



## Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

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

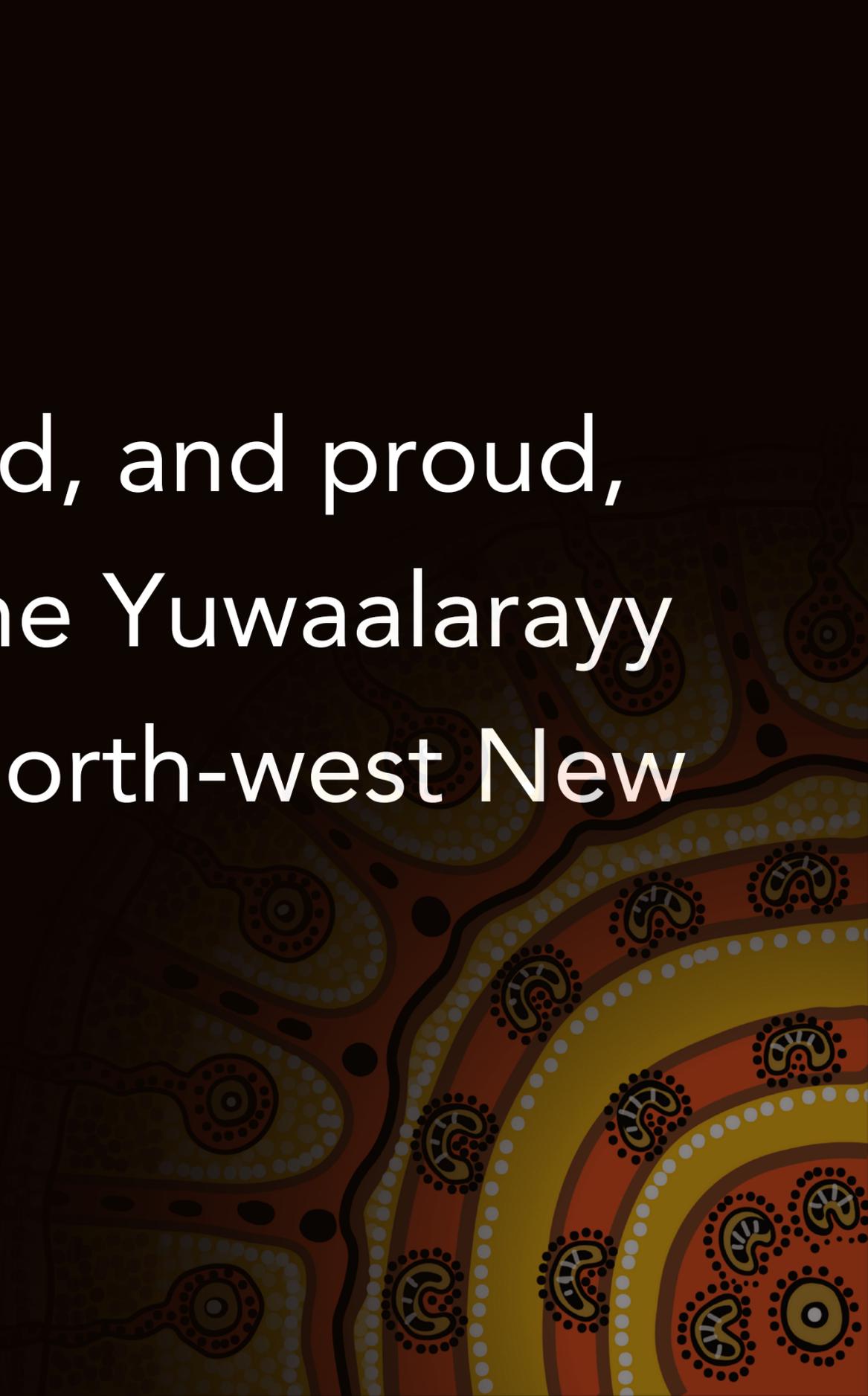


# GAYAA DHUWI

*Embedding Lived Experience*

28 May 2024

**'Gayaa'** means happy, pleased, and proud,  
and **'Dhuwi'** means Spirit, in the Yuwaalarayy  
and Gamilaraay languages of north-west New  
South Wales.



