Working Collaboratively with First Nations Peoples

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples continue to suffer from higher rates of mental illness than non-Indigenous populations.

- Suicide accounted for 5.5 per cent of all deaths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in 2020. The equivalent figure for non-Indigenous Australians was 1.9 per cent (AIHW, 2020).
- 31 per cent of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults had high to very high levels of psychological distress in 2018-19 compared to 13 per cent of non-Indigenous Australians (AIHW and NIAA, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework: Summary Report, 2020).
- The suicide rate in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is twice that of the non-Indigenous population, and suicide occurs at much younger ages. Suicide is the number one cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders aged 15-35 years (QMHC, Every Life: The Queensland Suicide Prevention Plan 2019-2029).

Concerningly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait peoples report that they are often treated poorly in mental health systems which are not delivering culturally appropriate models of care. Historical and ongoing colonisation, including the forced removal of children, lack of self-determination and structural racism contribute to this. We believe we have an obligation to be part of the process of righting these historical wrongs by:

- Working collaboratively with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples towards self-determination to establish community-controlled organisations
- Ensuring mainstream services are delivered in a culturally safe manner
- Sharing information about different approaches to mental health and wellbeing

To this end, QAMH has compiled a list of resources to help members work collaboratively and respectfully with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Resource Links

- **Local Perspectives on Strengths, Needs and Goals in the Aurukun Community**

  https://ro.ecu.edu.au/aihjournal/vol4/iss4/4/

  This study explores local perspectives on the goals, strengths and areas of need in the community, and perceptions of the role of a man in Aurukun - a small Aboriginal community located in remote Cape York, Far North Queensland. The study involved informal interviews with seventeen individuals from the Aurukun community, with the research project guided by a reference group comprising local community members and elders. It found that communities' main strength was their connection to culture, the areas most needing improvement were violence, alcohol use, over incarceration, poor support for mental health and a lack of employment opportunities. Participants saw the best way forward as being through more employment and better communication. Overall, this study provides useful

exploration of the interconnectedness of these themes as well as their implications for successful program development and evaluation.

- **QAMH Reconciliation Action Plan: Our Business Case**

  https://www.qamh.org.au/wp-content/uploads/QAMH-RAP-Business-Case_FINAL.pdf

  Queensland Alliance for Mental Health (QAMH) has completed a business case as part of its commitment to adopt a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). The business case outlines reasons – including big picture, legal and ethical – why it is important for QAMH to implement a RAP. The business case covers the following points:
    - Our RAP vision
    - Why is this important for our organisation?
        o The Big Picture
        o Benefits to business
    - What will it require?
        o First Nations Australians considerations and representation
        o Impact on our business internally
        o Impact on the wider community
    - Risks and opportunities

  QAMH are sharing this work with members as - in the process of developing this RAP business case - we found that there weren't many useful examples to guide this process.

- **Towards Truth**

  Towards Truth | Towards Truth

  The Public Interest Advocacy Centre (PIAC) and UNSW Indigenous Law Centre (ILC) have launched Towards Truth, a tool to support First Nations-led truth telling in Australia. Created in response to the Uluṟu Statement from the Heart, Towards Truth shows how laws and policies have affected First Nations people since 1788 and provides a crucial resource for understanding our shared history. While initial work has begun in NSW, other jurisdictions are set to follow.

- **Closing the Gap Information Repository**

  Closing the Gap Information Repository

  The Closing the Gap Information Repository is produced by the Productivity Commission and includes:

    o The Dashboard – this is the most up-to-date information available on the targets and indicators in the Agreement. The data will be available in different formats including visual.
    o The Annual Data Compilation Report - a point-in-time snapshot of the Dashboard material.

- **Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse – Intergenerational Trauma and Mental Health**

  [Intergenerational trauma and mental health - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC](#)

  This paper aims to define the link between intergenerational trauma and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and to identify current best-practice policies and programs to address this issue.

- **Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse – Indigenous Domestic and Family Violence, Mental Health and Suicide**

  [Indigenous domestic and family violence, mental health and suicide - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC](#)

  This article discusses the complexities regarding domestic family violence and mental health for Indigenous Australians and highlights relevant policies and programs that demonstrate best practice. It also highlights the work to be done to ensure that mental health is effectively integrated to demonstrate better and more culturally safe outcomes.

