

Know Your Body

“What is happening in my body?”

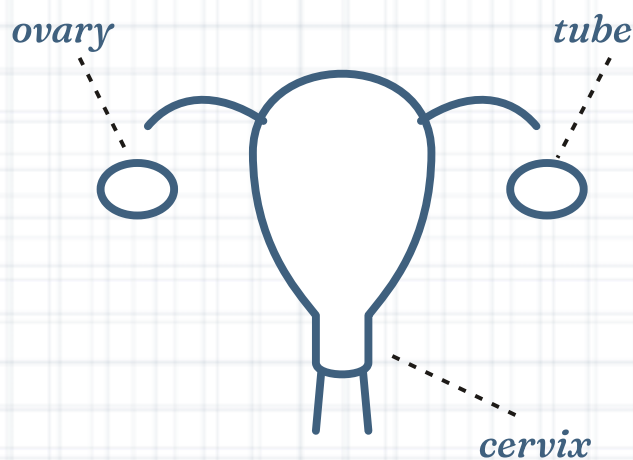
The health class a lot of us never got. What your body is made of, what changes in puberty, how a period actually works, and the words for all of it, said plainly and without embarrassment.

01 LEARN

02 UNDERSTAND

03 NORMALISE

About 25 minutes to read For ages 12+



EDITION 01 · KNOW YOUR BODY

FROM THE ARCHIVE

This is the earliest Voice Pack in our archive. It reflects the stage of Aletheia’s work when we believed the main problem was missing information: if young people simply knew how their bodies worked, the shame would lift. That was true, and it still is. It just wasn’t the whole story. Our work has since grown into language, healthcare navigation, youth advocacy and systems change, but everything we make still starts here.

01 Your body is not inappropriate

A lot of us learned about our bodies in whispers. From a sibling, a group chat, a diagram in a textbook that the teacher skipped. Some of us learned that certain parts of our body didn't have names, or had names you weren't supposed to say out loud.

This pack does the opposite. It uses the real words, explains them plainly, and treats your body as what it is: normal, worth understanding, and yours.

LEARN

What's there

The parts of the body, inside and out, and what each one does.

UNDERSTAND

What's happening

Puberty, hormones and the menstrual cycle, step by step.

NORMALISE

What's normal

Myths, facts and the wide range of bodies that are completely healthy.



