



Prize Winner

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IMPORTANCE OF FIRST NATION'S MEDICINE

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IMPORTANCE OF FIRST NATION'S MEDICINE

Introduction

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (First Nations) people are the first peoples of Australia. They comprise more than a hundred groups with distinct languages, histories and cultural traditions (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2015). The First Nations have an extraordinary tradition of utilising plant-based remedies and time-honoured practices to enhance the health and well-being of their communities.

We need to understand the importance of First Nation peoples' medicine and how they are used in different parts of Australia. Without deeper knowledge of traditional medicine, we can't move to integration with Western medicine. Do these precious medicines have a benefit for our society? Would you like to learn more about bush medicine in different parts of Australia? How could modern and bush medicine be combined to make a new extraordinary health benefit? Get ready for this epic adventure through the world of First Nation Peoples' medicines.

Traditional Medicine

According to the World Health Organisation, "traditional medicine" means "the total of knowledge, skills and practices based on the theories, beliefs and experiences indigenous to a different culture, whether explicable or not, used in the maintenance of health and the prevention, diagnosis, improvement or treatment of physical and mental illness" (Ontario Heritage Trust 2016; WHO 2023). Aboriginal health is not only individual physical well-being but is the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the community (National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 2010, p.g 5; Butler and Howard 2019)



Figure 1: Created by me

Traditional healers

All around Australia, Aboriginal people have their healers in their communities, who they believe have special powers to cure the sick. Traditional healers have special tools, such as amulets, chants, songs and hair ropes to help them with their work (Milgin, Watson and Thompson 2000, p.g 22). In many varieties of Aboriginal English, the healers are referred to as clever men powered men or spiritually powerful persons (Clarke 2011, p.g 97; Beveridge 1884, p.g 68-70). The healer's job is to diagnose problems, advise on remedies, suggest and perform ritualised healing procedures and importantly reassure their patients (Clarke 2011, p.g 99). Some traditional healers are:

1	Andy Tjilari
2	Toby Minyintiri Baker
3	Rupert Langkatjukur Peter
4	Naomi Kantjuriny
5	Illwanti Ungkutjuru Ken
7	Pantjiti Unkari McKenzie
8	Sam Wimitja Watson
9	Josephine Watjari Mick
10	Jimmy Baker
11	Dickie Minyintiri

(Table 1 shows a list of some traditional healers) (Ngaanyatjarra Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation 2013, p.g 23, 29, 41, 47, 55, 77, 85, 99, 107, 113).

Importance of Traditional medicine in modern life

❖ Scope of indigenous medicine as a part of research

Plant-derived regenerative medicine provides numerous therapeutic benefits such as antibacterial, antioxidant, anti-inflammatory, and wound healing properties. In Australian plant species, many plants contain biologically active extracts and compounds that exhibit remarkable wound-healing properties (Eades 2017). Indigenous knowledges are now included in health and medical research agrees Gugu Badhun Elder Professor Yvonne Cadet-James. She says funders recognise Indigenous knowledge alongside Western science. Sandra, a Noongar woman from Mount Barker in Western Australia, was the first in her family to complete high school. She was the first aboriginal medical

doctor to receive PhD. She highlights the fact that research is needed to “revolutionise medicine, as without it, treatment and management might not be as effective as it is today” (Eades 2017).

❖ Increasing demand for Indigenous products in the market

The higher demand for the products gives employment opportunities and entrepreneurship among indigenous communities based on the recent trade news. An estimated 50 tonnes a year of Kakadu plum is picked by Indigenous corporations in Kimberly and the northern territory is used for traditional medicine manufacturers (Mills 2022).

Kakkudu Plum Super Food and Skincare

Nowadays, Kakadu plum products are being used as skincare and they can brighten your skin, have powerful antioxidant properties and hydrate the skin (Sand and Sky 2022). It contains up to 4 times more antioxidants than blueberries, boosts the immune system which can help to prevent cancer, and produces natural waxes that are good for nourishing the skin (Clarke 2011, p.g 51).



(Figure 2: Kakkudu Plum (Bjarnadottir 2019))

Interview with First Nation person



(Figure 3:
Kerry and Me)

Interviewer: Hi Kerry. Please share a bit about the background of the Aboriginal medicine products you are selling.

