



The Centre of Best Practice in
Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander
Suicide Prevention

Indigenous Suicide Prevention and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Centre for Social Impact

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University of Western Australia

Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention

Acknowledgement

We acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the lands that we are meeting on today and pay respect to Elders past and present, and to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We recognise that our work in suicide prevention and social and emotional wellbeing stands on the shoulders of our ancestors and leaders, who continue to advocate for our culture, strength and resilience. We value the support of our allies as we walk together towards social justice.



History and Culture

- 60,000-75,000 years of **rich culture and history**
- Recognised as the **oldest living culture** in the world
- **Colonisation** occurred ~200 years ago and led to:
 - Frontier wars and genocide
 - Forced removal of Aboriginal peoples off their Country
 - Dispossession of land
- However, there is **survival, strength, and resilience**
- Prior to colonisation there were **250 language groups and cultures (diversity)**. These are being reclaimed.
- On June 30, 2021, there were **983,700 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** representing **3.8%** of the total population of 26 million in Australia. (ABS,2021)

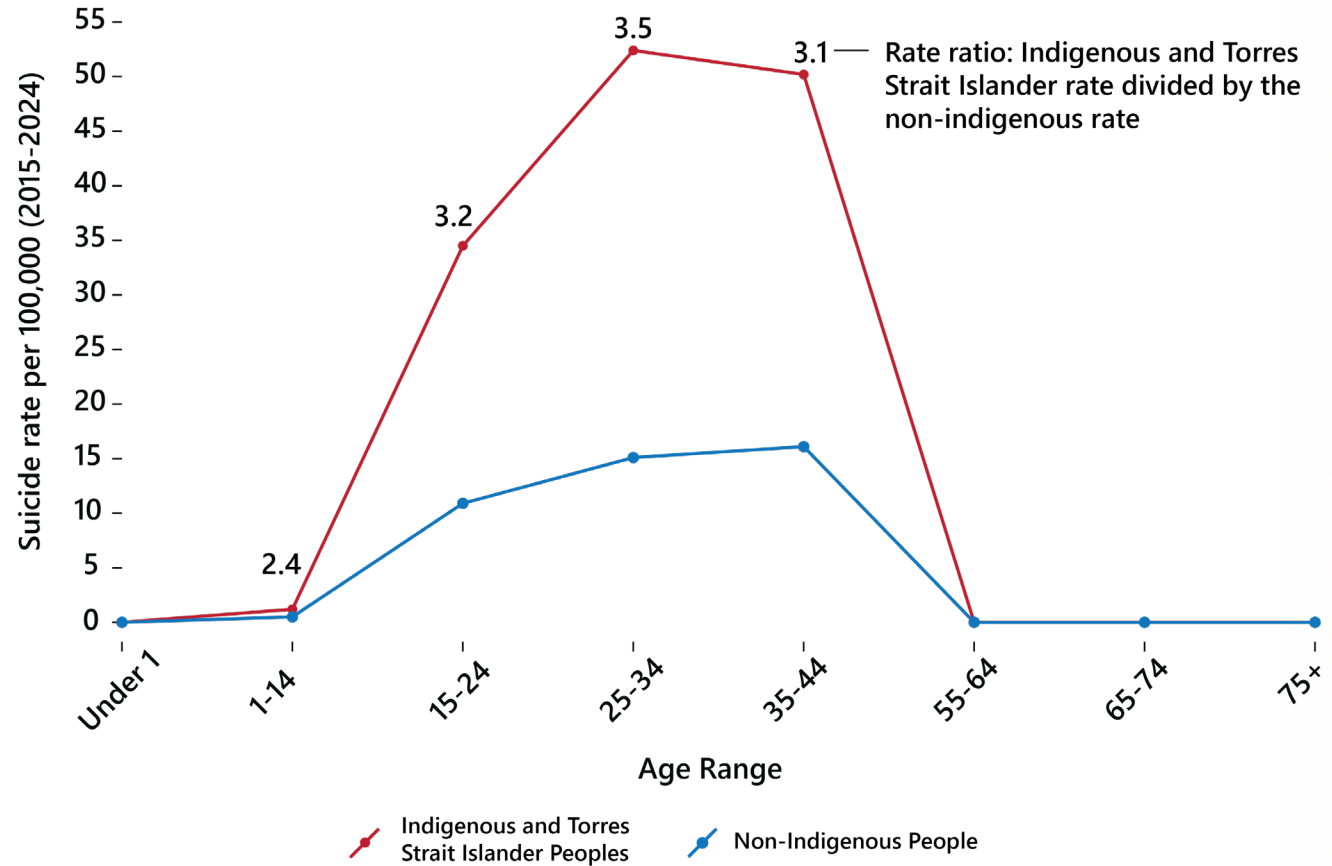


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Rates

- Suicide accounts for **5.5% of deaths** among **Indigenous people** (all ages) (1.7% non-Indigenous).
- Suicide is the **2nd leading cause of death** for **Indigenous males** (all ages) (10th non-Indigenous)
- Suicide is the **10th leading cause of death** for **Indigenous females** (all ages) (28th non-Indigenous)
- Suicide accounts for **almost 21%** of all **Indigenous child deaths** (ages 5 to 17)

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2025

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Rates



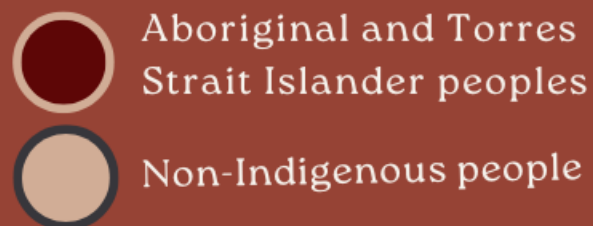
In 2024, the overall Aboriginal suicide rate was **three times** that of other Australians.

Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2025

Suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia in 2024

(Updated April 2026)

Rate of suicide per 100 000 people



References

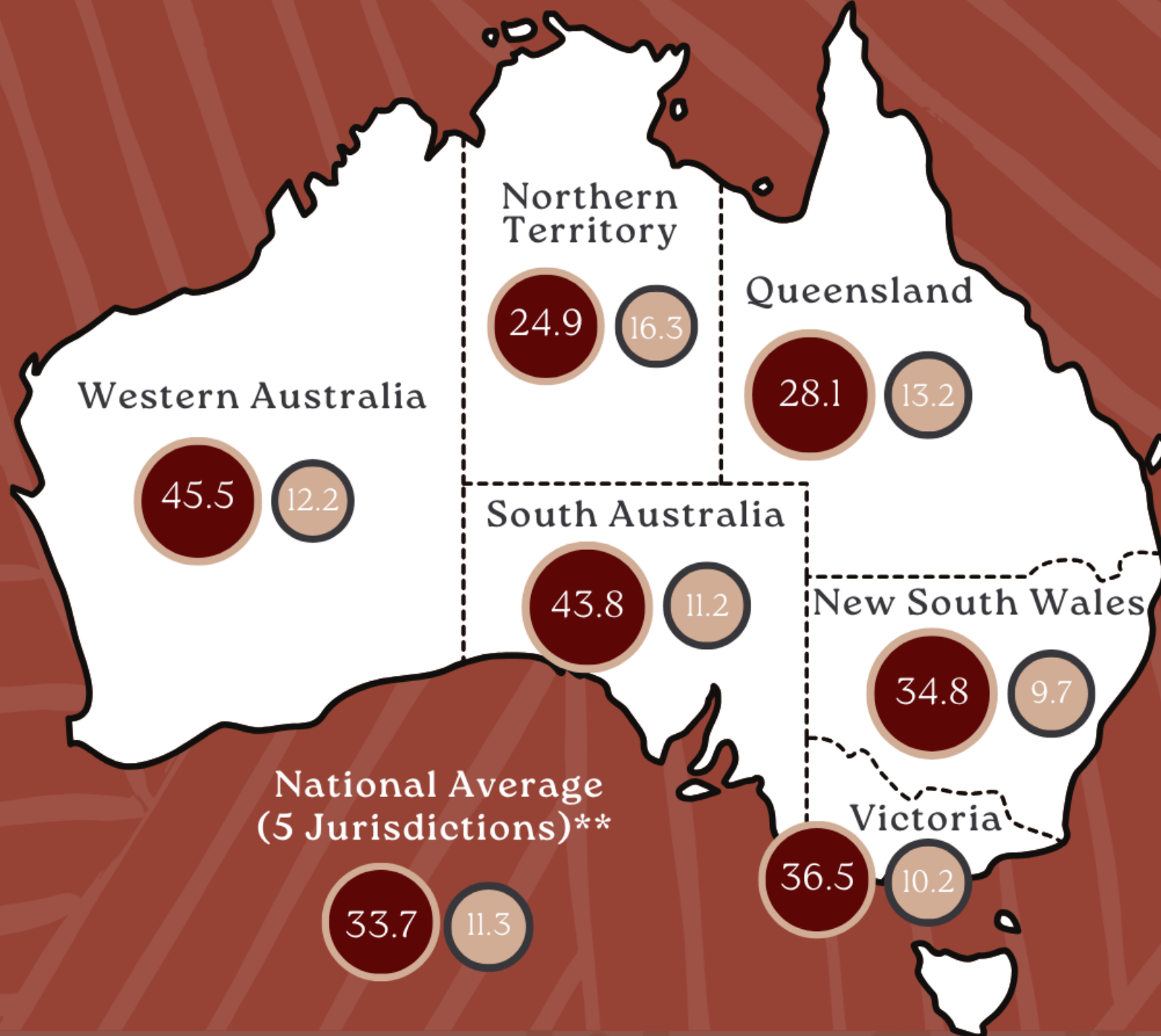
Australian Bureau of Statistics. (2025, November 11). *Intentional self-harm (suicide) deaths, 2024* | Australian Bureau of Statistics. <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/health/causes-death/intentional-self-harm-suicide-deaths/2024>

*Tasmania and Australian Capital Territory do not record Indigenous suicide rates.

**The 5 jurisdictions refer to NSW, QLD, SA, WA, and NT.



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Suicide Prevention



Disparities in mental health and wellbeing

- In 2024, the age-standardised suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was **33.7 per 100,000** compared to 11.3 for non-Indigenous people (ABS, 2025)
- In 2022-2023, **three in ten** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 18 years and over experienced high or very high levels of psychological distress in the last 4 weeks, about the same as in 2018–19 (31%) (ABS, 2024).
- For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth (aged 10-24 years), almost **two in three** experienced **significant stressors and/or adverse life events** (Trill, 2020).
- **Experiences of racism** among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have increased significantly, rising from 39% in 2014 to **54% in 2024** (Reconciliation Australia, 2024).

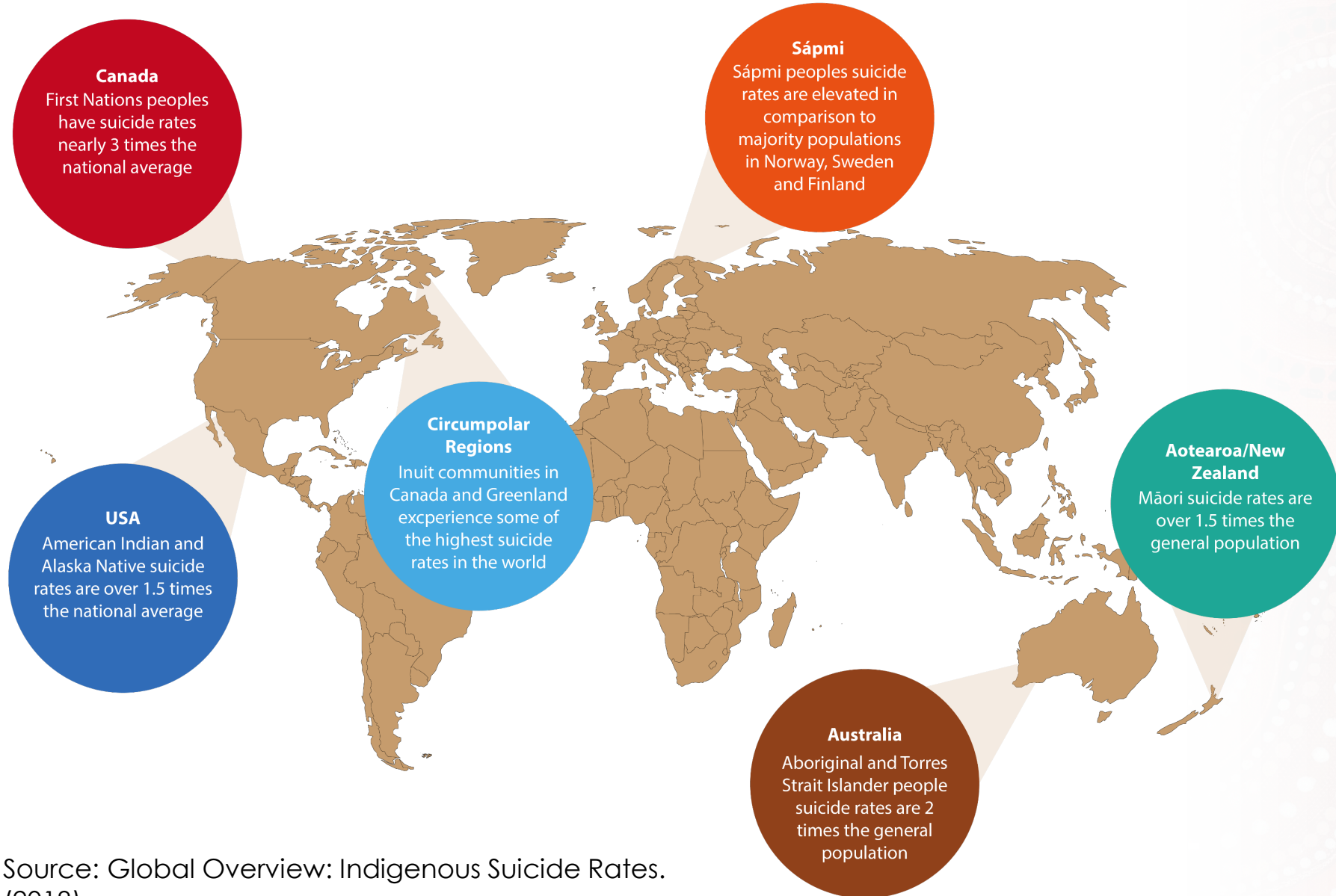
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide rates