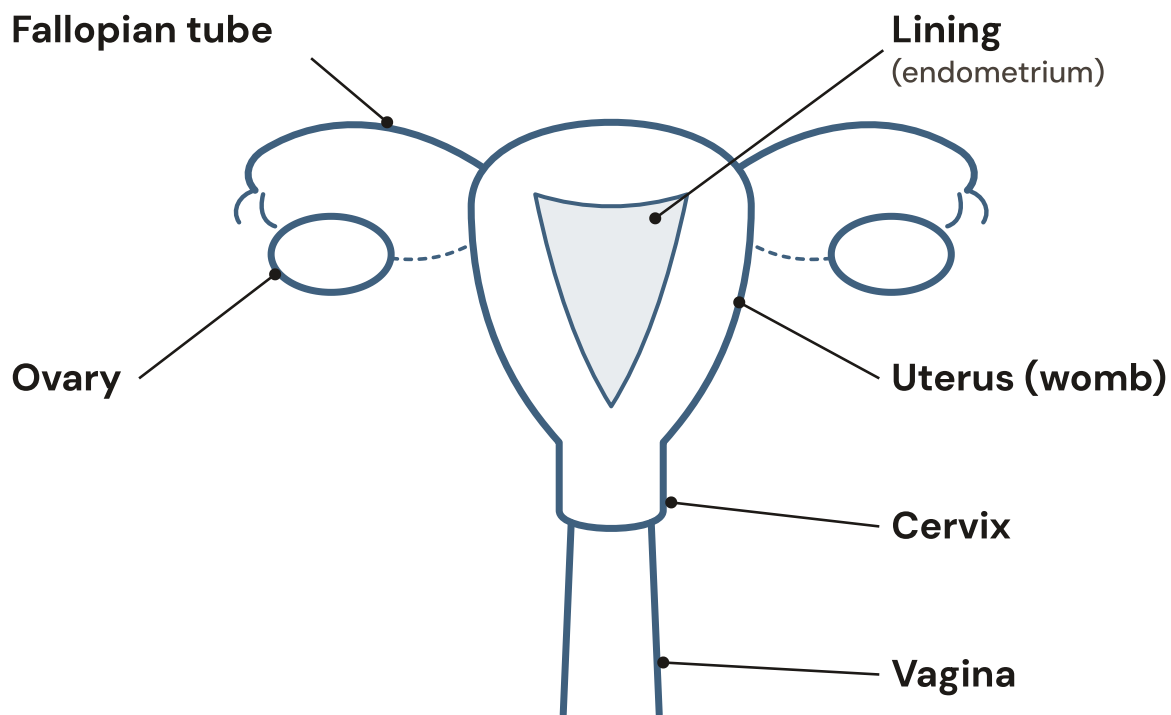
A note on words

We use the correct medical names, because they're the ones a doctor will understand and because nothing about them is rude. This pack focuses on the bodies of girls and people with a uterus, because that's where the silence has been loudest. Not everyone with these body parts is a girl, and not every girl has them. Everyone deserves to understand the body they live in.

02 LEARN Your body, labelled

Most of the reproductive system is inside the body, which is part of why it feels mysterious. Here are the main parts, what they're called and what they do.

Inside: the reproductive organs



Simplified and not to scale. Every body varies.

Front view, simplified. The uterus is roughly the size of a small pear and sits low in the pelvis, between the bladder and the bowel.

Uterus

YOO-ter-us · also called the womb

WHAT IT IS

A hollow, muscular organ. Each month its lining thickens in case of pregnancy, then sheds if there isn't one. That shedding is a period.

GOOD TO KNOW

The uterus is a muscle. Period cramps happen when it squeezes to push the lining out.

Ovaries

OH-va-rees

WHAT IT IS

Two small organs, one on each side, that store eggs and make the hormones oestrogen and progesterone.

GOOD TO KNOW

You're born with all the eggs you will ever have. From puberty, usually one is released each cycle.

Fallopian tubes

fa-LOH-pee-an

WHAT IT IS

Two thin tubes that carry an egg from the ovary towards the uterus. If sperm meets an egg, it usually happens here.

Cervix

SER-vix

WHAT IT IS

The narrow lower end of the uterus that opens into the vagina. Period blood passes through it. Cervical screening checks this area from age 25.

Vagina

va-JY-na

WHAT IT IS

A stretchy, muscular canal from the cervix to the outside of the body. Period blood leaves through it, and it's where a tampon or menstrual cup goes.

GOOD TO KNOW

The vagina is inside. The parts you can see on the outside are the vulva.

