

New integrated systems approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention announced

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Two leading organisations will work together on a new approach to preventing suicides among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, combining proven strategies, to create a powerful blueprint for saving lives.

The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) at The University of Western Australia will collaborate with Black Dog Institute to develop an integrated systems approach to suicide prevention in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Taking the findings of the 2016 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) as the starting point, the collaboration will work with Indigenous community organisations, clinicians, academics, and others to develop a combination of interventions with the potential to reduce Indigenous suicides. Tragically, suicide rates in this population are more than double that of other Australians.

Professor Pat Dudgeon, Director of the CBPATSISP said, “We demonstrated through ATSISPEP that the unacceptably high rate of suicide in our communities is a consequence of colonisation, intergenerational trauma and systemic racism, and we know that effective responses must be based on Indigenous leadership and empowerment.

“Since that time, we have greatly increased our understanding about interventions that help our people find strength in community, culture and Country. This collaboration with Black Dog Institute represents the next stage in that learning, to understand how the existing services and systems in a community can be applied together, with a cultural lens so that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can benefit from an integrated framework.”

Leilani Darwin, Director, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Strategy at Black Dog Institute, said, “Systems approaches, in which multiple proven suicide prevention interventions are applied simultaneously, are well established worldwide, and can significantly reduce suicides. Black Dog Institute has used learnings from its LifeSpan integrated suicide prevention model to provide support to the 12 National Suicide Prevention Trial sites, with several of these including a priority population focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

“This work with the CBPATSISP represents an opportunity to ensure those gains are extended to Indigenous communities in a supportive and culturally responsive way.”

Commenting on the announcement, Tom Brideson, Chief Executive Officer of Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia said, “This is a good opportunity to take a broad systems-based approach to continue to build the evidence and to focus on improvements for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples using multiple strategies at the same time.”

An initial meeting later this month between the CBPATSISP, Black Dog Institute and other key organisations including Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia and the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), will discuss the scope for the work, and will be followed by broad consultation. The work will support the forthcoming National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy.

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