Kerry: Sure, our products are based on traditional knowledge passed down from my great-grandmother to grandmother to mother and then to me. This lineage helps keep our culture alive.

Interviewer: It's fascinating. What are the significance of these products?

Kerry: We use several Australian natives, which we refer to as our bush medicines. Traditionally, these are used for colds, relaxation, open cuts, eczema, nappy rash, sleep, pain, and general well-being. We sell our products for skin care purposes, such as massage, bath oils, bath salts, and wellness teas.

Interviewer: That's important information. Thank you for sharing your insights, Kerry. Your commitment to preserving and passing down traditional knowledge is truly inspiring.

❖ Integration with Western medicine

"Traditional healers hold a deep cultural understanding of regional plants which can be effectively used in the treatment of common illnesses," said Professor Elizabeth Elliott AM from the University of Sydney Medical School (University of Sydney 2016). The Indigenous people mostly use medicine externally and only 10% internally. Hence, the risk of increased intake of drugs is lower (Latz 1995, p.g 61). Aboriginal people are generally concerned to point out that the tail plant (emu poison

bush) must be handled with great care and kept away from children (Punu 1988, p.g 22). Therefore, the knowledge of our First Nations people is important for integration with Western medicine.

❖ Value of types of traditional medicine used by First nation's people

Traditionally, when Aboriginal people fell sick, they used plants in a variety of ways to quell their ills. Banduk said, "All my foods have so many other uses." Different types of medicine used by First Nation peoples are:

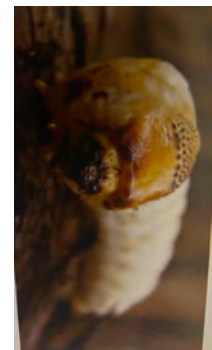
Honey ant: Honey pot ants have been used medicinally by First Nations people for thousands of years including for the treatment of colds and sore throats (University of Sydney 2023). Professor Carter said, "Honey pot ant's honey has unique antimicrobial characteristics that validate its therapeutic use by indigenous people". Honey ants are used by First Nation Communities in the deserts of South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory (Tutt 2021, p.g 52).



(Figure 3: Honey ant (Danny Ulrich 2023))

Animal fat: Animal fat was critically important in the preparation of many traditional medicines. First Nations people use animal fat to absorb and deliver the lipid-soluble active ingredient of a natural compound. Their medicine would not work without the addition of animal fat (Step toe and Passananti 2012).

Witchetty grub: They crushed up witchetty grubs and made them into a paste to heal the skin. The paste was applied to wounds and covered with a bandage or cloth made from dingo or kangaroo skin (Tutt 2021, p.g 51) (Williams 2013). It was a high-protein insect food found in the desert (Goh 2021).



(Figure 4: Witchetty Grub (Williams 2013))

Termite mounds: In Australia red-brown termite mounds have been commonly used as supplements by Aboriginal women during pregnancy and following delivery. The Earth was regarded as having tonic attributes as well as being useful for easing abdominal pain and promoting lactation (Williams 2013). Clay from termite mounds was usually eaten by women who had been inland for some time, living on roots and wild honey (Dulcie Levitt 1981). Kowanyama people used termite mounds on the tree trunk for pregnant women and after childbirth (Luke 2011).



(Figure 5: Termite mounds (Williams 2013))

Mud: Australian indigenous people directly apply specific soil types onto their fresh wounds. Mud was carefully selected from the cooler proximity of a waterhole to relieve and act as a physical barrier to wound infection (Steptoe and Passananti 2012). Kowanyama people used mud in the creek to fix diarrhoea (Luke 2011).



(Figure 6: Mud in the creek (Luke 2011))

Clay: Narrabri health workers in the northern territory, white ochre is smashed into a powder in a coolamon with a heavy stone, and mixed with water to make thick cream. It is then smeared onto sores and cuts. It can be mixed with more water and drunk (Narrabrind). The antibacterial and anti-inflammatory effects of some types of clay can be used for medicinal purposes (Williams 2013).



