



Mental Health
Australia

FIRST NATIONS PEOPLE, THEIR CULTURE AND MENTAL HEALTH

Gayaa
Dhuwi
(Proud
Spirit)
Australia



Established in 2020, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia is the national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention leadership body. It is governed and controlled by Indigenous experts and peak bodies working in these areas, promoting collective excellence in mental health care. The Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration has five themes:

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and healing should be recognised across all parts of the Australian mental health system, and in some circumstances support specialised areas of practice.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and healing combined with clinical perspectives will make the greatest contribution to the achievement of the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander values-based social and emotional wellbeing and mental health outcome measures in combination with clinical outcome measures should guide the assessment of mental health and suicide prevention services and programs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
4. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence and leadership is required across all parts of the Australian mental health system for it to adapt to, and be accountable to, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples for the achievement of the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes.
5. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders should be supported and valued to be visible and influential across all parts of the Australian mental health system

Mental Health Australia would like to thank and commend Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia on being a uniquely Indigenous and trusted source of wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention information. This issue paper is just a snapshot of their great work in providing guidance and support to first nations peoples. www.gayaadhuwi.org.au

The Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Implementation Plan is currently being developed and will be out for public consultation soon.

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The Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration **will be based on a Framework that includes the following nine principles:**

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context, that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land and sea is central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that when the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill-health will persist.
2. Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.
3. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health problems generally, and mental health problems, in particular.
4. It must be recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss, present since European invasion, are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing. Trauma and loss of this magnitude continues to have inter-generational effects.
5. The human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be recognised and respected. Failure to respect these human rights constitutes continuous disruption to mental health, (versus mental ill-health).
6. Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors and have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and wellbeing.
7. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognised as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.
8. There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes, as well as ways of living.
9. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment.

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