- **Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse – Racism and Indigenous Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide**

  [Racism and Indigenous wellbeing, mental health and suicide - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC](#)

  In the context of mental health, this article provides an overview of how racism affects Indigenous Australians, their access to care and the policies and programs that address cultural safety in the health system.

- **Respectful Language Guide**

  [Respectful Language Guide (publications.qld.gov.au)](#)

  This Respectful Language Guide has been designed to assist Queensland Government staff to make respectful, conscious and insightful choices of words, terms and language.

  The document includes the following:
  o preferred (and non-preferred) language, terms and ways of expressing
  o background, context, explanation and historical information to provide the rationale for each recommendation
  o further reading and resources, actions, insights and quotes shared by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff members

- **Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status 2022**

https://healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/publications/46464/?title=Overview+of+Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+health+status+2022&contentid=46464_1

The Overview of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health status 2022 provide a detailed picture of the current health status of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The early sections of the Overview present information about the social and cultural context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, social determinants, the structure of the population, and measures of population health including births, deaths and hospitalisations. The remaining sections consist of selected health conditions and risk/protective factors that contribute to the overall health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

- **Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future**

  https://apo.org.au/sites/default/files/resource-files/2023-03/apo-nid321911.pdf

  This report documents, through eight case studies, organisations and individuals work in communities to enrich the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth. It finds that young people are a powerful engine for positive change and draws attention to the essential role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led decision-making and self-determination in shaping a vision of health and wellbeing built upon a strong cultural foundation.

- **Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Resources**

  Wellmob - WellMob

  We highly recommend this collection of free online resources relating to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It includes practical resources such as short videos, fact sheets, podcasts, links to useful websites and more.

- **Creating Culturally Safe Workplaces**

  Creating workplace cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples - CSIA (csialtd.com.au)

  This highly recommended resource from CSIA show organisations how to create workplaces that are culturally safe for our First Nations peoples.

- **The Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute**

[Urban Indigenous homelessness: much more than housing (apo.org.au)](apo.org.au).

Did you know that one in 28 First Nations people were homeless at the time of the 2016 Census? Or that the homelessness rate of First Nations people is 10 times that of non-Indigenous people? This report published by the Australian Housing and Urban Research Institute unpacks these alarming statistics, including the systemic factors that have led to them, and offers practical policy solutions for impactful and lasting change.

- **Addressing the Broad Social, Cultural and Political Determinants**

[Indigenous Nation Building and the Political Determinants of Health and Wellbeing Discussion Paper | Lowitja Institute](#)

This paper from the Lowitja Institute discusses Indigenous nation building in the context of recent developments towards Voice, Treaty and Truth. It sees self-governed self-determination through community-controlled organisations to address the broad social, cultural and political determinants of health and wellbeing, leading to improved outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

- **The Black Dog Institute - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Portal**

[Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre - Black Dog Institute](#)

The Black Dog Institute now has an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Portal, which is designed to "elevate the voices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' lived experiences to contribute to the development of culturally safe, trauma-informed services, care and programs." It includes a wonderful suite of resources and facilitates partnerships between organisations and lived experience community members. We recommend you check it out!

- **Uluru Statement from the Heart**

[Home - Uluru Statement from the Heart](#)

In May 2017, more than 250 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates gathered in the shadow of Uluru and put their signatures on a historic statement. The Uluru Statement from the Heart, addressed to the Australian people, invited the nation to create a better future. In particular it called on the Australian people to establish a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution and a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making and truth-telling about our history. Here you can read the document in full.

- **National Agreement on Closing the Gap**

[National Agreement on Closing the Gap | Closing the Gap](#)

A landmark document, this National Agreement on Closing the Gap (the National Agreement) aims to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments to work together to overcome the inequality experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and achieve life outcomes equal to all Australians. The document highlights the four priority reforms, the 17 targets (many of which are directly related to mental health and wellbeing), and an Implementation Tracker to help track progress.

- **Closing the Gap: annual data**

  [Closing the Gap: annual data compilation report July 2022 (apo.org.au)](apo.org.au)

  The Productivity Commission's second Annual Data Compilation Report on Closing the Gap allows us to see whether the actions committed to have actually occurred, and if the life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have improved. The results are mixed with some outcomes on track and others revealing a widening of the gap.

- **Indigenous Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse**

  [Indigenous Mental Health & Suicide Prevention Clearinghouse - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC](#)

  This Clearinghouse has an abundance of data, research and evaluation projects related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health. You can access the latest publications on Connection to Community, Employment and Indigenous Mental Health, Indigenous Self-governance and much more.