(Figure 7: White clay (Isaacs2002))

Table 6.2 Summary of Australian Clay Resources Utilised by Aboriginal People
See Rowland (2002) for a more detailed discussion.

Northern Territory: Groote Eylandt	Red or yellow clay (<i>malarra</i>) Termite mound clay (<i>ebinga</i>)	Clay: eaten for mineral deficiencies (Levitt 1981)
Northern Territory: Groote Eylandt	White clay (<i>duingira</i>)	Clay: anti-diarrhoeal (Levitt 1981)
Northern Territory	White clay (<i>Benamankagunara</i> , White Clay Dreaming)	Clay: highly prized and used for gastrointestinal disorders and diarrhoea (Eastwell 1979;) White clay (kaolin): baked in fire, like a damper, then made into pellets or powder (1 teaspoon) mixed with water and taken for diarrhoea (Barr 1988). White clay: 'used as a medicine to cure stomach aches and diarrhoea. And to "settle the stomach" when it is upset ... also taken to "line the stomach" before eating yams or fish which may be poisonous'. Clay eaten to allay hunger and for hookworm infestation (Bateson & Lebroy 1978)
Northern Territory	Termite mound (anthill earth; termitaria)	Clay from termite mound (Arnhem Land): gastrointestinal disorders (Eastwell 1979). Termitaria: gastrointestinal problems; eaten by pregnant women (Foti 1994; Barr 1993, 1988). Ant-hill earth extract (boiled in water) used for stomach aches and diarrhoea (Bateson & Lebroy 1978).
Mornington Island	White clay	Clay: eaten, drunk in solution, rubbed over body: cure for internal pain, headache, joint pain, eye complaints, snake-bite wounds; increases flow of breast milk (white clay) (Mennott 1979).
Torres Straits, Murray (Mer) Island	Clay: 'greasy chocolate-like earth'	Clay: kneaded into balls, rolled in banana leaves and roasted; eaten by pregnant women to ensure birth of a fair-skinned child. Children ate clay to make them 'stronger, braver, sander' (Alfred Cort Haddon, cited in Rowland 2002).
Queensland (northern): Bloomfield	White kaolin clay	Riverine clay: sieved to remove all coarse particles. Refined clay put in trough, mixed with water to make a dough. This was kneaded to make long flat cakes that were sundried (6-8 days), then roasted in earth oven: wrapped in leaves, buried in ashes and fire lit above them. When cooled they were considered a great delicacy (Anell & Langercrantz 1958).
Queensland: northwest and central regions	Clay	Large clay or mud pills: 1-2 taken for diarrhoea (Roth 1897).
Queensland: Cape York	White clay	Clay: white (kaolin) clay from the beach mixed with water, washed and strained, used as a treatment for coughing or tuberculosis; clay also eaten as an anti-diarrhoeal agent (Isaacs 1987). Fire-roasted clay mixed with water and a teaspoon taken as an anti-diarrhoeal agent (Barr 1993).
Queensland (northern): Evelyn Tableland	Clay	Clay: eaten as an abortive and contraceptive (Mjoberg 1918).
Queensland: Taroom	Soft white stone (<i>copi</i>)	Clay heated and made into a fine powder (resembling cornflour), mixed with water: used for a variety of ailments (L'Oste-Brown & Godwin 1995).
Western Australia	Red clay (<i>wilgi</i>) White pipeclay	Clay heated and mixed with emu oil, applied on a dressing (paperbark, gumleaf or wad of possum fur) to wounds. Clay also applied to sore eyes (Hammond 1980).
Western Australia	<i>Broolga</i> (red earth)	Clay eaten for stomach trouble (White 1983).

Figure 8: Australian clay resources used by aboriginal people (Williams 2013)

Charcoal :

The Noongar people used charcoal during pregnancy time to enhance the well-being of mothers. Leaves, twigs and small branches were heated over hot coals to release their oils and the vapours were then inhaled (Hansen and Horsfall 2016).



Figure 9: Charcoal (Hansen and Horsfall 2016)

Massage:

A touch or massage technique used by First Nation’s people for healing purposes. Most practised a form of massage which would result in the apparent withdrawal of an object, a piece of wood or a stone from the affected part of the body (David Scrimgeour 2000, p.g 53).

