



MEDIA STATEMENT

10 September 2021

‘We will continue to Create Hope through Action’ NACCHO’s message on World Suicide Prevention Day

The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO) believes this year’s theme on World Suicide Prevention Day, ‘Creating hope through action’, aligns with the innovative work done by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led organisations and by NACCHO’s members to address disproportionate suicide rates amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, particularly amongst our young people.

NACCHO Chair Donnella Mills said, “Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults are 2.7 times more likely to experience high or very high levels of psychological distress than other Australians. Our people comprise 11% of all emergency department mental health presentations across the Country. Our children and grandchildren continue to experience the impacts of past practices and policies. The rate of suicide for our young people is four times the rate of other Australian young people.

“For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, social determinants affecting mental health can include factors such as cultural identity, family, intergenerational trauma, participation in cultural activities and access to traditional lands, lack of access to affordable housing, exposure to violence.

“The suffering of the Stolen Generations continues to have significant impacts on their health and well-being with intergenerational impacts of this trauma.

“In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic has contributed to increased feelings of isolation, anxiety and depression.

“To address these factors, adequate and ongoing funding support for evidence-based, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led, social and emotional well-being (SEWB), mental health, and suicide prevention programs is vital, and we will continue to advocate for funding to support the rollout of culturally competent services.

“We are in the midst of a critical reform period in mental health policy and programs. Commonwealth and state and territory government have demonstrated an appetite to make necessary systems reforms. These changes need to be made in alignment with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

“We know Aboriginal leadership, self-determination, and community control by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people works. We want to work in genuine partnership with governments to make sure our people receive the mental health supports they are entitled to.”

Ms Mills highlights the impressive programs run by Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), stating, “I want to acknowledge the incredible work ACCHOs are doing around social and emotional well-being, suicide prevention and mental health. These programs are saving lives every day.

“Danila Dilba Health Service in Darwin and the Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Service are each running one of the Federal Government’s twelve National Suicide Prevention Trials. Another member service, Katungul in NSW, developed specific training tools for their primary care staff in suicide prevention to ensure they were best equipped to assist their community.



“The Kimberley Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Trial is helping to develop a suicide prevention model suitable for the unique needs of Kimberley Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. At its core is an acknowledgement of the need for empowering local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities through the development and implementation of place-based suicide prevention programs and initiatives.”

The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) Director, Professor Pat Dudgeon said, “The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) established the connection between suicide and experiences of colonisation, structural racism and continuing social and economic disadvantage.

“Holistic approaches are needed. We know programs that honour and restore our connection to our culture, Country and community can strengthen our people’s social and emotional wellbeing and protect against suicide.

“That thinking is at the heart of Indigenous suicide prevention policy – including the forthcoming National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy. The ACCHO sector is at the forefront of delivering culturally responsive suicide prevention to communities, and I look forward to increasing commitment by the government to ensure these essential services can expand to reach everyone who needs them.”

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia CEO Thomas Brideson said, “In October the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2021 – 2031 will be released. This Strategy development was led by Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia and builds on the 2013 Strategy. The main theme throughout is empowering individuals, services and communities consistent with the National Agreement for Closing the Gap.”

There are several Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resources available online. Here are a few links:

- [Suicide prevention resources - Developed by the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention](#)
- [The Healing portal – Developed by The Healing Foundation](#)
- [Social and emotional wellbeing resources – Developed by the Aboriginal Health & Medical Research Council](#)

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NACCHO is the national peak body representing 143 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) across the Country on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO is the third largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia, with over 3,500 out of the 6,000 staff working in ACCHOs being either of Aboriginal and or Torres Strait Islander background.

Many ACCHOs have almost 50 years of experience in the delivery of comprehensive primary health care. Services are delivered through fixed, outreach and mobile clinics operating in urban, rural and remote settings across Australia.