



# Good Spirit Good Life Package

## Instruction Booklet



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### PRINCIPAL AUTHORS

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## Background

The Good Spirit Good Life (GSGL) assessment has been developed and validated for use with older Aboriginal Australians, aged 45 years and over, living in urban or regional areas. The project name originates from information obtained from the Elders governance group and participants of the study, in which the concept of a person's strong inner spirit as central to having a good quality of life was emphasised. All 12 interconnecting factors enhance an older Aboriginal person's inner spirit and quality of life.

## Assessment Selection

There are two versions of the Good Spirit Good Life assessment:

- 1) A Participant version – to be used with participants who are able to self-report on their quality of life. It is best to use this version wherever possible as self-reported measures are generally more accurate than proxy versions.
- 2) A Carer's version – for individuals who have difficulty self-reporting, it may be more appropriate for a family member or person close to the individual to report on their quality of life. For example, if the person has moderate to severe cognitive impairment, or a disability/illness that prevents them from being able to accurately report on their own quality of life.

## Assessment Guidelines

1. Begin with a social yarn to establish trust and rapport with the older person.

This generally involves introducing yourself and your personal and professional background (*Lin, Green & Bessarab 2016*).

e.g. "Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I'm from \_\_\_\_\_ (place of birth/where you grew up). Are you from here?"

Give the person the opportunity to share information about themselves and find common ground.

e.g. "I've always wanted to go there" (where the older person is from), "my friend who is from there (give name to find common link) tells me the wildflowers are beautiful".

A social yarn can be short, for example up to 5 minutes, before moving on to the assessment stage.

2. Continue to use a yarning approach when gathering responses throughout the assessment.

For example:

**Assessor:** "Do you feel connected to country? This could be yarning about country or going back to country."

**Older person:** "Oh I'm always yarning about country and talking about the old days. I try to get back there as much as I can."

**Assessor:** "It's always good to go home, isn't it? So would you say you feel connected to country all the time, most of the time or sometimes?"

**Older person:** "Only sometimes. It would be nice to go back more but I have to stay here for dialysis and my kids are here too."

**Assessor:** "That does sound hard. Maybe we can talk some more about this and work out other ways to help you connect to country."



3. Each question can be answered using the 5 point response scale. The scale is simplified to enable the individual to reply with a 'yes' or 'no' response if they prefer. The assessor is then encouraged to further qualify the individual's response by enquiring if the answer is 'all the time', 'most of the time', 'sometimes', 'not much' or 'never'.

For example:

**Assessor:** *"Do you get to have a yarn and spend time with family or friends?"*

**Older person:** *"Yes, I do."*

**Assessor:** *"Would that be all the time, most of the time or sometimes?"*

**Older person:** *"All the time!"*

4. Each question has a section for further comments. The assessor is encouraged to obtain supporting information which will assist in the development of the older person's care plan.

5. The assessment package has recommendations to guide individualised care plans. The service provider is encouraged to use the recommendations in a way that responds to a person's identified needs, that is, if the person's response is "not much", "never", or "sometimes" (see above example, guideline 2).

6. Sensitivity when asking questions - the assessor must be aware of the impact of past policies and practices that have shaped and influenced the older person's quality of life. People of the Stolen Generation, who were forcibly removed from their families as children, forbidden to speak language, practice culture and engage with the Aboriginal community, may not wish to talk about some quality of life areas. It is important to be guided by the individual on the quality of life areas they wish to discuss and the areas they would like support in.

For example:

**Assessor:** *"Do you feel connected to the Aboriginal community?"*

**Older person:** *"Not much. I was taken away when I was two and not allowed to speak my language or see my family. I'm trying to find out more about my people but it's hard."*

**Assessor:** *"Is there anything we can do to help you with this?"*

7. The Good Spirit, Good Life assessment package is appropriate for use with Aboriginal people from urban or regional areas but has not been validated for Torres Strait Islander peoples or people from or living in remote areas.

## Interpretation

It is important to consider that each of the quality of life areas below are not mutually exclusive and there is significant overlap amongst all the factors. For example, the ability to connect to Country may also allow the person to connect to family, community, culture and enhance their health and spiritual wellbeing. Therefore, by yarning with the individual and recording additional information in the comments section of each question, the assessor will be able to produce a sensitive and accurate document of the individual's current wellbeing and identify opportunities to enhance areas of need.



## Recommendations

The recommendations are provided as a reference for service providers to implement culturally informed strategies and tailor care plans to enhance the individual's wellbeing. There are blank lines in each of the quality of life areas to allow service providers to add their own recommendations. It is strongly encouraged and recommended to consult with an Aboriginal person on these additional recommendations to ensure they are culturally safe and appropriate for implementation.

### Family and Friends

Do you get to have a yarn and spend time with family or friends?