Bush medicine:

Most bush medicines are used as inhalants, antiseptics and rubs or liniments. Only a few are drunk or eaten by First Nation’s people (Isaacs 1987, p.g197). They use almost every part of a plant as a medicine. The knowledge of bush medicine helps with how to use it and is passed from generation to generation. At the same time, incorrect usage of bush medicine has a serious impact. For example, the unripe kangaroo apple is poisonous, and when ground up it can be used to temporarily remove the oxygen from small bodies of water (Tutt 2021 p.g 49).

Examples of plant parts used by the First Nation people as medicine

Parts of plant	Plant name	Uses
Fruit	Kangaroo Apple	Natural steroid for cuts, burns, bruises and fractures.
Leaves	Goat foot leaves	Bandage around the wound Making oil for cold and flu
	Eucalyptus	
Bark and Roots	Ironwood	Treat wounds ,cuts ,sores
Flowers	Red Lilly	Treat emotional issues

Table 2 shows parts of the plant used for medicine(Tuttu p.g 49,51)(King and Horsfall 2023,p.g 265) (Clarke 2014,p.g 149)

Australia is a geographically diverse continent with 3 main climate zones (Bureau of Meteorology, Australian Government 2005), which are tropical, arid and temperate (Clarke 2008, p.g 7). Here are the plants used in different states for medicines :

Western Australia

Plant Name	Aboriginal Name	Uses
Bullich	Bullish	Antibacterial poultices for healing wound, cold and flu, gum used as ailment for sore
Caustic Weed	Ngama-Ngama, Widda pooloo, Piwi	Non-melanoma skin cancer, sores, cuts and scabies, skin itches
Coastal Pig Face	Bain, Kolbolgo	Stomach cramps, diarrhoea, fungal infection, mosquito bacteria and sun burn, eczema, dermatitis, muscular ache and rheumatism
Karri Hazel	Drop Born	Rheumatism, back pain and for swollen joints
Lemon Grass	Djerp	Skin rashes, ear ache and sore eyes and sore throat
Sandalwood	Willarak Waang, Wolgol	Bronchitis, skin rashes
Jam Wattle	Mungart, Manjart	Mind relaxation especially for good night sleep, digestion, diarrhoea, wash for blisters and burns

Table 3 shows some of the medicinal plants of the south-western of western Australia (Hansen and Horsfall 2016, 40, 50, 52, 98, 102, 162, 92)

Plant name	Aboriginal name	Uses
Asparagus Fern	Leiwaleiwa manya	Leg ulcer on the ankle, breast cancer, Chest infection
Beach Cabbage	Amanganan	Ringworm, conjunctivitis, swollen joints
Bendee	Biriwiri (Bunuba), Yirriru (Wunambal) Warraroony (Gija), Yirriyarri (Jaru), Yirrirru manya (Kwini)	Jaru use it as a detoxifying agent and as a treatment for certain cancer
Brown Beech	Bollygum, Indian Laurel	Scabies infestations, arthritic and Rheumatic pain
Camel Bush	Jilarga (Bardi, Nyul), Maria, Maritji (Kukatja)	Tuberculosis, poisoning, snakebite
Coastal Jack Bean	Windi (Yawuru), Goordayun (Bardi)	Liniment for rheumatic pain, broken bones and as a antiseptic Pashto treat leprosy
Split Jack	Ngoorla (Bardi) Balkarda (nyikina)	Treat swelling, insect bites, snakebites

The table4 shows Some edible plants of the Kimberley region of Western Australia and their uses (King and Horsfall 2023, p.g.30, 40, 44, 74, 100, 112, 456)

Queensland

Plant Name	Aboriginal Name	Uses
Dye Tree	Egg errata	Cough or asthma
Bush Apple	Uk awerr	Pain, ear trouble
Turpentine tree	Uk idhul	Skin sores
Croton rears	Uk ifar	Sores, pain everywhere
White Berry	Uk inggarnang	Toothache, mouth abses, sore throat
Native Rosella - Spear Rod tree	Uk odhay	Urinary tract infection
Sandpaper Leaf Fig	Uk urrgum	Stomach Pain

