



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



**Black Dog  
Institute**

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The Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) at the Poche Centre, University of Western Australia and the Black Dog Institute have developed an Indigenous Governance Framework focussing on partnerships in suicide prevention activity.

### **Indigenous Governance Framework**

The legacy of colonisation and its influences over generations, has contributed to alarming over-representation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in suicide data. In contemporary Australia, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experience of suicide will have complex and layered causes that warrants a different approach to mainstream approaches, which might be considered inadequate, inappropriate and often limited.

### **The Importance of Inclusion**

As with many other areas, it is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people being an active agent and partner in suicide prevention and broader (mental) health enhances the outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Indigenous governance means placing the communities themselves at the centre of decision-making that affects their community, and ensuring that Indigenous perspectives are integral to any local suicide prevention effort. Simply, this means empowering local Indigenous peoples to identify needs, priorities and processes and to have control over the factors that will be protective for the individuals and community of which they are part.

A starting point for any organisation wishing to improve their Indigenous governance is to find out about the history of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and to listen to their experiences historically and today. Through building a relationship with the community, shared objectives can be established.

This Framework provides a structure for the design and establishment of Indigenous governance at the local Primary Health Network (PHN) level, and provides practical suggestions about how PHNs can:

- Delegate regional control for the design and implementation of suicide prevention efforts to the Indigenous community
- Ensure that commissioned services are both culturally competent and culturally safe for the local community
- Work collaboratively with local communities to design relevant and effective activities and programs that meet the needs of local Indigenous people
- Understand and support a broader range of healing and cultural activities that may not be informed by western medical models, but are endorsed and promoted by Indigenous people as being effective.

Innovative approaches are required to address Indigenous disadvantage for successful outcomes. Approaches are needed that are based upon a commitment to understanding and valuing the contribution that Indigenous people can make regarding their individual and collective health, safety and wellbeing. This recognises that communities may have a range of established health services that are Indigenous-led, and offers guidance about how to build stronger partnerships with those existing community assets. It encourages PHNs and other health service bodies to embed Indigenous concepts, such as Social and Emotional Wellbeing, into their organisation-wide decision-making frameworks. It also challenges the reader to reflect on their organisation's existing employment practices, advisory structures and commissioning policies to see if they are truly positioned to provide the best possible protective care for local communities.

## **Structure of the Framework**

The Framework addresses the following topics:

- Indigenous Governance and Suicide Prevention that Works in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities
- Important Considerations and the Evidence Base for Indigenous Governance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention
  - Culture, language and community empowerment and control
  - Community and Social and Emotional Wellbeing
  - Indigenous Governance and Community Wellbeing
  - Indigenous Governance, Communities and Colonisation
  - Indigenous Governance and Lower Suicide Rates
  - Indigenous Governance and Better Outcomes in Indigenous Communities
  - Indigenous Governance, the Human Rights Framework and the Fifth Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan
- The Indigenous Governance Framework
- Foundations: Building Organisational Capacity to Work Under Indigenous Governance
- Success Factors
  - Utilise Existing National Guidance and Standards
  - Working Effectively with Indigenous Leaders
  - Working at The Regional Level - Indigenous Health Councils
  - Working with Community Controlled Organisations and Health Services
  - Approaching Communities with Respect
  - Addressing Power Imbalances at the Community Level
  - Co-Design and Co-Implementation as Empowering Methodologies
- Specific Activities to be Undertaken Under Indigenous Governance
  - Cultural Safety and Competence in Mainstream Services
  - Cultural and Community-Based Suicide Prevention Activity
  - Cultural Adaptions of Mainstream Suicide Prevention Activity
  - Integration of Cultural Healing into Responses

The Indigenous Governance Framework provides the guides and tools to move beyond consultation, into a more genuine co-design that involves shifting power, responsibility and control to allow Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consumers and communities to become active partners, rather than passive recipients.

A number of diverse case studies are an important part of the Indigenous Governance Framework and they illustrate how there are some excellent examples of working in empowering and culturally appropriate ways between PHNs, government bodies and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

## National Consultation

The Indigenous Governance Framework will remain in draft form until a process of consultation has been undertaken. The Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) and the Black Dog Institute have partnered with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leaders in Mental Health (NATSILMH) and will deliver workshops to jointly promote the implementation of NATSILMH's *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration* and Indigenous Governance Framework. Over the next six months a series of national workshops will be held across all states and the Northern Territory. As well as this, consultations with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and individuals will take place.

We are keen to hear feedback on the Indigenous Governance Framework and about best practice Indigenous Governance case studies.

Please contact Jan Burrows on 08 64883743 (email: [jan.burrows@uwa.edu.au](mailto:jan.burrows@uwa.edu.au)) for further information.



**Professor Pat Dudgeon**

Poche Research Fellow  
University of Western  
Australia



**Professor Tom Calma, AO**

Patron and Chair,  
Poche Indigenous Health  
Network



**Professor Jill Milroy,  
AM**

Pro Vice Chancellor  
(Indigenous Education)  
University of Western  
Australia