

**Environmental Health Practitioner Manual: a resource manual for Environmental Health Practitioners working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities**

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# CONTENTS

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	v
<b>Foreword</b>	ix
<b>Introduction</b>	xi
<b>Chapter 1</b> Germ theory and parasites	1
<b>Chapter 2</b> Sewage system management	29
<b>Chapter 3</b> Healthy people, homes and dogs	73
<b>Chapter 4</b> Rubbish storage, collection and disposal and environmental management	133
<b>Chapter 5</b> Pest control	167
<b>Chapter 6</b> Water supply	237
<b>Chapter 7</b> Environmental health program management and community education	285



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## **Environmental Health for Aboriginal Communities: A Training Manual for Aboriginal Environmental Health Workers** (1991 version)

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# FOREWORD

Most people living in Australia do not need to consider how to access safe drinking water and power or how waste water and rubbish are removed from their homes and managed. If their house is damaged or any water or power connections, fittings or outlets are not working, it is a straightforward process to get the problem fixed.

For many remote Indigenous communities however this is not the case. The distances from regional towns, service providers and tradespersons can be vast, making access to repairs and maintenance expensive and slow. This can and does affect the quality of the living environment and, in turn, affects the health of community residents.

Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) make up a workforce that targets environmental issues which affect health, particularly in Indigenous communities where mainstream services may not exist. They undertake a wide range of activities, from the level of individual households, to the community and regional levels, and make a genuine and highly valued contribution to improving Indigenous health.

This manual was originally developed to provide the teaching resources required for the Aboriginal Environmental Health Worker training program which commenced in Western Australia in 1986. Workforce development and training has evolved considerably since then, as has the sophistication of equipment used, but the core activities of EHPs continue to include work in key areas discussed in this manual.

Although this manual is no longer used as a primary teaching resource for environmental health training its significance as a reference for EHPs engaging with Indigenous communities has been nationally recognised at the 7th National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference in Kalgoorlie and warranted its review and update. The Australian Government, under the auspices of enHealth's Working Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health, funded the revision of this version of the manual. This revision was coordinated by the Environmental Health Directorate of the Department of Health Western Australia.

Electronic copies of this publication are available free of charge from the Department of Health and Ageing website at <http://www.health.gov.au/internet/main/publishing.nsf/Content/health-pubhlth-publicat-enviro.htm>, the Western Australian Public Health website at [www.public.health.wa.gov.au](http://www.public.health.wa.gov.au) and from the Indigenous HealthInfoNet at [www.healthinfonet@ecu.edu.au](http://www.healthinfonet@ecu.edu.au). Hard copies can be ordered free of charge from [health@nationalmailing.com.au](mailto:health@nationalmailing.com.au) or by phoning 02 6269 1000 or fax 02 6260 2770. You may also be able to source copies from state or territory departments responsible for Indigenous environmental health.





# INTRODUCTION

This manual is designed as a field reference for Environmental Health Practitioners (EHPs) engaging with and working in remote Indigenous communities.

Health authorities recognise that many diseases experienced by Indigenous people are directly linked to poor environmental health conditions in their communities. If the overall health levels of Indigenous people are to improve, the environmental health and general living conditions that currently exist in many communities must be raised to a satisfactory standard.

It is only by keeping people, homes and communities clean, hygienic and safe that the health of community members will be significantly improved. It is considered that this manual will assist EHPs in their community environmental health work.

In this manual, EHPs are encouraged to make full use of local and regional environmental health technical expertise and specific information sources relating to community education and program management. This network includes Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), Environmental Health Supervisors, other Environmental Health Workers and Indigenous Environmental Health Practitioner training and education staff.

A DVD has been developed by enHealth entitled *“Introduction to Engaging with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities: An Environmental Health Resource”*. EHPs are encouraged to view this DVD as it showcases many of the issues that need to be considered when planning environmental health activities and meeting with community members. You should be able to get a copy of this DVD from your state or territory environmental health head office.

## Editorial note

There are some positions in environmental health that are referred to in this manual. They, along with their definition, are provided below.

**Environmental Health Officer (EHO):** an Environmental Health Practitioner with an appropriate tertiary degree level qualification recognised by the relevant state or territory authority

**Environmental Health Practitioner (EHP):** a person employed to work in environmental health with some level of accredited training. This term encompasses 'Indigenous Environmental Health Worker (IEHW)' and replaces 'Aboriginal Environmental Health Worker (AEHW)'. It can also be used to collectively refer to any person with or without environmental health qualifications working in this area, such as an Environmental Health Officer, Environmental Health Coordinator, Environmental Health Supervisor, Healthy Housing Workers and Animal Welfare Workers.

**Environmental Health Supervisor (EHS):** a person employed to coordinate and/or provide mentoring and support to Environmental Health Practitioners. This term includes 'Environmental Health Coordinator'.