



WELLBEING AND HEALING THROUGH
CONNECTION AND CULTURE – SUMMARY

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Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of all the lands of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. We honour the sovereign spirit of the children, their families, communities and Elders past, present and emerging. We also wish to acknowledge and respect the continuing cultures and strengths of Indigenous peoples across the world.

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Artist Acknowledgement

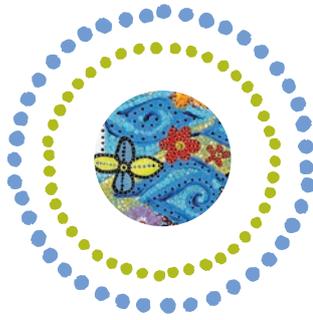
Beautiful Healing in Wildflower Banksia Country describes a story about the life affirming inter-connections between people, land, oceans, waterways, sky and all living things. The painting began in the Sister Kate's Home Kid's Aboriginal Corporation Healing (SKHKAC) Hub, at the second National and World Indigenous Suicide Prevention Conference held in Perth, Western Australia in 2018. During the conference participants came together in the Healing Hub to collaborate on the triptych which was then respectfully completed by the SKHKAC team. The Sister Kate's Children's Home began in 1934 and closed in 1975, and was an institution for Aboriginal children who are now known as the Stolen Generations - where the Home Kids of SKHKAC are planning to build an all accessible Place of Healing on the Bush Block adjacent to the old Home, and will run Back to Country Bush Camps and other cultural healing activities.

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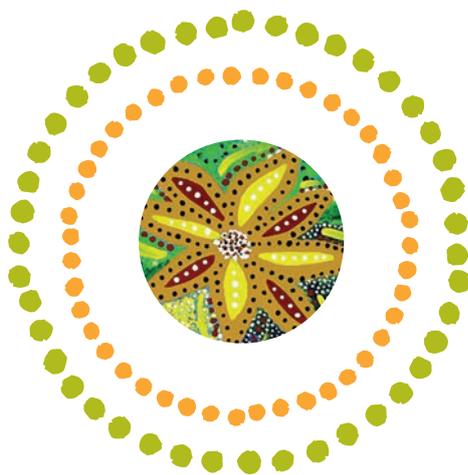


SUMMARY

This review summarises the emerging research and knowledge, key themes and principles surrounding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural perspectives and concepts of healing and social and emotional wellbeing as they relate to suicide prevention. These discussions will support Lifeline to enhance and refine their existing knowledge and practices to promote culturally responsive suicide prevention services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This review explores the importance of the delivery of staff training programs to achieve this along with external training and program development for Lifeline services, including the telephone crisis line, Online Chat and emerging Crisis Text. Adopting an Indigenous research approach, this review prioritises Indigenous knowledge of healing and wellbeing and provides examples of culturally appropriate and effective practices.

Culturally responsive Indigenous designed and delivered e-mental health services play a crucial role in overcoming barriers to help seeking experienced by Indigenous people such as a lack of culturally appropriate gender and age specific services, forms of institutional and cultural racism and poor service delivery which intensify mental health stigma and shame along with fear of ostracism and government intervention (Canuto, Harfield, Wittert & Brown, 2019; Price & Dalgeish, 2013). A lack of such services can result in barriers to help seeking which contribute to higher levels of intergenerational trauma, self-harm and suicide (Isaacs, Sutton, Hearn, Wanganeen & Dudgeon, 2016; Mitchell & Gooda, 2015). Self-determination in the form of community controlled suicide prevention and healing has been identified as a solution to the transmission of intergenerational trauma contributing to suicide (Dudgeon et al., 2016).

Furthermore, recommendations presented in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) Report, *Solutions That Work: What the Evidence and Our People Tell Us* (Dudgeon et al., 2016), stress that an effective primary suicide prevention strategy must include freely available 24/7 e-mental health services. Such services have been successfully implemented in Canada. Beginning in 2016, the First Nations and Inuit Hope For Wellness Helpline is a culturally responsive, multilingual, toll free, 24/7 telephone service and online chat counselling and crisis intervention service. However, although the exceptionally high suicide rates of Indigenous peoples in Canada and Australia are widely recognised internationally to be a shared population health crisis, Australia has yet to invest in the kind of culturally responsive e-mental health suicide prevention services provided to Indigenous peoples in Canada. In recognition of this context, this review contributes to, and builds on, Lifelines commitment to deliver culturally responsive suicide prevention services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia.



