Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teaching methods hand down knowledge through generations about how Country looks after those in its care, the living and the non-living, how to care for Country, and how systems work together to care for Country.

For tens of thousands of years, cultural practices have reinforced that Country is important.

So today Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples still believe and practice their culture.

'Country' is the word used by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to describe relationships with their environment which have been forged over tens of thousands of years through storytelling, songlines, cultivating and hunting foods, and other learnings such as observation of weather, testing medicinal and poison properties of plants and more. It describes a really strong, innate and emotional connection.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples view Country as encompassing and, at the same time, central to health.

Country is a concept which describes physical resources, spirituality, and connections to land, sea, water, animals, each other, ecology, and more.

An example of Country is when air, waterways and soil are clean and healthy, and then people eat healthy food which is plentiful, drink clean water and breathe fresh air.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, means not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community.

It is a whole life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.

As defined in NACCHO's Constitution as amended 9 March 2006 also from the National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) 1989.

People talk about Country, speak and sing to Country, visit and worry about Country, feel sorry for Country, long for Country. People say that Country knows best, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy. It has consciousness and a will towards life. Because of this richness, Country is love and peace, nourishment for body, mind and spirit. (Interpretation Australia 2003)

"Our identity as human beings remains tied to our land, to our cultural practices, our systems of authority and social control, our intellectual tradition, our concepts of spirituality, and to our systems of resource ownership and exchange. Destroy this relationship and you damage - sometimes irrevocably – individual human beings and their health."

Dr Pat Anderson, Chair, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, 1996

Dr Pat is an Alyawere woman from the Northern Territory.

The "Making Tracks" artwork was produced for Queensland Health byGilimbaa. CHHS would like to thank Tourism Tropical North Queensland for kindly donating these Country Images.