Hymen

HY-men

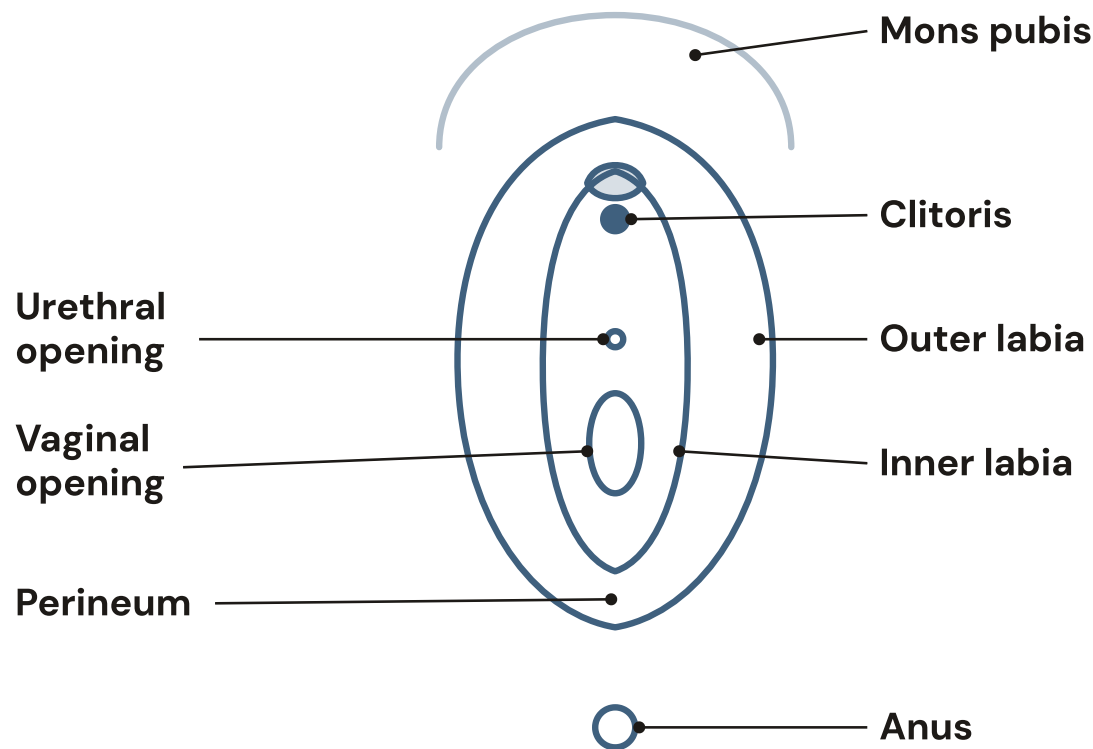
WHAT IT IS

A thin, flexible piece of tissue around the vaginal opening. It varies a lot between people and naturally stretches over time.

GOOD TO KNOW

It doesn't "break" in a way that shows anything about someone's sexual history. More in the myths section.

Outside: the vulva



Simplified. Every vulva looks different, and that's normal.

A simplified diagram, not a realistic drawing. Real vulvas vary a lot in colour, size and shape, including labia that are uneven or longer than the outer labia. All of that is normal.

Vulva

WHAT IT IS

The name for all the outside parts together: the mons, labia, clitoris and the urethral and vaginal openings.

Labia

WHAT IT IS

The outer and inner folds of skin (lips) that protect the openings. Inner labia often show past the outer ones.

Clitoris

WHAT IT IS

A sensitive organ. Only the tip (glans) is visible; most of it extends inside the body.

Urethral opening

WHAT IT IS

A small opening where urine (wee) leaves. It's separate from the vagina.

Vaginal opening

WHAT IT IS

Below the urethra. Period blood and discharge leave here.

Anus

WHAT IT IS

Where poo leaves the body. It's behind the vulva, not part of it.

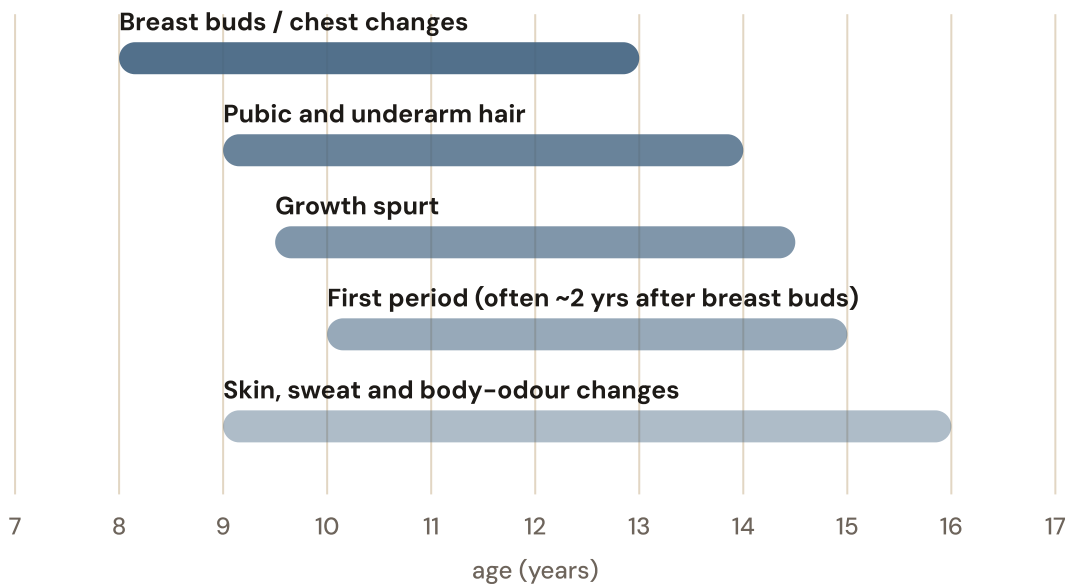
Other bodies, too

Bodies with testes go through puberty as well: the testes start producing sperm and testosterone, the voice deepens, and wet dreams and unexpected erections are common and normal. Knowing how other bodies work helps everyone talk about health without awkwardness, and it matters for intersex people and anyone whose body doesn't match a textbook.