- **Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031**

  [National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031 | Australian Government Department of Health and Aged Care](#)

  This is a comprehensive document which sets an ambitious, yet achievable target that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are fully represented in the health workforce by 2031. We commend the work of all involved to produce a document which genuinely recognises that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workforce will deliver the best outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

- **Impact and causes of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people**

  [Australian Burden of Disease Study: impact and causes of illness and death in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people 2018 – summary report, Summary - Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (aihw.gov.au)](aihw.gov.au)

This AIHW report analyses the burden of disease in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. It features some sobering statistics and is a reminder that while we have made some gains in closing the gap, there is still a long way to go.

- **The Manual of Resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention**

  [The Manual of Resources - CBPATSISP](#)

  The Manual is a collection of practical resources and tools that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people can use to promote social and emotional wellbeing and prevent suicide in our communities. It gives simple guidance on positive actions that can be taken in a crisis or to address an ongoing issue.

  The Manual is organised in three sections:

  - For individuals, families, Elders and community members
  - For clinicians and other front-line workers (both Indigenous and non-Indigenous)
  - For Primary Health Networks and other commissioning organisations

  Each section includes downloadable resources, checklists, online decision tools and best practice case studies that support users to respond positively and proportionately in whatever situation they face.

- **Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice**

  [Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing (telethonkids.org.au)](#)

  First published in 2010 and regularly revised, this document has become an invaluable resource on social and emotional wellbeing. It has been heralded as "an important step towards recognising the existence of a distinct field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology and raising awareness about the inappropriate application of western mental health models to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples". Covering a broad range of issues including the devastating impacts of colonisation, the social determinants of health, and the need for local and culturally appropriate solutions, this document has become the 'go-to' resource for professionals working in the field of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing.

- **A Guide to Culturally Safe Practice in Mental Health**

  [A-Guide-to-Culturally-Safe-Practice-in-Mental-Health_FINAL.pdf (mhcc.org.au)](#)

  This guide was developed by NSW's Mental Health Coordinating Council. It acknowledges that mental health services are best delivered by people from the same cultural background as those they support. In the absence of these ideal conditions, this guide supports workers

from non-Aboriginal backgrounds to foster a culturally safe environment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing their service.

- **Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet: Social and Emotional Wellbeing**

  [Social and Emotional Wellbeing - Health Topics - Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (ecu.edu.au)](ecu.edu.au)

  This resource, from the Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet, is a treasure trove of information on all things related to social and emotional wellbeing including:

  - o Thousands of online journal articles, reports and other key resources
  - o Job listings, scholarships, bursaries and grants
  - o Latest events Australia-wide

- **Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing**

  [Home - Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (timhwb.org.au)](timhwb.org.au)

  This research body's mission is to work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations to collate and undertake research that improves the cultural safety of mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia. You will find a wealth of research projects and publications on this website, along with links to useful media articles.

- **The Healing Foundation**

  [The Healing Foundation | Supporting the healing of Stolen Generations survivors, families and communities](#)

  The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that provides a platform to amplify the voices of Stolen Generation survivors and their families. They work with communities to create a place of safety, providing an environment for Stolen Generation survivors and their families to speak for themselves, tell their own stories, and be in charge of their own healing. They also promote trauma-aware, healing-informed practice to help government, policymakers and workforces understand their role in intergenerational healing.

- **Thirrili – Working to Address Suicide Prevention and Postvention**

  [Thirrili: Contributing to the broader social wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.](#)

Thirrili is a not-for-profit organisation that works to deliver Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention and postvention programs. It provides crucial supports to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples suffering grief, loss and trauma due to the loss of a loved one through suicide and other critical incidents.

- **13YARN – Crisis Support**

  [13YARN - Call 13 92 76 | 24 /7 Crisis support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders](#)

  13YARN is the first national crisis support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping. It is a free, confidential service available 24/7 run by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It provides the opportunity to yarn about needs, worries or concerns without judgement within a culturally safe space.

- **Aboriginal Disability Liaison Officer (ADLO) program**

  [Dedicated support for urban and rural First Nations Australians to engage with the NDIS | NDIS](#)

  This program provides dedicated support to First Nations Australians in urban and rural areas to access the NDIS and use their plans. Employed locally by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), ADLOs work at a local level to build understanding of the NDIS.