Lifeline Australia is responsible for delivering culturally responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who contact Lifeline when they are in crisis. The first strategic priority in *Lifeline's Suicide Prevention Strategy 2012* is to enhance their capacity to be an essential suicide intervention service by “targeting high risk groups and individuals within a broad strategy of promoting service access for the whole community” (Lifeline Australia, 2012, p. 6). In order for such service initiatives to be effective, Lifeline needs to have comprehensive knowledge about local culturally responsive suicide prevention and wellbeing services so that callers are referred appropriately or “followed up by culturally competent community based preventive services” (Australian Government, 2013, p. 32). This focus is also central to the *Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan*, specifically priority area 4 on improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and suicide prevention broadly, and in particular “increasing knowledge of social and emotional wellbeing concepts, improving the cultural competence and capability of mainstream providers and promoting the use of culturally appropriate assessment and care planning tools and guidelines” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 34). There is then, a clear policy alignment which needs to be urgently actioned with appropriate funding to address the current national Indigenous suicide crisis.

A number of key principles and practices fundamental to Indigenous knowledges of social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB), healing, and cultural responsiveness have been identified as central to effective suicide prevention. A strengths based approach, which empowers local healing capacity, is embedded in cultural understandings of healing and the life affirming principles of holistic relationality and respect which underpin SEWB is vital.

A culturally responsive suicide prevention help line should have a cultural framework, partner with community organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services, and employ Indigenous counsellors and community members. Such a service would train frontline workers skilled in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB and mental health; be freely available 24/7; offer culturally responsive referrals to high quality and culturally appropriate treatments; and engage in culturally appropriate forms of evaluation and data collection.

A culturally responsive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander e-mental health suicide prevention service should be guided by Indigenous governance and implement the following across all Lifeline services:

● Action Area 1

Sensitive processes for identifying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander callers to be implemented.

● Action Area 2

Development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lifeline telephone crisis line, Online Chat and/or Crisis Text service designed by and delivered by a skilled Indigenous workforce.

● Action Area 3

An in-depth clinical understanding of the culturally unique risk and protective factors for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing to inform Lifeline crisis support.

● Action Area 4

The building of partnerships between Lifeline and local community organisations and Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services.

● Action Area 5

Recruitment, training and secure and long term employment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lifeline workforce.

● Action Area 6

The development of culturally responsive and safe referral pathways which reflect local community healing knowledges and resources.

● Action Area 7

The nine guiding principles which are in the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023* be more prominently referenced as a guide to developing culturally responsive e-mental health services.

● Action Area 8

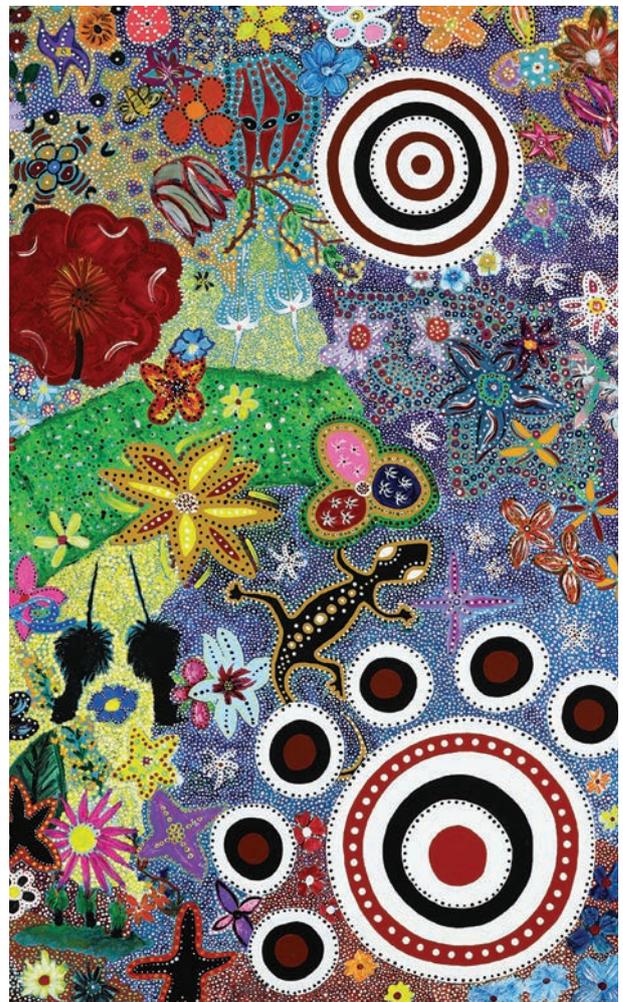
The development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and youth Lifeline to be co-designed with relevant Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander partners and promoted in schools and communities across Australia.