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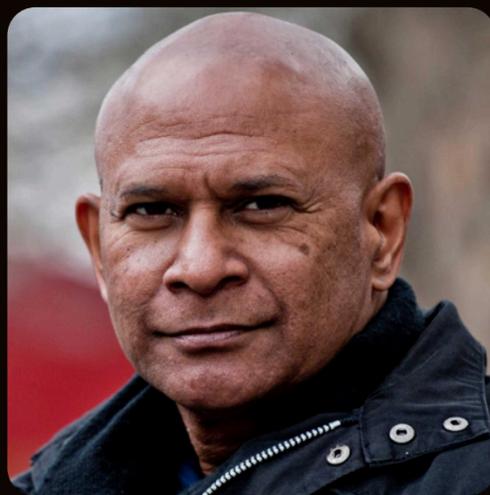
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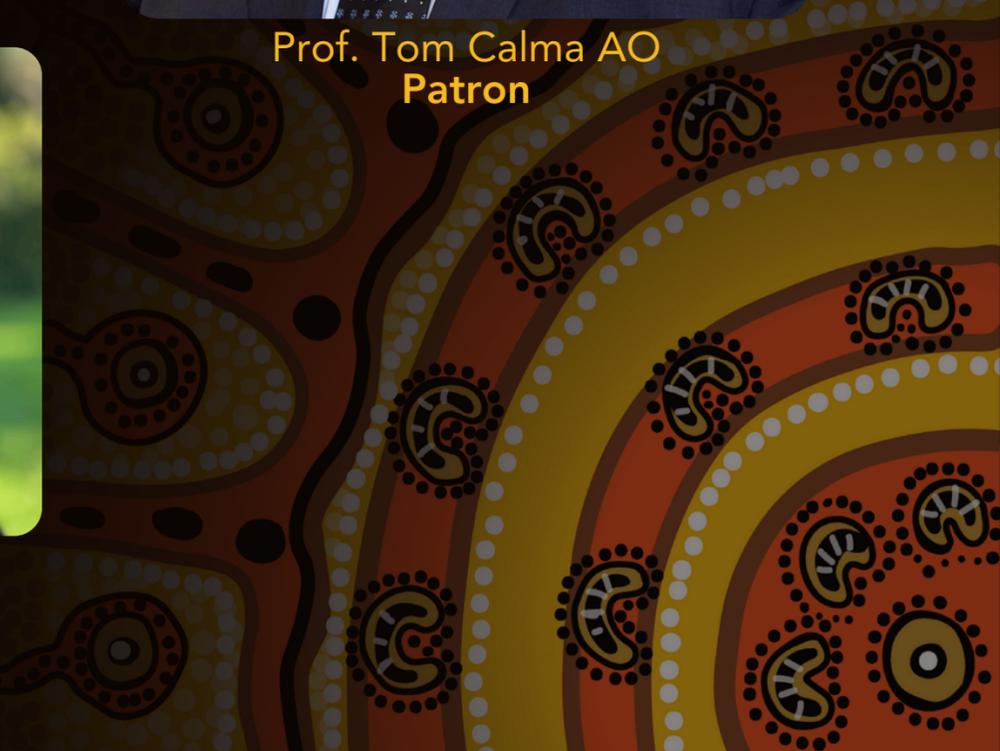
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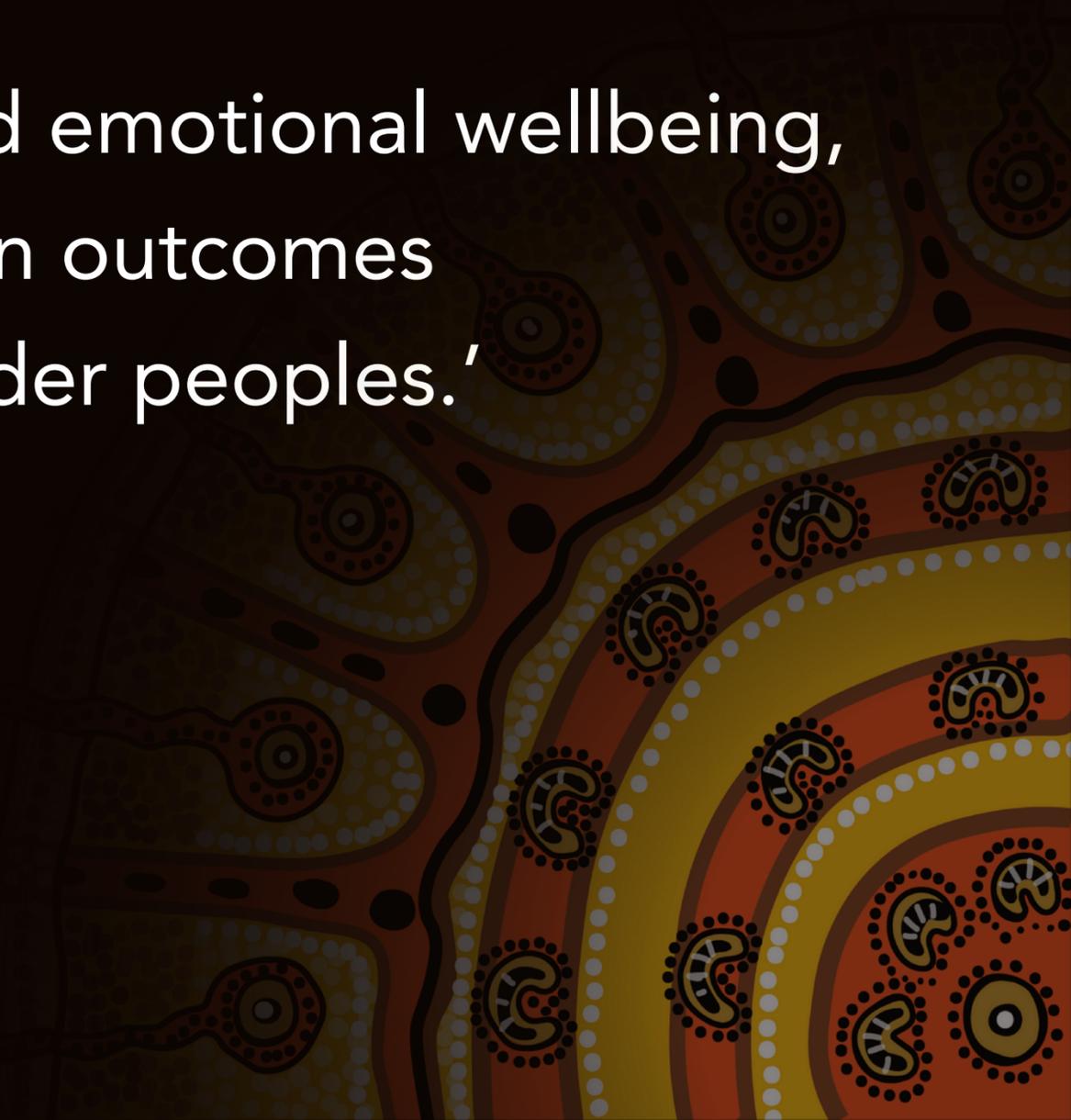


