


Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Fact Sheet 8

Empowerment and Accountability in Youth Suicide Prevention

In response to a spate of suicide deaths among Indigenous young people and children over 2018-19, and the Western Australian Coroner's March 2019 report of the *Inquest into the 13 Deaths of Children and Young Persons in the Kimberley Region* ([Fact Sheet 6](#)), the CBPATSISP co-hosted an *Empowerment and Accountability in Youth Suicide Prevention* workshop in Canberra in April 2019.



EMPOWERMENT AND ACCOUNTABILITY IN INDIGENOUS YOUTH SUICIDE PREVENTION

Report on Workshop Proceedings
Canberra, ACT
April 2019
Pat Dudgeon, Chris Holland, Roz Walker

"We bring a fierce and dedicated national and community-level commitment to the health and wellbeing of our young people."
(Workshop participants)

The Workshop Aims

- Review current activity in suicide prevention among Indigenous children and young people.
- Advance a shared understanding with respect to Indigenous children and young people of:
 - the challenges in suicide prevention,
 - promising or, evidence-based best practice in suicide prevention, and
 - ways organisations and stakeholders can work together individually and collectively to provide a more effective and integrated response to Indigenous suicide.
- Inform ATSIMHSPAG's advice to the Australian Government on reducing suicide rates among Indigenous children and young people.
- Inform CBPATSISP's development of a best practice manual related to suicide prevention for Indigenous young people in a variety of service, program and policy contexts.

About 70 participants attended the workshop in Canberra including:

- Indigenous youth leaders in suicide prevention and Elders,
- Indigenous people with lived experience of suicide and mental health consumers, and
- Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and senior Public Health Network (PHN) representatives.

Some of the Indigenous young people from Western Australia presented the *West Kimberley Young Leader's Collective Impact Statement* which was developed at the Empowered Young Leaders' forums. Their commitment to stand together in solidarity to lead and take action in suicide prevention received resounding support.

This echoed a statement by *Rob McPhee*, who is co-chair of the Kimberly Suicide Prevention Trial Site Steering Committee:

It was heartening to see emerging young leaders speak confidently about the willingness of our young people to lead and action positive change to improve their future and that of future generations¹.

The Young Leader's *Collective Impact Statement* and the outcomes of the workshop sessions underscored the need to support Indigenous young people to lead the youth suicide prevention activity, along with recognition of the importance and invaluable guidance by Elders.

Workshop Recommendations

Echoing the recommendations of the National Conference discussed in [Fact Sheet 7](#), participants recommended that:

- The Council of Australian Governments Health Council (COAG Health Council) support a dedicated, strengths-based National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and funded Implementation Plan to be co-designed with Indigenous leadership bodies, people with lived experience, stakeholders and community representatives.
- **A priority within this Plan would be a national response to child and youth suicide developed under Indigenous youth leadership.**
- The Plan to be integrated with COAG's Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan and its Implementation Plan.

Participants worked in small groups to identify short-, medium- and long-term actions in preventing Indigenous youth suicide which have been organised into five strategic focus areas: Indigenous Youth, Families and Community, Service Focus, Upstream Prevention and System Enablers. For a full list of recommended actions, refer to the [Report](#)².

Investing in programs that strengthen the connections of young people to:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Community • Family • Elders, Authority • Culture, country and 'cultural intelligence' • Strong and proud Indigenous identity (language)
Investing in family and relationship healing services and programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Utilise cultural intelligence/healing • Strengthen individual capability to cope with familial and relationship difficulties and breakdowns sometimes associated with suicide deaths
School programs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • School education/remote schooling programs provide age and culturally appropriate mental health education/information – empowering Indigenous children in co-design of these programs • Transitions – ensure that pathways of future opportunity are available for school children; when youth have completed primary school, there should be advice and support to engaging in meaningful life choices (further study, apprenticeships, employment)
Addressing the social and economic position of Indigenous young people	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increased employment in communities • Increased education opportunities - No Indigenous young person should have to pay for TAFE and higher education costs/fees • Place-based entrepreneurial support – supporting alternative pathways and providing opportunities to work, business, not just academic pathways
Indigenous young people 'at every table'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Promote existing national Indigenous youth leadership bodies – establish new bodies as appropriate • Youth involved in co-design processes and governance bodies involve Indigenous young people

See the [CBPATSISP](#) website for information about suicide prevention and additional fact sheets.

References:

1. Media Release, 27 August 2019. [Unprecedented commitment to reducing suicide in the Kimberley](#)
2. CBPATSISP 2019, [Empowerment and Accountability in Indigenous Youth Suicide Prevention – Report On Workshop Proceedings](#)

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