As the historic *Uluru Statement from the Heart* asserts:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands, and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from ‘time immemorial’, and according to science more than 60,000 years ago. This sovereignty is *a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or ‘mother nature’, and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefore, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty.* It has never been ceded or extinguished, and coexists with the sovereignty of the Crown. (*Uluru Statement from the Heart*, 2017)

The collective dignity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has likewise never been extinguished despite an ongoing process of colonisation which has been rightfully recognised as genocidal. Now, as the Uluru Statement asserts, “we seek to be heard” (*Uluru Statement from the Heart*, 2017). As many of the healing knowledges discussed in this review emphasise, being able to tell your story to people who are respectful of who you are and recognise your cultural dignity is vital to the healing process. The above recommendations for a culturally responsive e-mental health suicide prevention service are also a call for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples experiencing trauma and despair to be heard with respect and dignity.



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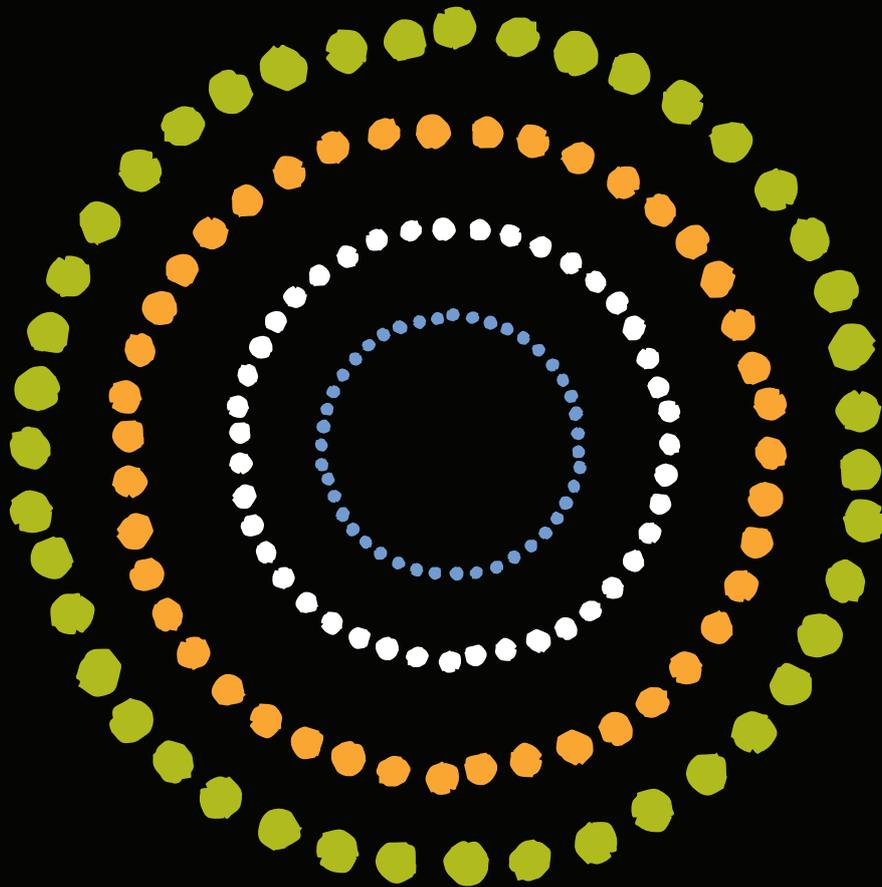
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If you, or someone you care for needs support or is thinking about suicide,
please phone Lifeline on **13 11 14** (24 hours / 7 days), or chat to a crisis supporter
on-line at lifeline.org.au (7pm - midnight / 7 days). **We're here for you.**