Donna Burns



# VISION

'The **highest attainable standard** of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.'





# The Wharerata Declaration – the development of indigenous leaders in mental health

**Rose Sones**  
*First Nations, Canada*

**Carol Hopkins**  
*First Nations, Executive Director of the National Native Addictions Partnership Foundation, Canada*

**Spero Manson**  
*Native American, Director of the Centers for American Indian and Alaska Native Health, USA*

**Ray Watson**  
*Maori, Commissioner at the Mental Health Commission, New Zealand*

**Sir Mason Durie**  
*Maori, Professor at Massey University, New Zealand*

**Valerie Naquin**  
*Consultant at Cook Inlet Tribal Council, USA*

This article has been written on behalf of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL). The IIMHL is a 'virtual' membership agency that works to improve mental health services by supporting innovative leadership processes: [www.iimhl.com](http://www.iimhl.com). The IIMHL contributes an article to every issue of *The International Journal of Leadership in Public Services*.

## Abstract

Indigenous populations and communities around the world confront historical, cultural, socioeconomic and forced geographic limitations that have profound impacts on mental wellness. The impacts of colonialism and, for some indigenous populations, forced residential schooling and the resulting loss of culture and family ties, have contributed to higher risks of mental illness in these groups. In addition, there are barriers to healing and mental wellness, including inconsistent cultural competence of mainstream mental health professionals, coupled with the limited numbers of indigenous mental health professionals. The Wharerata Declaration is a proposed framework to improve indigenous mental health through state-supported development of indigenous mental health leaders, based on a new indigenous leadership framework. Developed by the Wharerata Group (original membership noted in the acknowledgements section at the end of this article), the framework will be presented for support to the member countries of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) in 2010.

## Key words

Indigenous; aboriginal; First Nations; Inuit; Maori; mental health; leadership; cultural competence.