The high suicide rate is attributed to a range of complex and interrelated factors that heighten the risk for suicidal behaviours and self-harm. These can include the cumulative impact of:

- Ongoing exposure to **socio-economic disadvantage** and multiple psychological stressors;
- **Grief** from the premature deaths of family, community members and friends, including suicide;
- **Violence** and inter-personal conflict;
- **Transgenerational trauma**, grief and loss associated with the ongoing impact of **dislocation** and the effects of forced removal of children and mistreatment;
- Pervasive **racism** and discrimination at individual, institutional and system levels;
- A **loss of a sense of purpose** and meaning in life;
- **Relationship breakdowns**;
- **Poor health**, including a number of co-morbidities and severely compromised mental health and SEWB;
- An 'access' gap to mental health services: **34.5%** of Indigenous peoples who reported high or very high rates of psychological distress also experienced access **problems to health services**



The Global Indigenous Context



Source: Global Overview: Indigenous Suicide Rates. (2018).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP)



ATSISPEP

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project

- Indigenous suicide has many causes, including **cultural, historical, political** and other considerations.
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) was initiated to develop an **evidence base for what works** in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention.
- The final ATSISPEP report, *Solutions That Work*, was completed in 2016

SOLUTIONS THAT WORK:
WHAT THE EVIDENCE
AND OUR PEOPLE TELL US

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project Report



ATSISPEP



ATSISPEP Aims and Objectives

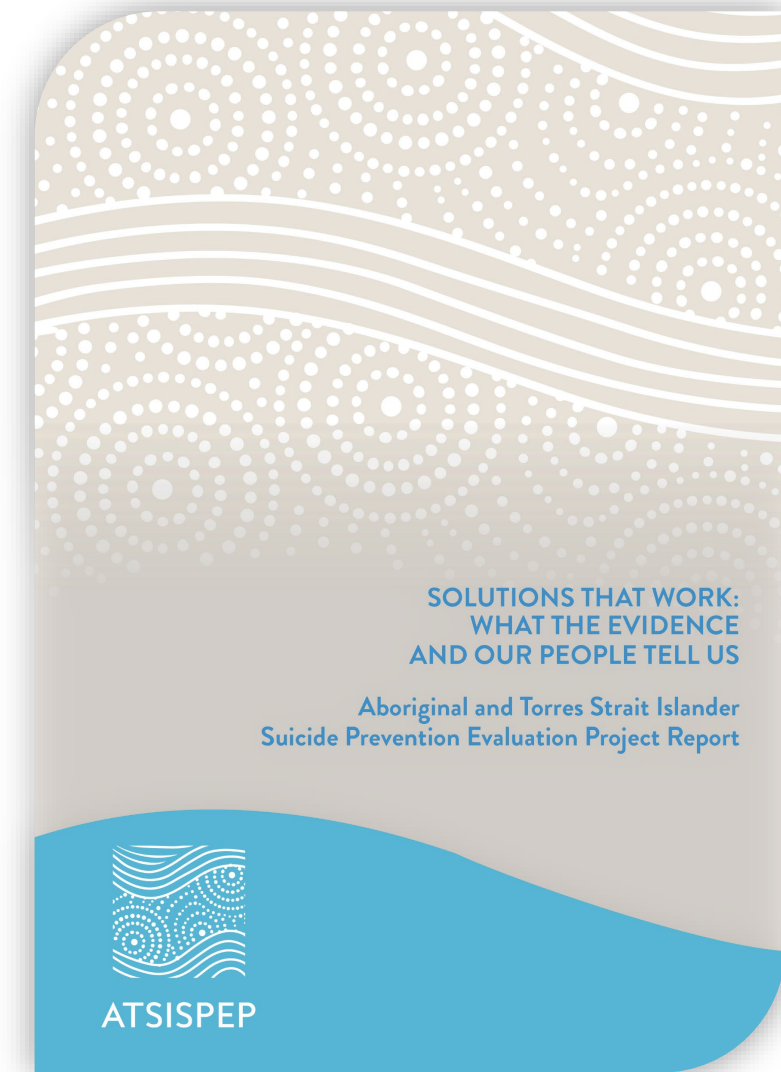


ATSISPEP's aims were to:

- **Prioritise** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working
- **Strengthen** the evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention
- **Develop** an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural framework for suicide prevention services and programs.

The final ATSISPEP report, *Solutions that Work: What the Evidence and Our People Tell Us*, was released in 2016

Authors: Pat Dudgeon, Jill Milroy, Tom Calma, Yvonne Luxford, Ian Ring, Roz Walker, Adele Cox, Gerry Georgatos, and Chris Holland.

