What is MeSH?

The Medical Subject Headings (MeSH) thesaurus is a controlled and hierarchically-organised vocabulary produced by the National Library of Medicine (in the US). It is used for indexing, cataloguing, and searching of biomedical and health-related information. MeSH includes the subject headings appearing in MEDLINE/PubMed, the NLM Catalogue, and other NLM databases.

2022 Update

The MeSH term for *'Oceanic Ancestry Group',* which 'Aboriginal Australians' and a host of other Australian Indigenous terms was mapped to, had been changed to *'Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander'* in the 2022 MeSH update.

Research

"terminology, usage, and word choice are critically important, especially when describing people and when discussing race and ethnicity. Inclusive language supports diversity and conveys respect. Language that imparts bias toward or against persons or groups based on characteristics or demographics must be avoided."

Flanagin 2021

US Census

It appeared that the National Library of Medicine changed the MeSH terms for 'racial groups' in the 2022 release to match the terms used in the US Census, which probably makes some sense for Americans but is far less helpful for the rest of the globe, especially where our ethnic categories don't match those used in North America.

Going by the US Census Bureau's own definition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians would not fit any of the listed categories.

Combing Expertise to propose new MeSH term

Subject – Health Librarians – ALIA Health Libraries Australia (HLA)

Technical – ALIA Community on Resource Description (ACORD).

Indigenous - ALIA Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Expert Advisory Group

Submitted...

Proposed term

Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Scope note: *'The two groups of indigenous peoples of Australia. They include Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. These encompass many distinct peoples with unique histories, languages, cultural practices and spiritual beliefs.'*

Success!

Thanks for your suggestion... As you noted MeSH terminology related to race/ethnicity has been in flux to better align with other US governmental sources. By doing so we also created some temporary oddity which we are addressing in MeSH 2023.

In summary we separated US-only from the rest of world population descriptors. In addition we created Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples per your request along with three other indigenous group terms: Maori People in NZ and Navajo People and Pima People in the US.

Ongoing issues…

2023 onwards ✓

Pre 2023 - All records that were tagged with Oceanic Ancestry Group have been replaced with Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander regardless of year entry, not only 2022 as the Scope Note suggests…

Take homes...

Speak up! You can make a difference

Get involved in your professional association

Impacts are far reaching

Thank you