



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



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# CALL FOR ACTION: the WA Government needs to commit to investing in the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people

18<sup>th</sup> MAY 2020

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This statement is from the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Cultural Centre (KALACC), Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services (KAMS), the Kimberley Land Council (KLC), Empowered Communities East Kimberley (ECEK) and the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention at the University of Western Australia (CBPATSISP).

In response to the release of the WA Department of Premier and Cabinet's Statement of *Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing on the 20th of March 2020*, we are calling on the WA Government to:

1. Provide a clear response to all 86 recommendations contained in the WA Department of Premier and Cabinet's May 2019 Statement of Intent on Aboriginal Youth Suicide, including the specific actions the WA Government will take in terms of resourcing and strategies.
2. Allow Aboriginal people to lead the design of the measures of success of these actions and provide a publicly accountable annual report card that ensures accountability for delivering, not just short term outcomes, but long term impacts.
3. Directly engage with our communities and significantly invest in long term solutions that are paced to include Aboriginal led co-design and a clear process for the implementation of short, medium and long term actions.
4. Support actions and investment that are placed-based to deliver results on the ground.
5. Immediately fund a number of critically important culturally-based initiatives in the Kimberley, namely:
  - a. Language maintenance, revival and education projects led by Kimberley Aboriginal people through Kimberley Aboriginal institutions
  - b. The Yiriman Project, which is auspiced by KALACC
  - c. Implementation of the Empowered Young Leaders report recommendations
  - d. Support Kimberley Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services to strengthen service delivery to at risk individuals, families and communities through a Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) model of care, programs and activities
  - e. The Wirnan Project through which Kimberley Aboriginal community-controlled art centres are collaborating to facilitate activities and chart the impact that intergenerational transmission of art and cultural practice has on the wellbeing of Kimberley Aboriginal youth and elders.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in the Kimberley continue to wait for clear and substantive responses to each of the 86 recommendations that are outlined in the [Statement of Intent on Aboriginal Youth Suicide](#). It is our view that the [Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing](#), as a complimentary document to the Statement of Intent, does not provide us with a sufficient response or clear and accountable commitments from the WA Government. Whilst we acknowledge that there is goodwill and intention, it is our view that these statements from the WA Government once again provide only incremental commitments, package up other existing State funding responsibilities, and lack clear accountability in regards to the action, outcomes and long term impacts needed for our families, communities and most importantly our young people.

We ask that the WA Government not assume that they know what is best for Aboriginal young people. We again impress on the State to ensure that the solutions and measures of success are led by Aboriginal people and that all investment into these solutions is clearly and publicly accountable to our people. We repeat the words of our Empowered Young Leaders – “Nothing about us without us”.

This means committing to a process of co-design with Aboriginal Community Controlled organisations and communities leading this process with the Government. A partnership for co-design of the solutions requires commitment, resources and action that is immediate, and paced over the long term. Anything less will be unacceptable and will only serve to delay addressing youth suicide in the region further.

The need for significant, meaningful action to address the youth suicide crisis in the Kimberley is not the latest news. Indeed, the 2016 [Learning from the message stick: The report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas](#) cites some 40 reports over 15 years in which Governments have failed to act on nor respond to their respective recommendations. In the meantime, Aboriginal communities have continued to suffer.

As the threat of COVID-19 infiltrates our region and looms for our remote communities, we are deeply alarmed. Not just for our physical health, but for significant impacts to the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of our peoples. We are also working together furiously to support the rapid changes needed, and we can see that these changes will have immediate and long term impacts. We also see this is an opportunity for the WA Government to take a very different approach. Aboriginal community controlled organisations are best placed to service our people and communities. Without immediate funding to our SEWB model of care and activities, we are not resourced or ready to be able to respond to what could become a tsunami of SEWB concerns, mental ill health, deliberate self-harm and suicide in the coming months and years for our young people. We are already seeing these impacts in the Kimberley region.

The WA Government now has the opportunity to map out a long-overdue comprehensive plan to improve Aboriginal health and wellbeing outcomes in the Kimberley, in collaboration with our community.

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## Further Reading & Resources

- WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet's [Commitment to Aboriginal Youth Wellbeing](#) – March 2020
- WA Department of Premier and Cabinet's [A Path Forward: Developing the Western Australian Government's Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy](#) discussion paper – December 2019
- WA Department of the Premier and Cabinet's [Statement of Intent on Aboriginal Youth Suicide](#) – May 2019, in response to the State Coroner Ros Fogliani's [Coronial Inquest Report](#)
- [Coronial Inquest Report: Inquest into the deaths of thirteen children and young persons in the Kimberley region, Western Australia](#) – 7 February 2019
- [Learnings from the message stick: The report of the Inquiry into Aboriginal youth suicide in remote areas](#) – WA Parliament Education and Health Standing Committee, November 2016 (referred to as the Message Stick Report)
- [Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm & Youth Suicide](#) – People Culture Environment in partnership with Our Generation Media, 2014
- [Solutions That Work: What the Evidence and Our People Tell Us: ATSIPEP Report](#) – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Project, November 2016
- [My Life My Lead – Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations](#)
- [Empowered Communities website](#) and [Empowered Communities: Empowered Peoples Design Report](#)
- [2019 Kimberley Empowered Young Leaders Forums Report, https://www.wapha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Empowered-Young-Leaders-Report-2019.pdf](https://www.wapha.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/12/Empowered-Young-Leaders-Report-2019.pdf)