Table 5 shows some of the medicinal plants of the Kowanyama region (Alma Luka with Myrtle Luke and Bernadette Boracic 2011, p.g 24, 30, 36, 40, 46, 54, 60)

Tasmania

Plant Name	Uses
Pig face (karkalla)	You can eat its green leaves in salad, apply its juice to sandfly bite and help ease pain from burns
Running postman	The nectar was used to soothe sore throats.
Native pepper (Tasmania lanceolata)	Skin disorder, venereal diseases, colic and stomach ache
River mint (mentha australis)	Cough and cold, used for digestion
Sweet scented kunzea	To relieve irritated skin and muscular aches and pains
Cider gum	Cough and cold, sore throat

Table 6 shows details from the website of Good Life Permaculture, which was published in 2016.

Adelaide

Name	Aboriginal Name	Uses
Native Lemongrass	Aherre-aherre	Its oil works as an effective panacea against bacteria, flu and colds
Yam Daisy	Murnong	The leaves of this plant were used for treating stomach complaints
Quandong	Gurti	It is a treatment of rheumatism and is used as an antioxidant
River red gum	Karra	Cough, cold and flu, sore throat, diarrhoea
Muntries	Mantirri, Mantiri	Heart health, wound healing, lowering risk of infection and cancer
Wattle Seed	Mirnu	It is beneficial for people who have diabetes.

Table 7 shows some of the Adelaide Kurna people’s medicine plants Catalyst Foundation 2019.

Victoria:

Plant name	Uses
Gold dust wattle	Bark used to treat venereal disease
Hop wattle	Dysentery and applied to wounds
Hop Goodenia	Anti-diabetic medicine
Paperbark/snow in summer	Coughs and colds, aches and pains and respiratory complaints
Blackwood	Bark used for aching joints act as anti-inflammatory properties
River Red gum	Medicine for burns

Table 8 shows the medicinal plant used by Kulin nations (Cumpston 2020).

New south wales

Plant used for Narcotics and painkillers	Plant used for Headaches, cold and fevers	Plant used for Antiseptics and skin ailments
Blackwood	Headache Vine	Australin Bugle
River Mangrove	Hillock Bush	Hickory
Sarsaparilla	Native Grape	Native yam
Red ash	River Mint	Nodding Blue Lily
Wilga	Native Pennyroyal	Sydney Red Gum
Mat-Rush	Sydney Blue Gum	Rock Lily

Table 9 shows the traditional bush medicine of the New South Wales region First Nation people (Tent 2010).

Conclusion

Traditional medicine of First Nation’s people promotes health and well-being and has been passed down from generation to generation over hundreds and even thousands of years (Ontario Heritage Trust, 2016). The growing influence of Western medicine has led to the gradual decline of traditional practices, resulting in the erosion of valuable traditional knowledge. An old saying is that “medicine is the art of keeping the patient amused while nature affects the cure”. By recognising the worth of traditional knowledge passed down through generations, we can support cultural preservations and honour the approach adopted by the First Nation people with traditional bush medicine.

WORD LIMIT: 1402 WORDS excluding tables, brackets, reference and acknowledgement.