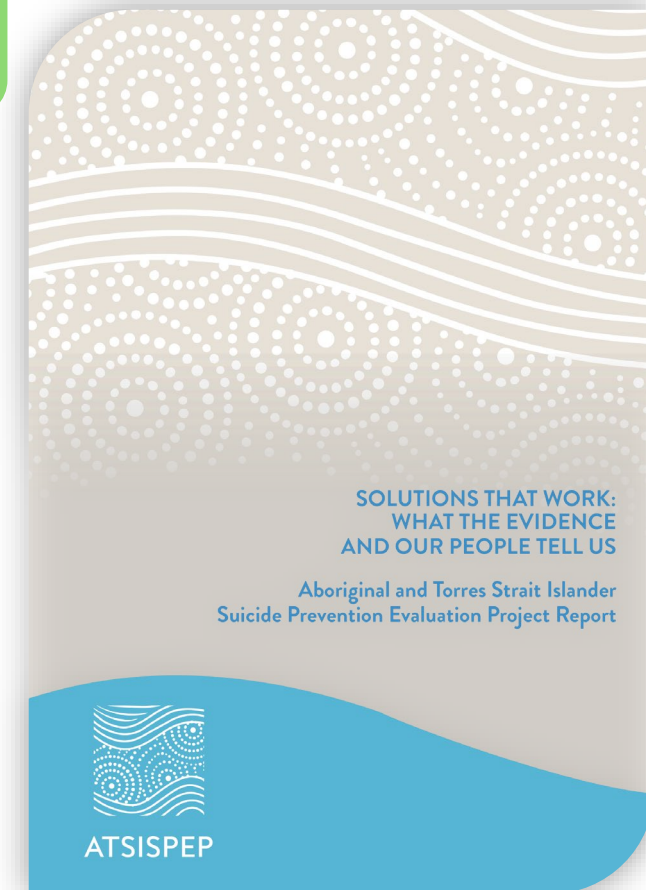


ATSISPEP Methodology and Consultations:



ATSISPEP was based upon rigorous Aboriginal-led research and extensive knowledge derived from a large number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices and credible sources:

- A comprehensive national and international **literature review** on what works in community-led Indigenous suicide prevention;
- **Sixty-nine community consultations** on suicide prevention that took place in 2009-2015 across Australia, involving 1,823 participants;
- **Twelve** Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community, risk group and subject-matter-specific suicide prevention Roundtable consultation findings;
- The **Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS)** Operational Guidelines for Indigenous Suicide Prevention Services;
- State and territory general population **suicide prevention strategies**;
- **Key themes and recommendations** from the inaugural National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Conference held in Alice Springs on 5–6 May 2016; and,
- Contributions of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander expert leadership group and the **National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Indigenous Leadership (NATSIMHIL)**.

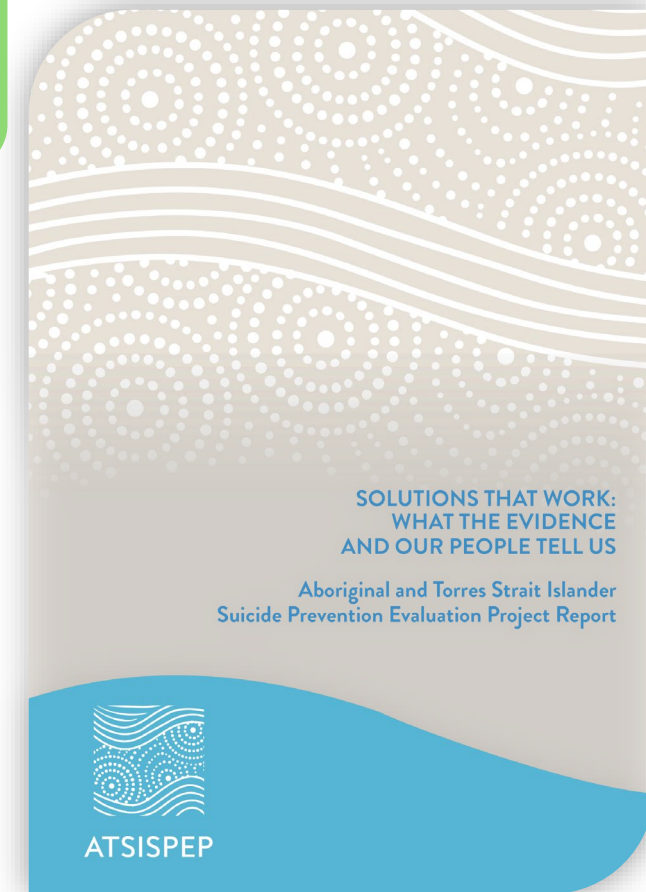


ATSISPEP Report Findings and Recommendations:



ATSISPEP includes **17 Key Recommendations** and **33 Success Factors**, forming a **holistic and systematic framework** for commissioning services and communities to create locally relevant **community-led solutions**. These include:

- The principle of self-determination, with funding to be directed **towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled bodies**.
- The principle of **Indigenous governance** with ACCHOs as the preferred facilitators of suicide prevention work and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in positions of authority on boards and committees as well as through community empowerment, ownership and employment.
- A **holistic approach** to suicide prevention through **social and emotional wellbeing, cultural strength, involvement of Elders**, promotion of **cultural competence** and **trauma-informed care** and addressing **social determinants of health**.



