

## **The importance of traditional bush medicines**

Throughout Australia, hundreds of different Indigenous cultures have existed for thousands of years. Over this time native plants have been used traditionally for both spiritual and medicinal use. The properties of these plants have been experimented with and learnt from to develop generations worth of shared knowledge embedded in Aboriginal culture and lore. Many nations throughout Australia hold strong knowledge over the use of these plants. One such tribe includes the Kamilaroi Nation who are located towards the north of New South Wales. Their strong knowledge of native bush medicines is seen prominently throughout their culture and beliefs. Their extensive knowledge is also supported through modern medical studies which show conclusive evidence to support the effectiveness of many of these bush medicines. Despite modern medicines Indigenous medicine still holds an important role in Indigenous wellbeing. A large portion of this knowledge may also reveal new medicines that could only have been identified through the hundreds of years of knowledge that has been developed through oral traditions. This forms a clear importance of the plants in the underlying wellbeing of Indigenous communities.

The importance of the medicinal knowledge of native plants may seem obsolete in a modern setting although it still plays a large role in the continuation of Indigenous belief, mental wellbeing and in some cases may be chosen over modern medicine by many Indigenous people. “Western health professionals often experience difficulties in service delivery to Aboriginal people because of the disparity between Aboriginal and Western health belief systems.” (Maher, P. 01 May 2002). The large difference in Aboriginal and Western beliefs highlight a large

importance of bush medicines. In some communities traditional medicines are used instead of modern medicine. This is due to many Indigenous beliefs and connections to spiritual and traditional knowledge. Furthermore many of these plants are commonly available. This allows for cheap and effective medicine to be easily accessible for many communities. Knowledge of plants and how to use them becomes especially important in many rural Indigenous communities where modern health care may be too expensive or not readily available. “A lot of people are spending money (on medicine) because people get sick. Bush medicine is naturally grown around Australia and is as effective as modern medicine,” (Jeremia (student) as quoted by Hirini, R. 19 Feb 2018).

The Kamilaroi people’s vast knowledge of bush medicines cannot be understated. For generations they have passed down knowledge of bush medicines and their uses. This knowledge is shown in modern research which reveals to western science the existence of many previously unknown medicinal plants. An article on the matter reveals smoking rituals employed by the Kamilaroi Nation have strong antibacterial effects. “The findings appear to confirm knowledge of plants’ healing capacities that the elders of the Kamilaroi Nation have passed from generation to generation for thousands of years.” (White, M. 23 Jun 2015). Kamilaroi knowledge and the knowledge of many other Indigenous nations/tribes show a clear understanding of the plants and their properties.

The success of traditional Indigenous medicine also comes with issues for the protection of Indigenous knowledge. Their understanding bears a large importance to cultural and physical

wellbeing and it should be noted that western medicine may bear a threat to such practices by taking the knowledge without permission. The sharing of knowledge and tradition without reference to community elders creates a large threat towards Indigenous wellbeing and goes against customary laws. This expresses a necessity for the protection of Indigenous knowledge in general and proclaims the importance of this knowledge and its conservation.

The importance of traditional medicinal practices is prominent in Indigenous society. The Indigenous knowledge of the subject has been passed down over generations and holds an unparalleled understanding of plants and their surroundings. Traditional knowledge and use of plant medicines are also still highly relevant even in modern society. The use of traditional knowledge in modern tests proves that many of these traditions are based on factual evidence towards the benefits of such practices. The conservation of this knowledge also marks a large importance in the wellbeing of Indigenous Australians, both physically and culturally. Plant medicines allow for cheap and effective medicines to be produced and aid in rural communities. The connection to Country and the cultural significance of Indigenous knowledge also not only affects the physical health of Indigenous people but also helps to support their culture and continue traditional practices among generations. The Kamilaroi Nation are one such community who have, for generations passed, developed a strong understanding of traditional medicines. This is highlighted in western medical studies which have been conducted on Kamilaroi knowledge such as a paper by Qian Liu and research from the University of New England. Unfortunately many problems can also be found in western research. Often the information is

exploited and taken without proper acknowledgement. The great importance of this knowledge to Indigenous Australians is apparent in their wellbeing.

## References

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