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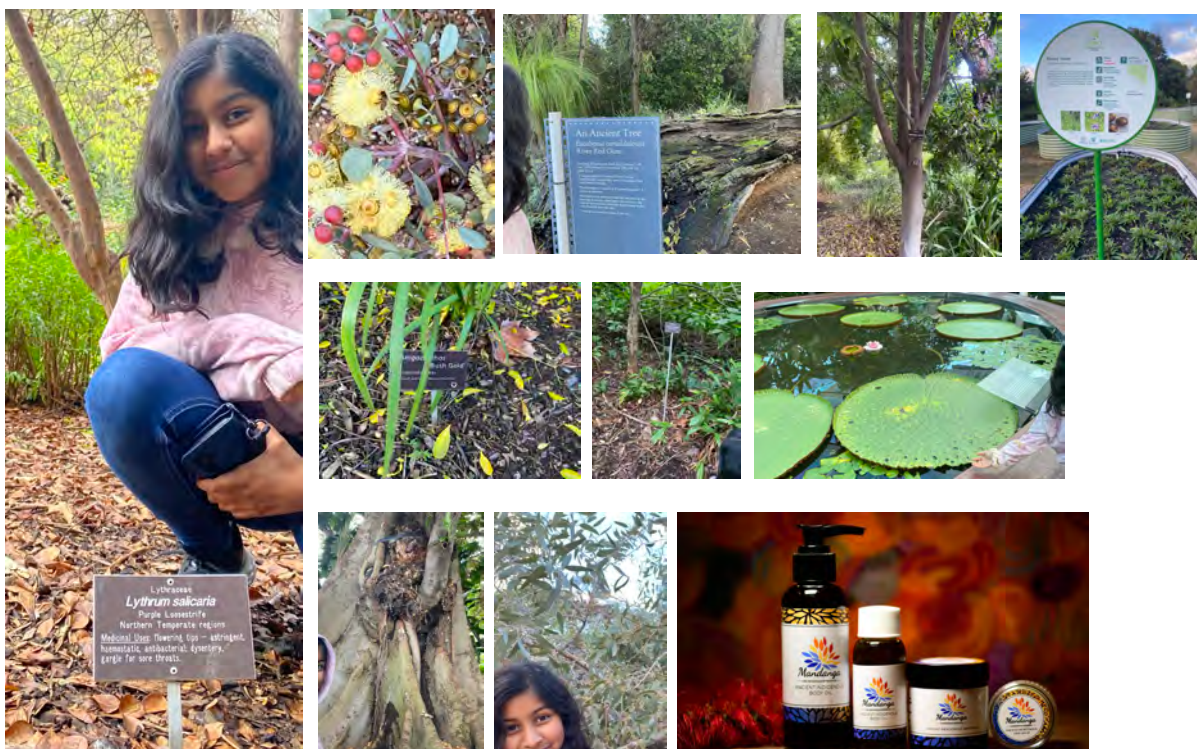
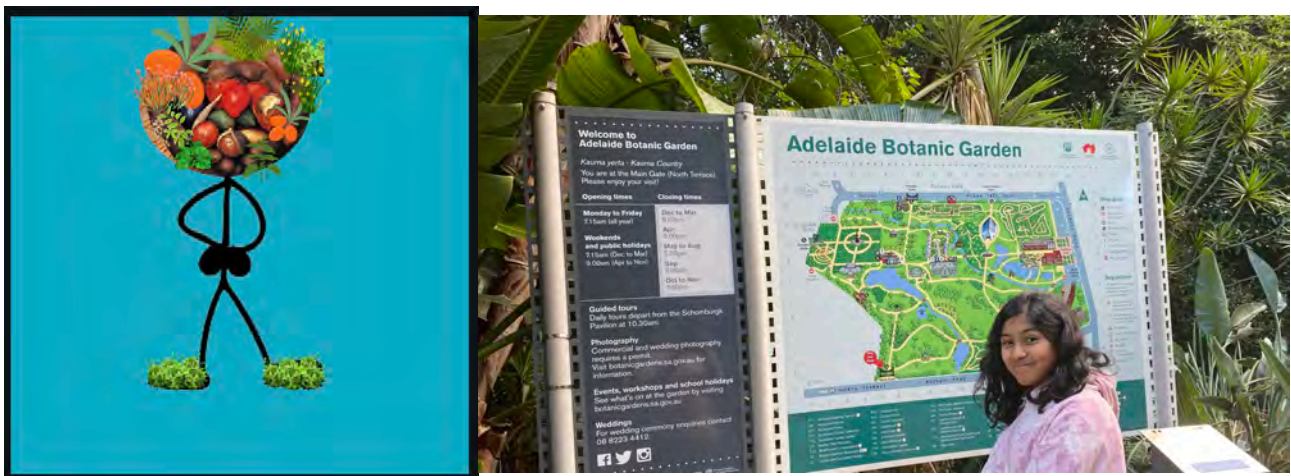
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Interview with Kerry Colbung(The First National person)

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First Nation people's medicine