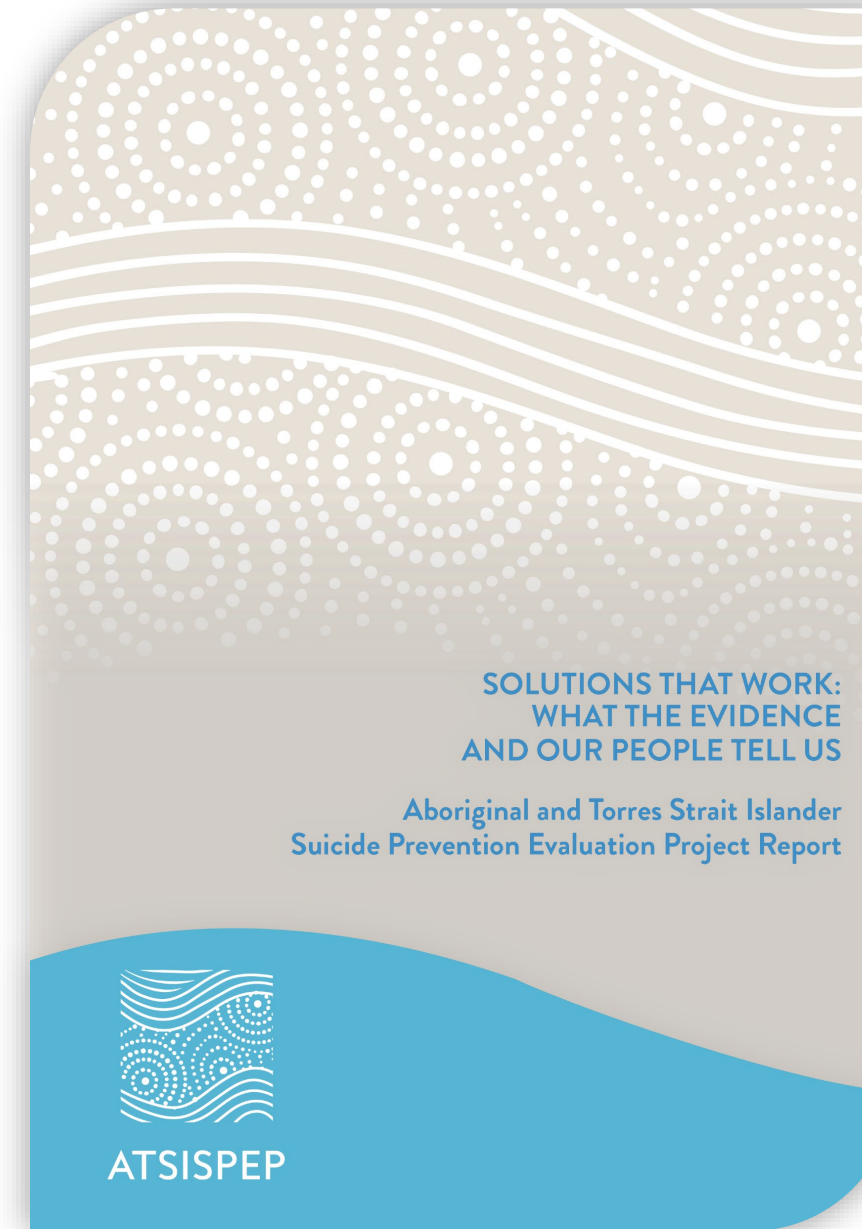
ATSISPEP Levels of Intervention

The ATISPEP final report *Solutions that Work: What the Evidence and Our People Tell Us* took a population health approach.

Suicide prevention activities can be classified into 3 levels of intervention*:

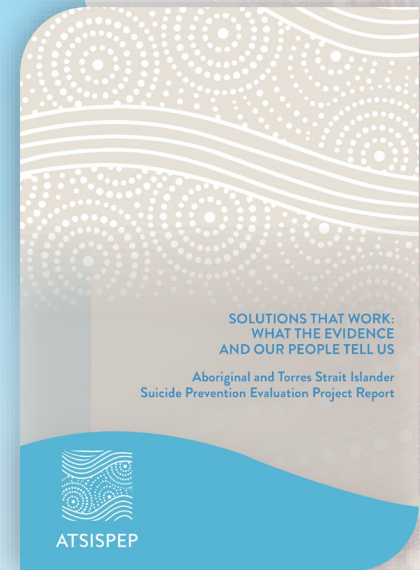
- **Universal interventions** – usually aimed at the whole population, including the ‘well’ population. Includes addressing risk factors and restricting access to means of suicide
- **Selective interventions** – targeting groups of people at high risk of suicide. Includes postvention services and programs for high-risk groups
- **Indicated interventions** – for those individuals identified as being at-risk of suicide or who have attempted suicide. Includes crisis phone helplines, the treatment and management of suicidal behaviours, and follow-up support after suicide attempts

* *Department of Health and Ageing 2013; Dudgeon et al. 2016; WHO 2014*



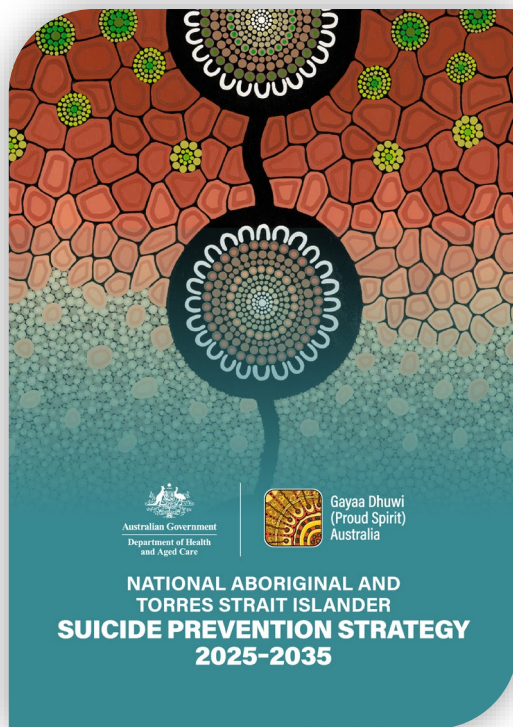
ATSISPEP Key Messages

- **Community control, empowerment and self-determination:** projects should be grounded in community, owned by the community, based on community needs and accountable to the community.
- **Holistic:** based on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander definitions of health and social and emotional wellbeing, and incorporating spirituality, culture and healing.
- **Sustainable, strength based and capacity building:** projects must build community capacity and endure until the community is empowered.
- **Partnerships:** mainstream service providers should work in genuine partnerships with local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and other providers to support and enhance existing local measures, not duplicate or compete with them.
- **Safe cultural delivery:** projects should be delivered in a safe manner.
- **Innovation and evaluation:** projects need to build on learnings, try new and innovative approaches, share learnings, and improve the evidence base.

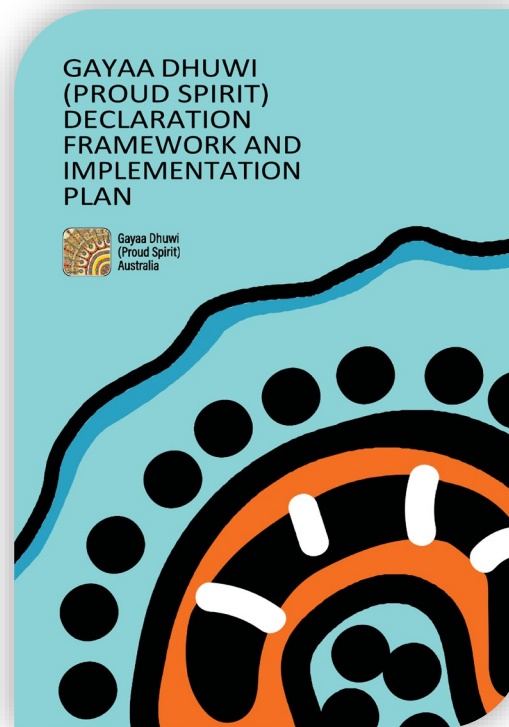


Three important Policy Documents

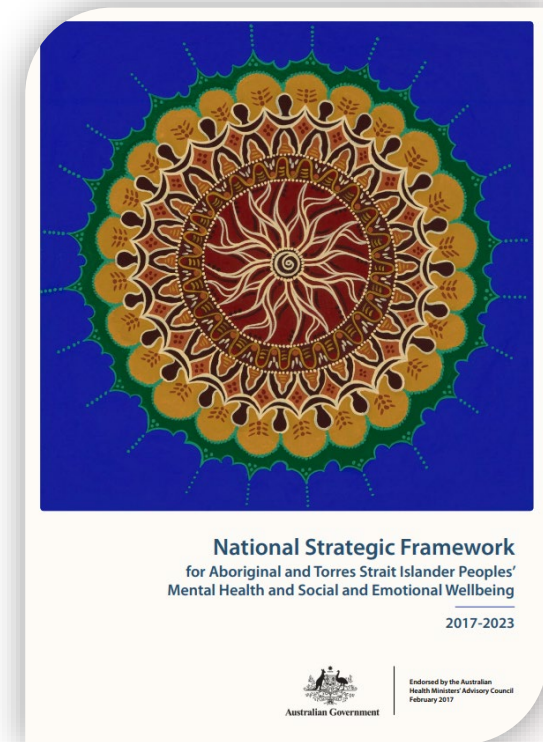
The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy



