Sections two to seven introduce the concept of culture and gradually build participants’ understanding of dominant culture and cultural safety.

Aims and learning outcomes
• To explore the concepts of culture, cultural heritage, dominant culture and cultural safety.
• Participants will gain an awareness of culture and the impact of their own cultural heritage on their values, understandings and ways of relating to others.

Associated materials
• PowerPoint presentation: 2 Culture 2007.
• 2.1 Handout: What is Culture?
• 2.2 Exercise: Ten key ideas about culture.

Facilitator note:
Explain to participants: This training invites you to think about culture for two reasons:
• Firstly, everyone’s culture influences their daily behaviour and way of life but because it is so much a part of us we often think that it is ‘natural’ and the correct way, rather than only one of many ways of being. To be culturally sensitive we must look at this idea of culture and what it means. We need to examine our own personal culture in order to understand how we operate in the world and consider how this might affect others.
• Secondly, culture affects memory, language, understanding and behaviour. Working with anyone who is experiencing dementia requires an awareness of their cultural context and history so that we can effectively support them in responding to the disorientation that dementia can bring.

2.1 What is culture?

2.1 Exercise: Brainstorm: What is culture?
Aim: To gain an understanding of culture.

Activity
1. Ask participants to call out their thoughts and responses to the question – what is culture? Keep a record on the whiteboard of these ideas.

There are many definitions of culture. Show a range of definitions on overhead and ask for comments. Some examples are provided here:

Culture is…
• a way of life of a group of people, the blueprint for living which guides the actions, thoughts and feelings of that group and makes them identify others in it
• common beliefs and practices of a group of people. The integrated pattern of human knowledge, beliefs, and behaviours that depend upon man’s capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations
• the accumulated habits, attitudes, and beliefs of a group of people that define for them their general behaviour and way of life; the total set of learned activities of a people.
• Customs and civilisation of a particular time or people

2. Draw out the following key themes: learned behaviours; transmitting knowledge to future generations and agreed norms.

Facilitator note:
There are many different models of culture that have been proposed – an example is provided here as an option for you to use, but you may have your own version.

All cultures have a set of values, rituals, heroes and symbols which embody the culture. Show ‘what is culture’ circles diagram (PowerPoint slide or use the handout included in the kit).

2.2 A model of culture
Present a model of culture for the group to consider.

Facilitator note:

FIGURE 2.1 WHAT IS CULTURE?
Use the following points to lead a discussion of what is Australian culture using the levels in the circles and the following guide.

- **Values (underpinning beliefs about what is important)**
  What does Australian society value? – working hard (a good day’s work for a good day’s pay), owning property, family, a ‘fair go’, being a mate?

- **Rituals (significant practices that are repeated over time and understood by everyone)**
  What rituals do we practice in Australian culture? – Christmas, weddings, funerals, Anzac marches, summer holidays, having a shower every day, candles on our birthday cakes…

- **Heroes (individuals who embody the cultural values and are publicly revered)**
  Who are our heroes? – sports people, the Aussie ‘battler’, business entrepreneurs, war veterans…

- **Symbols – (icons that stand for the culture)**
  What symbols reflect our culture? – The Australian flag, kangaroos, the boomerang, Uluru, Sydney Opera House…

Ask the group to consider where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people fit into this picture of Australian culture? What is different about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures?

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia have their own set of values, rituals, heroes and symbols, and have done so for over 50,000 years.**

It is important not to generalise too widely about cultural communities, not all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the same. When Europeans invaded Australia there were estimated to be around 250 distinct language groups living on this continent, with many different dialects spoken. It was a multicultural Land. Use a map of Aboriginal Australia to demonstrate the diversity of groups and inhabitation of Land (D. Horton 1994 is recommended and included in the PowerPoint presentation for this section). There are many groups sometimes called clans, tribes or nations and many differences in practices between Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural communities. Cultures are also not static – they change over time as they come into contact with and accommodate other cultures. Many people have multiple cultural affiliations and/or languages and move readily between them. If we have fixed ‘recipes’ for how to respond to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we may risk stereotyping.

### 2.3 Dominant Culture

At this point, talk to the group about dominant culture. In your own words, explain that within most societies there are dominant and marginalised cultures, with differing levels of power, acceptance and feelings of privilege or isolation. These are not ‘good’ and ‘bad’ cultures, but simply ones that more obviously set the ‘rules’ for public life, and others that have less influence. The dominant culture’s symbols and rituals are the main way business is done, and others must learn these in order to get along.

For example, it could be said that mainstream Australia structures itself around Christian practices – public holidays celebrate Christian events; our prime minister refers explicitly to Christian values; parliament opens with a prayer to a Christian God. This is one aspect of the dominant culture in current day Australia. We do not all practice Christianity, but we live in a society where Christianity is the mainstream framework for public life. There are other dominant practices that reflect a certain value base – the dominant culture in Australia is also Anglo-European, our Westminster system of government comes from England, we still have an English Queen as our monarch…etc.

These dominant symbols and practices affect how people understand their lives, how they see their place in society and ultimately how they engage with mainstream services.

If you are not like the dominant culture or do not agree with it, it can be harder to feel connected. Many things that give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a sense of belonging have been eroded since an Anglo-European culture has become dominant. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians could be said to now live in a dominant culture that is fundamentally different to their own heritage. In this context people may experience cultural conflict, lack of belonging, and tension.
2.2 Exercise: Ten key ideas about culture

**Aim:**
To review learning and understanding of culture and explore questions arising.

**Activity:**
Handout the checklist – Ten key ideas about culture.
Ask participants to individually mark their responses to the items on the list. As a group, go through each one and discuss people’s feelings and opinions.
For each one, encourage participants to give examples to illustrate their thinking, or describe an example yourself.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ten key ideas about culture</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Everyone learns their own culture’s ways and values and has expectations based on this learning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People can misunderstand and misjudge each other based on cultural expectations and assumptions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural learning is so deeply embedded that people may not be aware they have learnt their values – they may assume everyone has the same ones.</td>
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<tr>
<td>People feel better when their cultural beliefs and expectations are recognised and respected.</td>
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<td>People from within a particular cultural group are not all the same.</td>
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<td>Behaviour that is OK in one cultural context may not be OK in another.</td>
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<td>It is important to think about a client’s cultural expectations in any health care setting.</td>
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<td>It is very helpful to think about our own cultural expectations to be able to work well with other cultures.</td>
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<td>Mainstream services are part of dominant culture and need to vary their practices to reach non-dominant groups.</td>
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<td>Difficulties occur when one cultural group assumes superiority over another, i.e. assumes their ways are best.</td>
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