03 UNDERSTAND Puberty, and the hormones behind it

Puberty is the few years when your body shifts from a child's to an adult's. It usually starts somewhere between 8 and 13, it doesn't follow a fixed order, and it isn't a race.

Usual ranges only. Earlier or later can be completely healthy. See 'When to check in' below.



Common ranges for girls and people with a uterus. Periods usually start about two years after breast buds appear.

The messengers: your hormones

Hormones are chemical messengers. They travel in your blood and tell different parts of your body what to do. A small part of the brain (the hypothalamus) and a gland beneath it (the pituitary) start puberty by signalling the ovaries to switch on.

Oestrogen

OVARIES

EES-tro-jen

WHAT IT IS

Builds the lining of the uterus, and drives breast development, wider hips and changes to skin and discharge.

Progesterone

OVARIES

pro-JES-te-rone

WHAT IT IS

Rises after ovulation to keep the lining ready. When it drops, the lining sheds and a period starts.

FSH and LH

BRAIN

WHAT IT IS

Follicle-stimulating hormone and luteinising hormone. They come from the pituitary and tell the ovaries to mature and release an egg.

Testosterone

EVERYONE

WHAT IT IS

Present in everyone, at different levels. In people with ovaries it contributes to body hair, oily skin and sex drive.

Changes you might notice

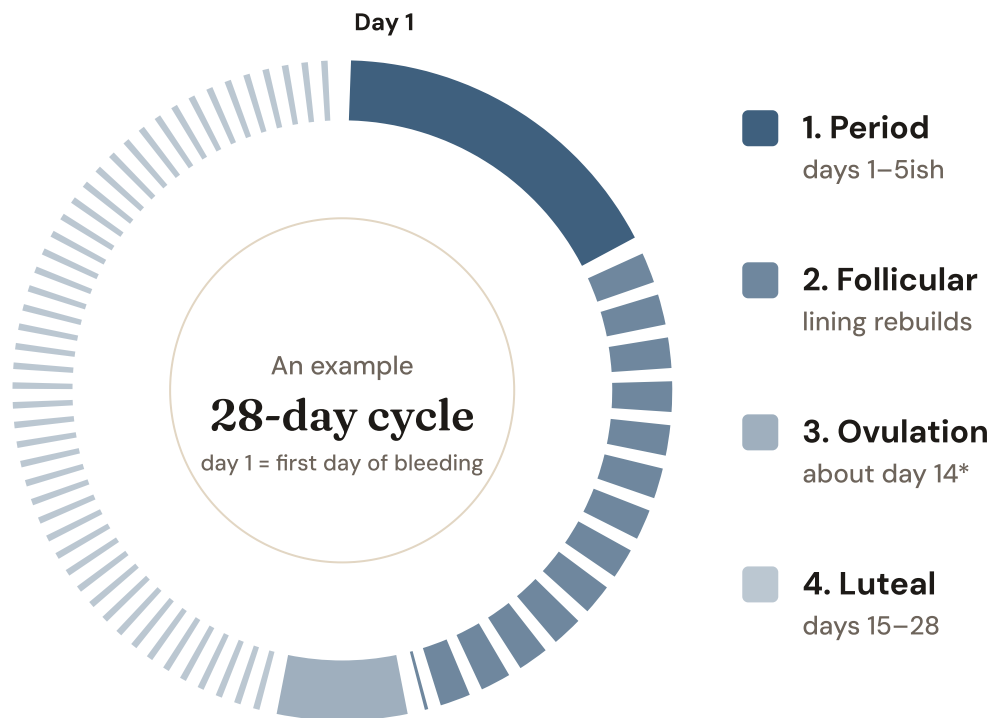
- Breast buds, which can be tender or uneven at first
- Hair under the arms, on the legs and around the vulva
- A growth spurt, and wider hips
- More sweat and body odour, and oilier skin or pimples
- Clear or white discharge from the vagina, often a few months before the first period
- Stronger or quicker-changing feelings

All of these are normal

- One breast growing faster than the other
- Stretch marks on hips, thighs or breasts
- Starting earlier or later than your friends
- Discharge that changes through the month
- Feeling awkward in a body that's changing fast

04 UNDERSTAND How a period actually works

A period is not the body “getting rid of bad blood”. It’s the uterus shedding a lining it no longer needs. Here’s the whole cycle.