The Gayaa Dhuwi Implementation Plan



The SEWB Framework



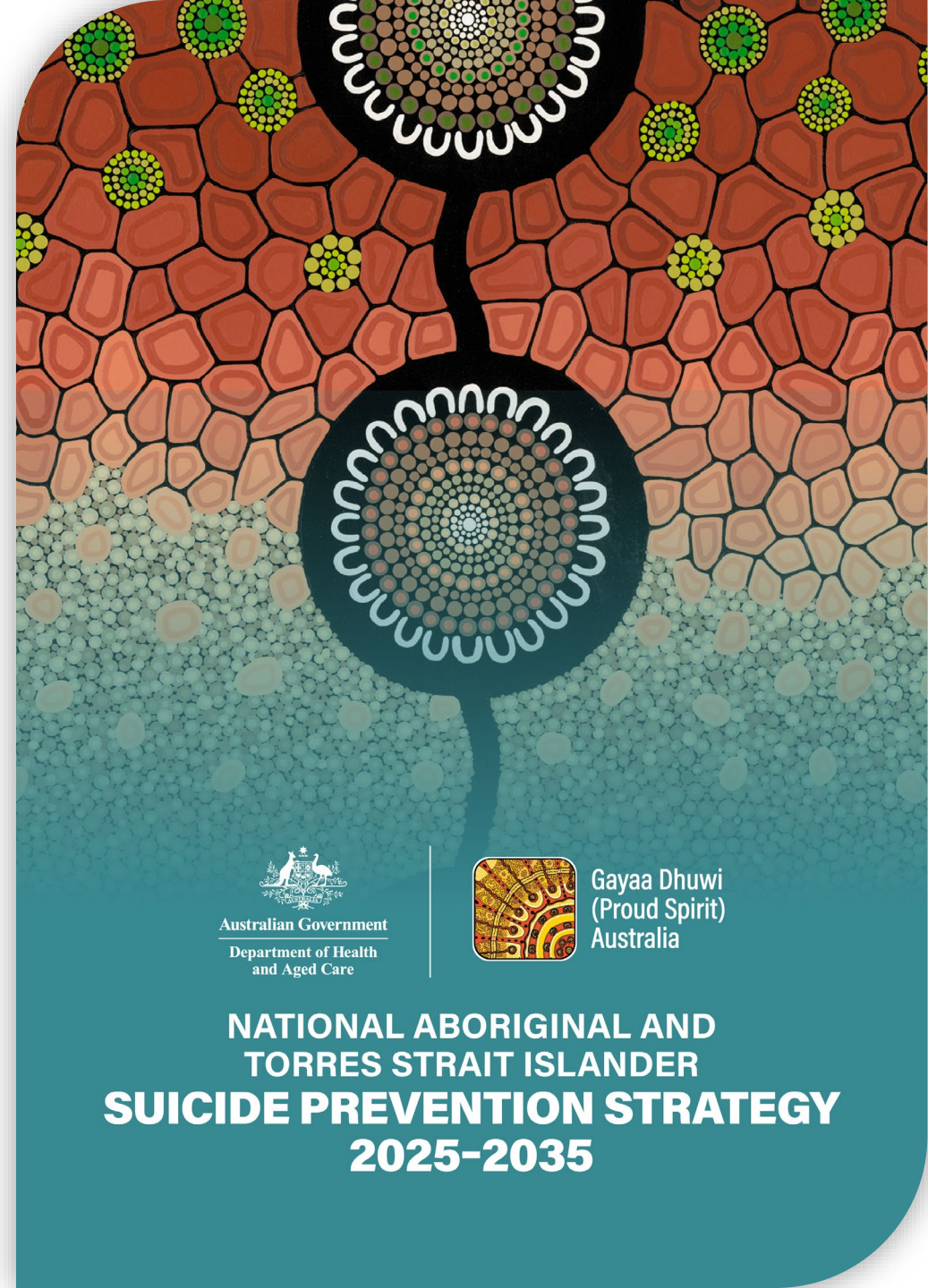
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2035



Drawing on the work of ATSISEPP, the Strategy sets a path for all governments to work in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to reduce the rate of suicide and self-harm.



