



Media release

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Digital records support preservation of bush medicine information

To mark NAIDOC Week 2021 (4-11 July), the Australian Digital Health Agency today released a [new video](#) showing the importance of bush medicine in Indigenous culture and health and how My Health Record can be used to manage that information for the holistic care of patients.

Director of Clinical Services and Senior Medical Officer at Gurriny Yealamucka Health Service in Yarrabah Queensland, Yued Noongar man from Dandaragan WA, Dr Jason King, said “I ask my patients what bush medicines they are using and include that information in the medical records in our clinic and this feeds into My Health Record.”

The Agency’s [new video](#) features Linc Walker, owner and tour guide at Kuku Yalanji Cultural Habitat Tours in Cooya Beach, north of Port Douglas in Queensland and pharmacist Brad Reilly from Live Life Pharmacy in Port Douglas. The tours have been running for 22 years and were started by Linc and his brother Brandon to help preserve ancient cultural activities and knowledge.

Linc said “We use traditional medicine because we’ve always used it. When we were young it was too far to town, the shops were too far away and so we had to do this. It’s part of our life still.”

“Our cultural activities have so much value and we didn’t want to lose it. We started learning from all of our elders, taking the information and the knowledge and developing it for today and for the future.”

In the video, Linc welcomes the opportunity to team up with pharmacist Brad Reilly, to show him a range of local bush medicines and describe their applications, including the use of green ants to make three different medicines for sore throat and breathing problems and the white fruit of beach lettuce squeezed softly for an eyewash or skin wash.


Mr Reilly said it was an amazing experience learning from Linc, someone who knows so much about the local area.

“What a lot of people don’t know is that some of the medicines we use day to day here in the pharmacy have their origins from the plants and animals in the lands around us,” he said. “Just because we’re taking it from the pharmacy shelf as a packaged medicine and dispensing it to patients doesn’t dismiss the original source of our modern medicines.”

He marvelled at some of the medicines Linc revealed to him, ranging from treating common warts with a frangipanni tree to calming stomachs with the beach hibiscus leaf. When the wattle flowers are on and mullet are fat, mullet soup oil is used by elders when they are sick and sore with aching joints. Brad suggested the fatty acid in the fish oil is working as an anti-inflammatory.

“It’s fascinating how Linc is able to bring plants and animals from the local area into a medicines context,” he said.

Mr Walker added “There is a great opportunity for our mob to put this information into My Health Record, to get it down and documented. We’ve never had this opportunity and we’ve never been asked before and it



can only better the health of our people. This is an opportunity for people to record information that they can use in the future. For our mob, this is just the start.”

Dr Jill Benson AM works in Aboriginal health and said the Eremophila plant species or Emu Bush is widely used by Aboriginal people across Australia to treat aches and pains as well as minor burns and skin infections.

“This bush medicine works better than some of my medicines,” she said. “If a patient comes to me, I will sometimes recommend they use this bush medicine first.”

Australian Digital Health Agency CEO Amanda Cattermole said “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can upload their uses of bush medicine to My Health Record by including it in their personal health summary.”

“This information can be used by health care providers to better understand and treat patients and help preserve key cultural heritage.”

The NAIDOC Week 2021 theme, Heal Country, calls for greater protections for lands, waters, sacred sites and cultural heritage from exploitation, desecration and destruction.

Media contact

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About the Australian Digital Health Agency

When it comes to improving the health of all Australians, the role of digital innovation and connection is a vital part of a modern, accessible healthcare system. Against the backdrop of COVID-19, digital health has seen exponential growth in relevance and importance, making it more pertinent than ever for all Australians and healthcare providers.

Better patient healthcare and health outcomes are possible when you have a health infrastructure that can be safely accessed, easily used and responsibly shared.

To achieve this, the [National Digital Health Strategy](#) is establishing the foundations for a sustainable health system that constantly improves. It underpins and coordinates work that is already happening between governments, healthcare providers, consumers, innovators and the technology industry.

For further information: www.digitalhealth.gov.au.

The Australian Digital Health Agency is a statutory authority in the form of a corporate Commonwealth entity.