



MEDIA STATEMENT

9 October 2019

World Mental Health Day 2019: NACCHO recognises the foundations are in place to Closing the Mental Health Gap, but the work lies ahead.

NACCHO is marking World Mental Health Day by emphasising the importance of the 2019 theme and focus, suicide prevention.

In Australia, the rate of suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities continues to grow. NACCHO CEO Pat Turner AM said, "Our people experience very high levels of psychological stress at almost three times the rate of other Australians and are twice as likely to commit suicide.

"At the heart of suicide is a sense of helplessness and powerlessness, which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience across multiple domains in direct response to their intractable circumstances. Almost all of our people who die of suicide are living below the poverty line."

Ms Turner also highlighted the most vulnerable victims of this mental health crisis: "Our children are four times more likely to kill themselves in comparison with other Australian children. In 2018, suicide was the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, accounting for more than a quarter of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child deaths."

NACCHO believes that suicide prevention initiatives must incorporate culturally safe, holistic approaches that are co-designed with communities, and which consider the physical, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing of individuals and families.

Professor Pat Dudgeon, Director of the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Director, said, "The evidence shows that Indigenous cultural strengths already provide an overarching foundation for the national effort ahead. These strengths contribute to what we call our 'social and emotional wellbeing'. Strong families, strong communities and strong cultures and cultural identity support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental (and indeed physical) health."

There is a range of evidence which demonstrates that community-led initiatives, exemplified by the values, beliefs and services of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs), are critical for designing programs that strengthen Social and Emotional Wellbeing and promote healing.

Ms Turner stated, "Our ACCHOs deliver culturally safe, trauma-informed services in communities dealing with the extreme social and economic disadvantage that are affected by intergenerational trauma, but they need more support. Our services know what's happening on the ground, and the help that our communities need and that is why government funding is so vital."

NACCHO understands harnessing the global momentum on World Mental Health Day is critical to ensure productive and culturally meaningful solutions are resourced and delivered to drive suicide rates down within Aboriginal and Torres Strait communities.

"NACCHO urges the Commonwealth Government to continue providing support for the national suicide prevention trials in 12 communities by looking at the learnings and how they can transition the successful elements into ongoing funding and programs," Ms Turner stated.



NACCHO

National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation

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NACCHO is the national peak body representing 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations across the country on Aboriginal health and wellbeing issues. NACCHO represents over 6,000 ACCHO staff – of which 3,500 are Indigenous – and is the largest employer of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia.

Many NACCHO members have almost 50 years of experience in the delivery of comprehensive primary health care. Services are delivered through fixed, outreach and mobile clinics operating in urban, rural and remote settings across Australia.