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Suicide Prevention



Australian Government
Department of Health
and Aged Care



Gayaa Dhuwi
(Proud Spirit)
Australia

**NATIONAL ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER
SUICIDE PREVENTION STRATEGY
2025-2035**

NATSISPS-Strategic Priorities



Leadership and Self Determination



Culturally Safe, Accessible, and Coordinate Care



Thriving Communities



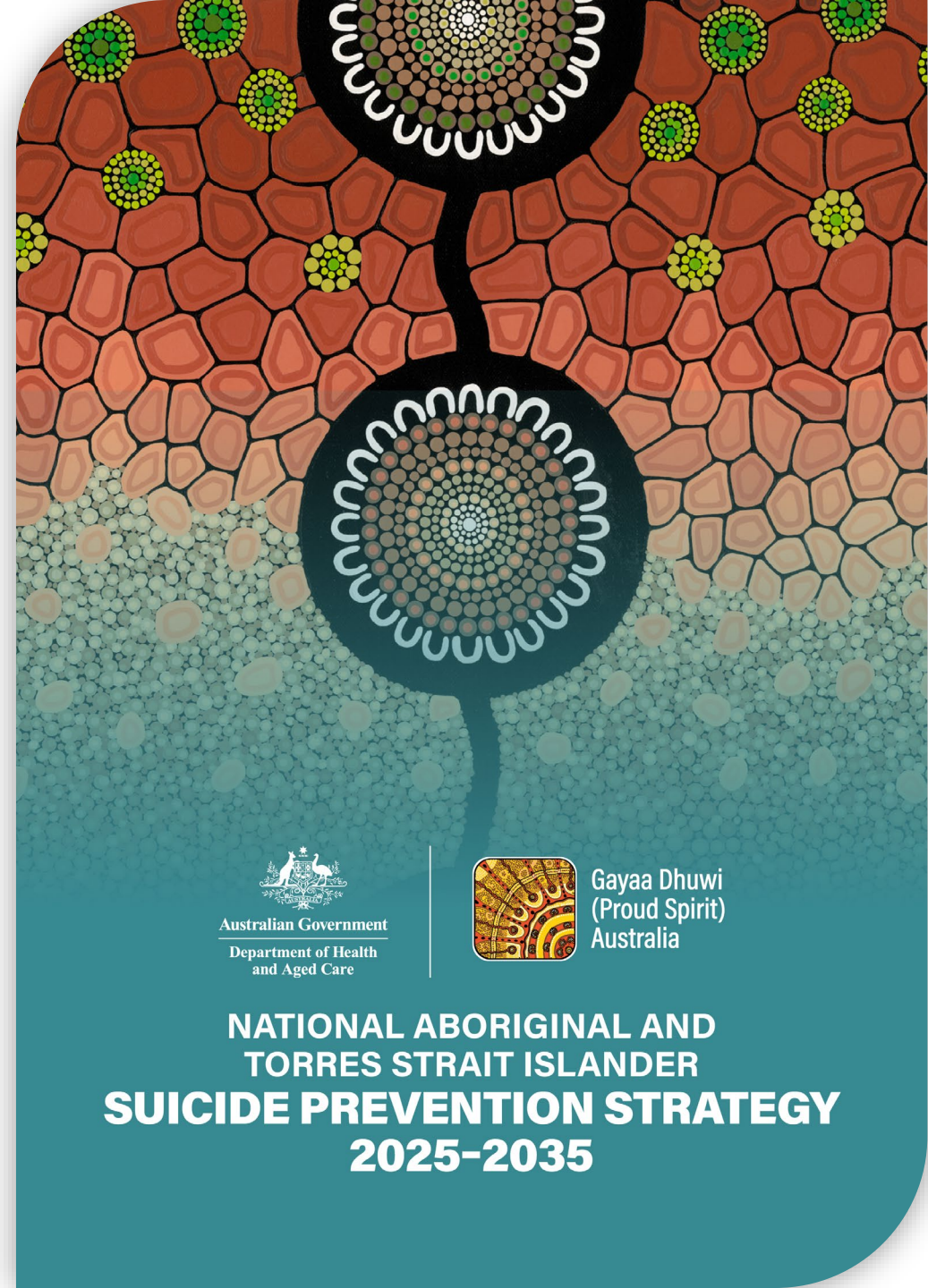
Responsive Workforce




Informed and Supportive Communities



Evidence and Data



Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration Framework and Implementation Plan



The Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Framework and Implementation Plan offers a 10-year strategic approach to achieving the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Framework is designed to help all sector stakeholders work towards a culturally safe, responsive, and self-determined mental health system.

The Framework focuses on five key themes:

- Cultural strength
- Best practice
- Best evidence
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership & influence

The Framework and Implementation Plan align with the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, reinforcing commitments from all levels of government to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

GAYAA DHUWI (PROUD SPIRIT) DECLARATION FRAMEWORK AND IMPLEMENTATION PLAN



Gayaa Dhuwi
(Proud Spirit)
Australia





National Strategic Framework

for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

- The MHSEWB Framework responded to the high incidence of social and emotional wellbeing challenges and mental ill health, by providing a **framework for national action**.
- It recognised the **strengths, resilience, and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**.
- It acknowledged that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have **different cultures, histories and needs**, which may need to be addressed by **locally developed, specific strategies**.
- The Framework has been **revised and updated**, and the sector looks forward to this publication.



National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing

2017-2023



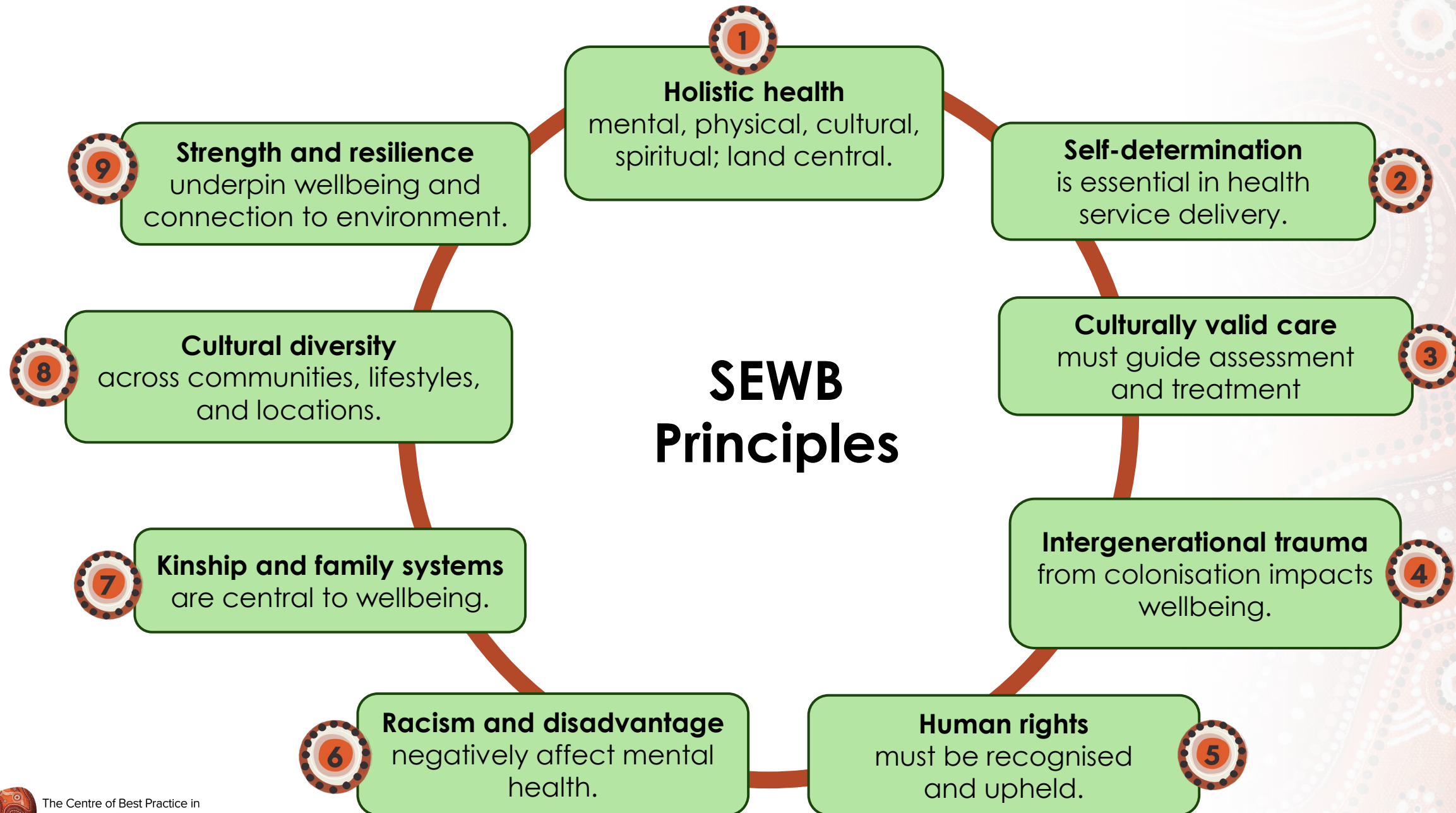
Endorsed by the Australian
Health Ministers' Advisory Council
February 2017



Social and Emotional Wellbeing

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a **holistic context**.
- Social and emotional wellbeing includes **body, mind, emotions, spirit, family, culture, Country and community**.
- When the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, ill health will persist. **Distress in one area impacts the whole**.
- Colonisation has had a **cumulative impact** on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.
- Government policies such as
 - **dispossession of traditional land**
 - **forcible removal of children from their families**
 - **disruption to culture and identity**have resulted in **complex intergenerational experiences of trauma and loss**.