**In teens, cycles of 21–45 days are common and ovulation shifts with cycle length.*

Day 1 is the first day of bleeding. “28 days” is an average, not a rule.

1 The period (about days 1–5)

Progesterone drops, so the lining of the uterus breaks down and leaves through the cervix and vagina as blood and tissue. Bleeding usually lasts 2 to 7 days.

2 The follicular phase

FSH tells the ovaries to ripen some eggs. Oestrogen rises, the lining starts to rebuild, and discharge often becomes clearer and stretchier.

3 Ovulation (around the middle)

LH surges and one egg is released into a fallopian tube. Some people feel a twinge on one side. This is when pregnancy is most likely.

The luteal phase

Progesterone keeps the lining ready. If there's no pregnancy, hormone levels fall, and some people notice sore breasts, bloating or mood changes (PMS) before the next period.

HOW LONG

21 to 45 days

The time from the first day of one period to the first day of the next. Cycles are often irregular for the first year or two after periods start.

HOW MUCH

A few tablespoons

It looks like more, but most of a period is only a few tablespoons of fluid across the whole thing. Blood mixes with tissue and mucus.

WHAT COLOUR

Red to brown

Bright red, dark red and brown are all normal. Brown is older blood. Small clots can be normal too. Clots bigger than a 50-cent coin are worth mentioning to a GP.

Period products

PRODUCT	HOW IT WORKS	GOOD TO KNOW
Pads	Stick to underwear and absorb blood.	Change every 3 to 6 hours or when full. A good first product.
Tampons	Sit inside the vagina and absorb blood.	Use the lowest absorbency you need and change every 4 to 8 hours. Never leave one in longer than 8 hours.
Menstrual cups and discs	Sit inside and collect blood. Empty, rinse, reuse.	Can stay in for up to 12 hours. Sizing matters, so check the brand's guide.
Period underwear	Underwear with an absorbent layer.	Reusable. Good for light days, overnight, or as back-up.



Toxic shock syndrome (TSS): rare, but know the signs

TSS is a rare but serious illness linked to tampons and cups. If you suddenly get a high fever, vomiting or diarrhoea, a rash that looks like sunburn, dizziness or fainting while using one: take it out and get urgent medical help straight away. In an emergency, call 000.

SCENARIO

Maya and the cramps no one explained

Maya is 13. On the first day of her period she gets a deep, dragging ache low in her tummy and her lower back. She's heard "cramps" before, but she thought it meant something small, and she wonders if something's wrong.

In her health notes she finds the answer: during a period the uterus, which is a muscle, squeezes to push the lining out. Chemicals called prostaglandins cause those contractions, and they can make you feel sore, and sometimes a bit sick or loose in the tummy. It's common. Heat packs, gentle movement and period pain relief from a pharmacist often help.

She also reads the other half: pain that stops you going to school, or doesn't get better with the usual things, is worth talking to a GP about. She files that away.

Maya is fictional. You'll meet her again in the later editions of this archive.

05 Myths, facts, and the things people whisper

Myths stick around because nobody corrects them out loud. So let's.

MYTH

~~You can't swim or play sport on your period.~~

FACT

You can do anything you usually do. Tampons, cups and period swimwear make swimming easy, and exercise can ease cramps.

MYTH

~~Using a tampon means you're not a virgin anymore.~~

FACT

Tampons don't change anything about virginity. Virginity is a social idea, not a body part, and the hymen stretches naturally.

MYTH

~~Period blood is dirty or unhygienic.~~

FACT

It's blood and tissue from the uterus, not waste. It's no dirtier than blood from a cut.

MYTH

~~You can't get pregnant on your period.~~

FACT

It's less likely, but possible, especially with short or irregular cycles. Periods are not contraception.

MYTH

~~PMS is just an excuse to be moody.~~

FACT

Hormone changes before a period can cause real physical and emotional symptoms. They're recognised by doctors.

MYTH

~~Bad period pain is just something you have to put up with.~~

FACT

Some pain is common. Pain that stops you living your life is not something to put up with, and it's worth seeing a GP.

MYTH

~~Discharge means something is wrong.~~

FACT

Clear or white discharge is normal and keeps the vagina healthy. It changes through your cycle.