This question enquires about the person's opportunities and satisfaction with their current level of social engagement. If the individual experiences limited opportunity or satisfaction with this and would like further support to improve this area of quality of life, refer to recommendations. For some older people the obligations of family may negatively impact on quality of life. Friendships may more positively impact on quality of life, or vice versa. To take a strength based approach, focus on optimising the positive relationships.

### Country

Do you feel you spend enough time connecting to Country?

This question enquires about a person's opportunity to connect to their ancestral lands and impacts on their spiritual, cultural, emotional and social wellbeing. 'Being on country' or 'returning to country' involves the person travelling to or living on country, where the person's spirit is protected and nurtured. Dying on Country may become increasingly meaningful as a person ages and is reflecting on end of life matters. If physical access to country is not possible, it is important to explore other means of connection (see recommendations).

### Community

Do you feel connected to the Aboriginal (and/or Torres Strait Islander) community?

This question enquires about the person's sense of belonging and inclusion in their community. Access to community may differ for individuals, as will opportunities to engage with the community. An individual may be living away from the community they belong to however may enjoy the opportunity to engage with another community in the area they are living. Others may feel connected to their community despite distance due to opportunities to engage with their community in other ways (e.g. returning to country regularly, yarning with family and community over the phone).

### Culture

Do you feel connected to cultural ways? (prompt with examples e.g. attending Aboriginal events and meetings, sharing traditional foods).

This question enquires about the person's ability to share in cultural knowledge, practices and activities that allow the person to express their cultural identity and belonging. There are a range of formal and informal activities that a person can engage in and this can occur in a variety of settings (home, local community, on country).



## Health

### Do you do things to take care of your health?

This question enquires about health in a holistic context and can encompass the individual's physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. The health of an older person is often considered in relation to their obligations, roles and responsibilities and enhancing the individual's health will allow them to not only care for themselves, but their family and community. Having access to culturally safe health services is a key component to improving health and wellbeing.

## Respect

### Do you feel respected and valued as an Elder/older person?

This question enquires about the relationships the individual has with others and the value placed on their role as an Elder/older person. This is particularly important in relation to younger people, their interactions and behaviour towards the older person and the recognition of the older person's cultural responsibilities and obligations in their family and community.

## Elder Role

### Do you feel you can share your knowledge and stories with the younger mob?

This question enquires about both formal and informal opportunities to pass on culture through storytelling and intergenerational exchanges. It is the older person's cultural responsibility to pass on stories passed onto them from their Elders so that these stories are not lost. This ensures the continuation of culture through the generations and gives the older person a sense of peace in knowing they are fulfilling this cultural role.

## Supports and Services

### Do you feel the services you use are respectful and support your needs?

\*In residential care ask: Do you feel this place is respectful and supports your needs?

This question enquires about the person's satisfaction, safety and confidence in accessing and receiving quality services that are culturally appropriate, respectful and meet their expressed needs. The individual may express a preference for using services that are Aboriginal controlled and operated. If the person is accessing mainstream services, it is vital the service understands and respects the cultural needs of the older person to appropriately deliver services.

## Safety and Security

### Do you feel you have a safe place to live?

This question enquires about a person's sense of safety in relation to housing security and their living environment. This can be affected by financial hardship, family obligations, physical and cultural safety. Experiences of racism have a large impact on housing security and safety.



## Spirituality

Do you feel safe and supported in your spiritual beliefs? (prompt with examples e.g. yarning about culture, going to church).

This question enquires about the person's freedom and opportunities to express and fulfil their spiritual needs. It is important to understand the diversity in spiritual expression for Aboriginal people. Many people are committed to their church and religious community, however experiences of religion can be negative due to trauma experienced in religious institutions. Some people have strong cultural spiritual beliefs however due to the impact of colonisation, others may feel disconnected from this. Cultural and religious beliefs may also be intertwined.

## Future Planning

Do you feel you have things in place as you grow older? (e.g. your future health and care, funeral wishes, family looked after).

This question enquires about a person's thoughts and plans for the future and can allow them to feel a sense of peace and control in their life. Funeral and end of life plans are important to discuss however may be taboo for some older people. Attending to health care needs to enable the older person to grow old well and fulfil family, community and cultural obligations is also a priority. Resolving conflicts and making peace with others is another area the individual may wish to explore.

## Basic Needs

Do you feel you have enough money to get by? (E.g. for food, housing, clothing).

This question enquires about financial and personal security. If the older person is experiencing hardship, services can assist to explore appropriate support avenues.

## REFERENCES

### Yarning resource

Lin, I., Green, C., Bessarab, D. (2016). 'Yarn with me': applying clinical yarning to improve clinician–patient communication in Aboriginal health care. *Australian Journal of Primary Health*, 22(5), 377-382. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1071/PY16051>

### Additional reading

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