

# Ngankari Healers: 60,000 Years Of Traditional Aboriginal Methods Make Headway In Medical Clinics



PHOTO Healer Cyril McKenzie at the Royal Adelaide Hospital after being called for an appointment.

FACEBOOK: ANTAC

By Sowaibah Hanifie | [ABC News](#)

Ngangkari healers were considered the treasure of Aboriginal communities, and now their 60,000-year-old tradition has made its way to South Australia's Royal Adelaide Hospital and rural clinics.

Eighteen registered Ngangkari healers set up the Anangu Ngangkari Tiutaky Aboriginal Corporation (ANTAC) more than seven years ago.

Chief executive Francesca Panzironi heads a team visiting major hospitals and rural clinics in Victoria, New South Wales, South Australia and Western Australia.

“It all started with friendly chats, a cup of tea and kangaroo tails,” she laughed.



PHOTO Francesca Panzironi heads ANTAC with 18 Aboriginal healers like Debbie Watson from the APY Lands. ABC RIVERLAND: SOWAIBAH HANIFIE

More recently they have been working in regional clinics across country SA and the new Royal Adelaide Hospital.

“I think about 95 per cent of the Australian population doesn’t know this knowledge system exists,” Ms Panzironi said.

## **Getting recognition in mainstream health**

ANTAC’s objective is to provide a platform for Aboriginal healers to be recognised in the mainstream healthcare system

as a form of complementary alternative medicine.

*Anangu woman, Debbie Watson, removing and re-aligning the “bad” spirit from her client’s body. This is one of the traditional methods Ngangkari healers use to help with pain, stress or other illnesses. [pic.twitter.com/DIWgMEesJA](https://pic.twitter.com/DIWgMEesJA)*

– Sowaibah hanifie (@SowaibahH) [March 26, 2018](#)

While she was a university lecturer, Ms Panzironi identified a gap in literature on Australian Aboriginal healing.

She said the most comparable form of alternative medicine to Ngangkari healing was reiki, a Japanese technique for stress reduction.

Depending on a client’s problems, Ngangkari healers offer three main techniques – a smoking ceremony, bush medicines or spirit realignment.

“The healer identifies where the issues are and, through a specific method of healing, which is called panpooni, they take away whether it’s pain, a blockage, or some kind of obstruction, with their hands,” Ms Panzironi said.

“The most unique method of healing they use is the realignment of the human spirit.

“They see the spirit as the core component of the human body.

“If it’s not in the right place it can cause problems, whether physically, emotionally, mentally. With their healing touch they push it back in the right place.”

## **Complementary treatment for clients**



PHOTO Anangu healers working in city hospitals and regional clinics have gained popularity with people of all backgrounds. FACEBOOK: ANTAC

The Ngangkari healers are popular with clients of all backgrounds.

Ms Panzironi said some people who used the healing technique for pain management experienced relief of their symptoms.

But for Indigenous people especially, the healers have been making a world of a difference by improving attendance rates at medical appointments.

Ms Panzironi said the treatment did not replace the role of mainstream medicine, but it could be used in conjunction with other treatments.

“I remember once the manager of the hospital said to me ‘Oh my god, I have never seen so many Aboriginal people in the hospital smiling and being so happy to be here’,” she said.



PHOTO Indigenous women Kelly Matthews (L) and Lyn Ackerman are happy to see a healer because it connects them to their culture. ABC RIVERLAND: SOWAIBAH HANIFIE

Riverland Community Health has been inviting the Aboriginal healers to its clinic for only a few months, and the results have been life-changing for some.

Aboriginal health consultant Kelly Matthews said before the healers' involvement, it was a struggle to get Indigenous clients to see a conventional doctor.

"It's a fear. It's how a doctor communicates. The first thing is to listen and not be judgemental," she said.

*"Sitting in the sitting room they feel self-conscious. I hate it myself and my skin is pale.*

"I'd rather go to the Aboriginal clinic where you sit back, can have a yarn, catch up with family and friends."

Since the healers have been involved with the clinic, appointments have been completely booked.

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