

## Media Release

### **Past has role to play in reducing Indigenous suicide rates**

The ongoing impacts of intergenerational trauma, disempowerment and disengagement cannot be overlooked if Indigenous suicide rates are to be reduced according to University of Southern Queensland Associate Professor Raelene Ward.

A registered nurse, Dr Ward is a Senior Lecturer at USQ's College for Indigenous Studies Education and Research School of Nursing, and recently completed her PhD in suicide prevention, specifically exploring Aboriginal understandings of suicides from a social and emotional wellbeing point of view.

"It is well known that suicides among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are much more frequent in comparison to other Queenslanders, and I really wanted to get a more comprehensive understanding of suicides from an Aboriginal perspective," Professor Ward said.

"I consulted more than 50 Aboriginal residents across Darling Downs and the South West Queensland who have been affected by suicide and understand their experiences, where they feel they were let down or what could have been done differently, and their ideas around what could put in place for their communities in the future," she said.

"Our region has been affected greatly by suicide in recent years, and there's been a lot of commentary from the Indigenous community around negative experiences with attempting to access mental health services and support."

Professor Ward will share the key findings of her research at a [community forum in Toowoomba next month](#) that's focus is on reducing youth suicide through collective community support.

"Some people wonder how things that happened in Aboriginal families sixty, seventy or eighty years ago can impact a young person today to the point of taking their own life, but these are traumatic events that have played a factor in modern day disadvantage within the larger social and health context," she said.

"There is good work being done in suicide prevention and postvention, but it is policy and strategy that is coming down from a top level that doesn't consider or understand how Indigenous people access services, especially communities that are rural or remote.

"One theme that kept coming through strongly in my research is the need to have our people involved in designing these services and mental health support and also have a front line role for Aboriginal medical officers in hospitals and other healthcare settings where assessments are made."

Professor Ward said while she had always planned to serve her community, she never planned on becoming a spokesperson.

"I am at a point in my career and my life now where I have to acknowledge that being the only Aboriginal person who has completed a PhD on Aboriginal suicide with a nursing and mental

health background means I have a role to play on behalf of our Indigenous community, and I hope I can keep the conversations going in the right direction.”

-ENDS-

**Captions:** Dr Raelene Ward (USQ Photography)

**Media contact:**

Megan Woodward, [megan.woodward@usq.edu.au](mailto:megan.woodward@usq.edu.au); 0487 352 859

Sarah Green, [sarah.green@usq.edu.au](mailto:sarah.green@usq.edu.au); 0417 799 331

