could go if they receive bad news or to have some quiet time. The Clinic transformed its conference room into a multi-purpose yarning space, with soft furnishings, an extendable hardwood table, and Aboriginal design elements. Local community members have been asked to contribute artwork and cultural items, making the space feel welcoming and authentic.

Patients have used the safe yarning space whilst waiting, and staff have used it to diffuse tense situations. The Clinic also plans to host culturally safe nurse-led health clinics for Aboriginal patients in the yarning space. Aboriginal health checks can be cumbersome for busy general practices, so the practice plans to offer 'mini health checks' providing preventative health care on specific days in the yarning space including; blood pressure checks, immunisations and blood sugar checks for people who have diabetes.

Looking ahead

"I really hope in the future other mainstream services will be able to incorporate this into their practice somehow. It's achievable; it's about respect and acknowledgement. What matters most is demonstrating a willingness to listen, to learn, and to take action where we can," she added.

COORDINARE thanks Samantha and the Curalo Medical Clinic team for their dedication to culturally safe care. Their work demonstrates how listening to community voices can create lasting change.

Useful COORDINARE Resources:

- [Partnering to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing | COORDINARE - South Eastern NSW PHN](#)
- [Aboriginal Cultural Engagement Self-Assessment Tool - NSW Health](#)
- [Alcohol and other drugs treatment guidelines for working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – in a non-Aboriginal setting - Network of Alcohol and other Drugs Agencies \(NADA\)](#)
- [Supporting effective, culturally safe primary healthcare - Royal Australian College of General Practitioners \(RACGP\)](#)
- [Supporting the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at end of life - End of Life Directions for Aged Care \(ELDAC\)](#)