



## **MEDIA RELEASE**

### **We must keep trying to improve mental health and suicide prevention outcomes**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should have every opportunity to live happy and fulfilling lives. Instead, too many of our families are struggling with mental health challenges, continuing grief and trauma, and suicide.

It is a public health issue that must be addressed beyond the health system, says Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention.

The rate of suicide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men is 2.6 times that of non-Indigenous men.<sup>1</sup> For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, the rate is 2.5 times that of non-Indigenous women.<sup>2</sup>

“Reducing deaths by suicide among our people is an issue of major concern for our communities, and should be for government”, says Professor Tom Calma AO, human rights and social justice campaigner and Patron of Gayaa Dhuwi.

“We can sit back and lament the rates of suicide and mental ill health in community, or we can continue pushing for change. Every life is precious, so I want to continue pushing for change”, Professor Calma said.

Professor Helen Milroy AM, Australia’s first Aboriginal psychiatrist and Chair of Gayaa Dhuwi agrees. “Our people deserve to live happy and long lives, enjoying high levels of social and emotional wellbeing and mental health. We know for too many of us, though, that this isn’t the case”.

“Widescale changes are needed. Gayaa Dhuwi has worked with government to develop the roadmap for these changes – in the form of the Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration Implementation Plan and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (NATSISPS)”, said Professor Milroy.

“The Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration Implementation Plan and the NATSISPS provide positive ways for government and community to work together, ensuring our people can get the support they need, where they seek it”, says CEO of Gayaa Dhuwi, Ms Rachel Fishlock.

The Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration Implementation Plan focuses on a ‘best of both worlds’ approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, and suicide prevention, promoting an appropriate balance of clinical and culturally informed mental health system responses.

The refreshed NATSISPS reflects the changed policy landscape and sets a path for all governments to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, organisations, and

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<sup>1</sup> [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Australian Institute of Health and Welfare](#)



## Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

communities to reduce the rates of suicide and self-harm amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people by driving culturally safe and responsive solutions.

“Change is possible. The Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration Implementation Plan and the refreshed NATSISPS will reduce barriers to mob seeking mental health support and ensure that culturally safe care is available”, said Professor Calma.

Gayaa Dhuwi is the peak community-led organisation whose role is to work across the system to ensure the highest attainable standard of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Media are reminded of the importance of abiding by the [Good Yarn Guidelines](#) when reporting on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander matters, including the provision of 24/7 crisis helpline services: 13 YARN (139276); Brother to Brother crisis line (1800 435 799); Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800).

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