SEWB Principles



Social and Emotional Wellbeing



DETERMINANTS

DESCRIPTION

POSITIVE / PROTECTIVE FACTORS

CHALLENGE / RISK FACTORS

Historical determinants of health

The legacy of colonisation and the disruption to the traditional way of life.

Aboriginal Rights Movement, National Referendum 1967, Land Rights, and the National Apology.

Invasion, frontier wars, massacres, genocide, state control and terror (e.g. Aborigines Protection Act 1905 that led to Stolen Generations).

Political determinants of health

The human rights of all peoples to self-determination, sovereignty, and social justice.

Truth-telling, treaty, land rights and protection of heritage sites, Indigenous governance, Aboriginal community control, and cultural continuity.

Oppressive legislations that enable displacement, dispossession of land, forced removal of children and assimilation, and suppression of language and culture.

Social determinants of health

Health inequity is a result of social inequity.

System level change, access and support for housing, welfare, education and employment, access to community resources and services, supportive family and community.

Poverty, insecure or overcrowded housing, limited access to water and food, education, employment, justice system, exposure to violence, stress and trauma.

Cultural determinants of health


A strengths-based perspective that finds solutions in stronger connection to community, culture and Country.

Self-determination, reconciliation, freedom from discrimination, human rights, custodianship of Country, reclamation of cultural practices, protection of traditional knowledges.

Intergenerational trauma, mistreatment and pervasive racism and discrimination at individual, institutional, and system levels.



SEWB Welcome Guide



The guide is a reference tool for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working in SEWB teams

- It aims to complement rather than replace organisations' position descriptions and/or workforce induction procedures.
 - What is SEWB?
 - SEWB in the Workplace
 - SEWB in ACCHS
 - SEWB Resources

Scan here for the guide:



KAMS & TIMHWB PRESENT:



SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING:
A WELCOME GUIDE FOR THE ABORIGINAL WORKFORCE

UPDATED JULY 2022

Workforce Wellbeing Guide



This guide is designed to provide ACCHS workforces in the Kimberley with information about wellbeing in the workplace.

The guide focuses on the role of self-reflection and self-care in safeguarding and promoting worker wellbeing.

Scan here for the guide:



Transforming Indigenous
Mental Health and Wellbeing
www.timh-well.org.au



THE UNIVERSITY OF
WESTERN
AUSTRALIA



WIC-K
Wellbeing Informed Care - Kimberley

WORKFORCE WELLBEING GUIDE:

A self-reflection and self-care resource for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in the Kimberley



SELF-CARE

Self-care strategies are things that people do to unwind, relax, heal, empower themselves and connect to things that keep their mind, body, and spirit strong. Self-care can happen when we are self-reflecting and are able to recognise when and how to look after our self. We have used the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) wheel as inspiration for the activities in this guide.

Source: Gee, G., Dudgeon, P., Schultz, C., Hart, A., & Kelly, K. (2014). In P. Dudgeon, Milroy, H, Walker, R. (Ed), Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice



SELF-CARE ACTIVITIES

PHYSICAL	SPIRITUAL	EMOTIONAL	MENTAL
Caring for your body	Yarning with Elders	Engage in yarning circles	Strengthening your identity and sense of self
Strengthen the body through collective activity (e.g. exercise and diet)	Connecting with Country	Express emotions through cultural mediums (art, dance etc)	Setting boundaries
Create safe physical environments	Engage in cultural practices and ceremony	Building emotional safety through trusted relationships	Attending local community events
	Staying connected with loved ones	Connecting with loved ones	


[Workforce-Wellbeing-Guide.pdf](#)



SEWB Gatherings Over the Years



Social and Emotional Wellbeing Training



CBPATSISP and TIMHWB hosted a 2-day Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) workshop with participants from teams working and delivering SEWB programs at ACCHOs all over Australia. They came together to support the development of a SEWB Training Program for the SEWB workforce.



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB Resources

Websites

<http://www.indigenousspsyched.org.au/>
<https://timhwb.org.au/>
<https://cbpatsisp.com.au/>

Fact Sheets

<https://timhwb.org.au/fact-sheets/>
<https://cbpatsisp.com.au/suicide-prevention-resources/#factsheets>

Aboriginal Participatory Action Research paper

https://www.lowitja.org.au/content/Document/Lowitja-Publishing/LI_Discussion_Paper_P-Dudgeon_FINAL3.pdf

Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project Frameworks

<https://indigenousspsyched.org.au/frameworks/>

Decolonising Psychology article

<https://psychology.org.au/for-members/publications/inpsych/2020/oct-nov-vol-42-issue-5/decolonising-psychology>

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia Declaration

<https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/resources/the-gayaa-dhuwi-proud-spirit-declaration/>

Solutions That Work: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) final report

<https://www.atsispep.sis.uwa.edu.au/>

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025-2035

<https://www.gayaadhuwi.org.au/Gayaa-Dhuwi-NATSISPS-2025-2035+web.pdf>

Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and

Practices (book)

<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/working-together-aboriginal-and-wellbeing-2014.pdf>

Working Together – Ten years Later

<https://timhwb.org.au/working-together-book/>

Social and Emotional Wellbeing: a Review (Lowitja Institute)

www.lowitja.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/SocialandEmotionalWellbeing_aReview.pdf

Social and Emotional Wellbeing: A Welcome Guide for the Aboriginal Workforce

timhwb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/KAMS-SEWB-MANUAL-7.pdf

Workforce Wellbeing Guide - A self-reflection and self-care resource for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services in the Kimberley

timhwb.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Workforce-Wellbeing-Guide.pdf

Us Women, Our Ways, Our World

[Darlene Oxenham, Jeannie Herbert, Jill Milroy & Pat Dudgeon](#)

<https://www.magabala.com/products/us-woman-our-ways-our-world>

Visit Our Websites



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