

# Getting started with family history research

*Worldwide knowledge and understanding of Australian Indigenous cultures, past and present*

Have you decided to trace your family history but are unsure where to begin? Below are some suggested steps to help you get started with your family history research:

## 1. Write down what you know about yourself and your heritage

Your parent's names or nicknames? Born when? Where? Their brothers and sisters? Your grandparent's names or nicknames? Born when? Where? Their brothers and sisters? A good way to record this information is in a family tree – you may like to use the family tree provided at the end of this kit.

## 2. Work back through certificates

Birth, death and marriage or BDM records are a great way to start tracing your family history and filling in the blanks in your family tree. Each state has a Births, Deaths and Marriages registry where you can apply for your own birth or marriage certificates. You can also apply for your parents' certificates (if they are alive you will need their permission) as well as the certificates of your grandparents, great-grandparents and so on. You may be asked to provide identification and proof that you are their descendant. Fact Sheets 4 & 5 for more information.

## 3. Find out what was going on in the area where your people came from

Were your family associated with a mission, a station, a town? What was the history of the area?

## 4. Contact the local family history and historical society of the town your family is from

These societies are a valuable source of information for finding out about local and family history. You can pay a small fee for them to do a search on your behalf or become a member and access their resources and facilities directly. Many societies have also produced indexes to cemetery records, local newspapers etc. To find a family history or historical society, see the Family History Unit's 'Family History and Historical Societies' webpage ([www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family\\_history\\_tracing/family\\_history\\_and\\_historical\\_societies](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/family_history_tracing/family_history_and_historical_societies)) or look in the Yellow Pages.

## 5. Think about what records people might have kept about your family

What was happening in your family's lives. Think creatively about what they were doing and the records that may have been kept. For a list of some of the records that may exist for your family see Fact Sheet 6.

## 6. Be aware of name variations

Think about the spellings of names and differences between birth names and the names that people are commonly known by. See Fact Sheet 3 for more information on names.

## 7. Think about other people in your family tree

Remember that brothers and sisters share the same parents and cousins the same grandparents - it might be possible to find out more about your ancestors by looking at the certificates of family members outside of your direct line. For example, you might find more information about your great-great-grandparents on the birth certificates of your great-grandparents brothers and sisters.

## 8. Find out if any other family members have been researching the history of your family

The internet is a great way of connecting with other people researching the same family as you.

## 9. Read about researching family history

You may like to borrow a 'how to search your family history' book from your local library and look at our 'Brief Guide to Indigenous Family History Research' [www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/assets/pdfs/fhu/Brief\\_guide\\_e2.pdf](http://www.aiatsis.gov.au/library/assets/pdfs/fhu/Brief_guide_e2.pdf) (please contact the Family History Unit if you would like to be sent a copy of this guide).

## 10. Do one family line at a time.

For example, you may wish to research your mother's family and then your father's – it can be confusing to try to research both at once.

Once you have completed these steps you may like to contact the Family History Unit for further guidance with your family history research.