

Speech pathology and Indigenous children



- **2.4% of the Australian population (455,000) is Indigenous**
- **More than 50% of the Indigenous population live in remote areas**
- **84% of Indigenous people living in remote areas do not speak Australian English at home**
- **21% of Indigenous Australians don't use Australian English**

Indigenous children have a higher risk of health and other problems than other Australian children. They are twice as likely to be born with low birth weight which can lead to communication difficulties. Indigenous children have extremely high rates of middle ear disease (around 70% of all children in remote communities), which can lead to conductive hearing loss. Hearing loss from early in life can affect the development of listening, speech and language skills, as well as literacy development.

Aboriginal English

80% of Indigenous Australians speak 'Kriol' or a dialect of 'Aboriginal

English' and many people who hear it spoken wrongly assume it to be "pidgin English". In fact, most Indigenous children in remote areas know three or four complex languages and dialects and it's these they've grown up with, not standard Australian English.

Aboriginal English varies across Australia, but differs to Standard Australian English in its sound system, grammar, story structure and in the way it's used – words often have different meanings and take into account the rich linguistic heritage of Indigenous culture.

It is important that speech pathology services are delivered from the

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perspective of the specific Indigenous community and in the most appropriate language – an urban Aboriginal community has different language features to those of a remote area, and different needs as regards speech pathology services.

Speech pathologists working with Indigenous children and their communities

Speech pathologists working with communities play a role in assisting with access to other specialist medical, allied health or educational services. They may also consult with community services (like prep/preschool/ kindergarten and primary schools) to coordinate care for their clients.

Resources may be developed specifically for a community – standard English assessment tools can be culturally and linguistically inappropriate.

Speech pathologists often work with Community Based Workers based in remote communities to:

- provide assistance to identify and locate people with communication difficulties
- discuss the needs of people with communication difficulty with someone they know in their first language
- advise on cultural and linguistic issues relating to the client's needs and possible ways of meeting them
- provide assistance with the development of intervention programs

How do I become a speech pathologist?

Speech pathology is an accredited undergraduate or entry level masters degree.

To find out more go to www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au/education-and-careers/university-courses

How do I find a speech pathologist in my area?

Go to www.speechpathologyaustralia.org.au and click on “Find a Speech Pathologist”.

For further information contact **Speech Pathology Australia** – the national peak body representing speech pathologists, the professionals who work with and advocate for people who have a communication disability and all Australian consumers of speech pathology services.