MYTH

~~Everyone's periods sync up when they live together.~~

FACT

Research hasn't shown that periods reliably sync. Cycles vary, so they sometimes line up by chance.

Say it plainly

Families and cultures have lots of nicknames for periods and bodies, and that's fine at home. At the doctor, the real word saves time and gets you taken seriously. Here are a few swaps.

WHAT PEOPLE SOMETIMES SAY	THE WORD A DOCTOR USES	MEANING
"Down there"	Vulva / vagina	Outside parts / the internal canal
"That time of the month"	Period, menstruation	The bleeding part of the cycle
"Women's problems"	Gynaecological symptoms	Anything to do with the reproductive organs
"My tummy hurts"	Pelvic pain, period pain	Pain low in the belly, between the hips
"Spotting"	Bleeding between periods	Light bleeding outside your period

REFLECT

Your turn

1. What's one thing about your body that you were never told, and wish you had been?
2. What word for a body part feels awkward to say? Try saying it out loud once. Nothing happens.

“My grandmother told me drinking cold water during my period would make me infertile. I was so scared I avoided ice cream for years. When I finally learned the truth, I felt cheated — like I’d wasted years being afraid of my own body.”

26, Korean international student

“At school, girls told each other that you couldn’t get pregnant the first time you had sex. We all knew someone who believed it. I still remember a friend crying in the bathroom after her first time, thinking she was safe, only to find out she wasn’t.”

21, Australian university student

“My mum never really talked about periods, so when I got mine, I sat her down and asked questions instead. She was shocked — like no one had ever asked her before. Now she asks me what I’ve learned from TikTok doctors or school, and we kind of swap knowledge.”

15, Italian–Australian high school student

Shared with Aletheia and first published on our blog in [Body literacy through generations](#). Names removed.

06 NORMALISE What's normal, and when to check in

Bodies vary a lot, and most changes are healthy. These are the signs that it's worth talking to a GP or school nurse. You're not overreacting by asking.

COMMON

Usually normal

- Irregular periods in the first 1–2 years
- Mild cramps that ease with heat or pain relief
- Discharge that changes through the month
- Sore breasts or bloating before a period

BOOK A GP

Worth checking

- No period by 15, or none 3 years after breast buds
- Signs of puberty before 8
- Periods that stop for 3 months or more
- Cycles shorter than 21 or longer than 45 days
- Bleeding for more than 7 days
- Changing a pad or tampon every 1–2 hours
- Pain that makes you miss school or plans
- Bleeding between periods

GET HELP NOW

Urgent

- Soaking a pad or tampon every hour for several hours, or feeling faint or dizzy
- Sudden, severe pain in your tummy or pelvis
- TSS signs: high fever, rash, vomiting while using a tampon or cup
- Call 000 in an emergency, or healthdirect on 1800 022 222 for advice



Going to the GP about your period is normal

GPs talk about periods every day. You can go on your own from about 14 or 15, and in many situations what you say can be kept confidential. Later editions of this pack go much further into how to explain what's happening and what to ask.

WHERE THIS IDEA WENT NEXT

From knowing your body to the rest of our work

Plain, accurate body knowledge is still where Aletheia starts. It became the Health Literacy pillar, it shapes our digital health education, and it sits inside every Empower Pack alongside first-period essentials.

Five Pillars

Health Literacy 101 is the first of them

Digital Health Education

Plain-language articles and myth-busting

Empower Packs

Voice Packs with period and health essentials

Next: Archive Edition 02

Knowing your body was not enough on its own

Health education, not medical advice. This pack explains general health information so you can understand your body and talk about it. It cannot diagnose you. If you're worried about your health, speak to a doctor, nurse or other health professional. **In an emergency, call 000.**

Emergency • 000

If you or someone else is in danger or needs urgent medical help.

Kids Helpline • 1800 55

1800

Free, 24/7 phone and webchat, ages 5–25.

Lifeline • 13 11 14

24/7 crisis support. Text 0477 13 11 14.

headspace •
headspace.org.au

Free or low-cost support, ages
12–25.

► **Sources and fact-checking (6)**

Written and designed by The Aletheia Project resource development team. Scenarios are fictional. We acknowledge the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the Kulin Nation, where Aletheia was founded. Sovereignty was never ceded.