## National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health *Together we are strong*

### Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration

**A companion declaration to the Wharerātā Declaration  
for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples**

#### Introduction

The Wharerātā Group of Indigenous mental health leaders from Canada, the United States, Australia, Samoa and New Zealand developed the *Wharerātā Declaration* in 2010.<sup>1</sup> It comprises five themes on the importance of Indigenous leadership in addressing the common mental health challenges faced by Indigenous peoples around the world. Member countries of the International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership endorsed the *Wharerātā Declaration* in 2010 and now promote it as a key part of their work.<sup>2</sup>

Through the March 2013 *Sydney Declaration*,<sup>3</sup> the *Wharerātā Declaration* was endorsed in Australia by key government mental health agencies including the National Mental Health Commission, the Mental Health Commission of New South Wales, and the Government of Western Australia Mental Health Commission. The Queensland Mental Health Commission, forming later, also supports the *Wharerātā Declaration*.

This endorsement underpinned the formation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILMH) in 2013–2014. Guided by the *Wharerātā Declaration*, NATSILMH is an independent entity that is supported by the four Australian mental health commissions to provide national leadership in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing, and suicide prevention.

In December 2014, NATSILMH undertook to develop a companion declaration to the *Wharerātā Declaration* for use by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. After the release of a discussion paper and a consultation process, the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration* was launched on the 27th of August 2015.

#### The Name of the Declaration

'Gayaa' means happy, pleased and proud, and 'Dhuwi' means spirit in the Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages of north-west New South Wales.

NATSILMH thanks the Dharriwaa Elders Group and Virginia Robinson for their agreement to use these words to name the Declaration. NATSILMH also acknowledges the late Mr George Rose OAM, the founding Chairperson of the Dharriwaa Elders Group, for helping to preserve the Yuwaalaraay and Gamilaraay languages to the present day.

NATSILMH was directed to the Dharriwaa Elders Group by Ms Pat Delaney (nee Swan) to seek a name for the Declaration. NATSILMH acknowledges her important contributions to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and social and emotional wellbeing as co-author of the landmark 1995 *Ways Forward* report with Professor Beverley Raphael.<sup>4</sup> The principles from that report are adopted by and appended to the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration*.

*Gayaa Dhuwi* is the official name of this Declaration. In adopting these words, it is acknowledged that different meanings might be attached to these words in another Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language. The members of that language group should use other local words that reflect the spirit of the Declaration.

Leadership together Gayaa Dhuwi outcomes  
strong proud spirit Declaration National mental health  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

# 1989 NATIONAL ABORIGINAL HEALTH STRATEGY

'Aboriginal health does not mean the physical wellbeing of an individual, but refers to the social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. For Aboriginal people this is seen in terms of the whole-life-view. Health care services should strive to achieve the state where every individual is able to achieve their full potential as human beings, and must bring about the total wellbeing of their community'.

# SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

- Health as holistic
- The right to self-determination
- The need for cultural understanding
- The impact of history in trauma and loss
- Recognition of human rights
- The impact of racism and stigma
- Recognition of the centrality of kinship
- Recognition of cultural diversity
- Recognition of Aboriginal strengths



SEWB Diagram adapted from Gee et al., (2014)

# FIFTH NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH & SUICIDE PREVENTION PLAN

**Action 12.3:** Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander access, to and experience with mental health and wellbeing services in collaboration with ACCHs and other service providers: by recognising and promoting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and supporting the implementation of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration

# NATIONAL AGREEMENT ON CLOSING THE GAP

JULY 2020

## An Agreement between:

- the **Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations**, and
- all **Australian Governments**, being:
  - the Commonwealth of Australia
  - New South Wales
  - Victoria
  - Queensland
  - Western Australia
  - South Australia
  - Tasmania
  - the Australian Capital Territory
  - the Northern Territory
  - the Australian Local Government Association

# NATIONAL MENTAL HEALTH AND SUICIDE PREVENTION AGREEMENT

An agreement between

- the **Commonwealth of Australia** and
- the **States and Territories**, being:
  - ♦ New South Wales
  - ♦ Victoria
  - ♦ Queensland
  - ♦ Western Australia
  - ♦ South Australia
  - ♦ Tasmania
  - ♦ the Australian Capital Territory
  - ♦ the Northern Territory

This Agreement will contribute to building a better mental health and suicide prevention system for all Australians against a range of priority areas.

# DECLARATION IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

- Overseen by Governance Committee and Government Advisory Group
- Public consultation process engaged over 500 stakeholders through workshops and submissions
- Three phases for flexible approach to adapt to community needs and the changing policy landscape

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Leadership in Mental Health  
Together we are strong

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Leadership together strong  
Gayaa Dhuwi outcomes  
Declaration National mental health  
proud spirit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

**NATSISSPS**



Australian Government  
Department of Health and Ageing

# National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy

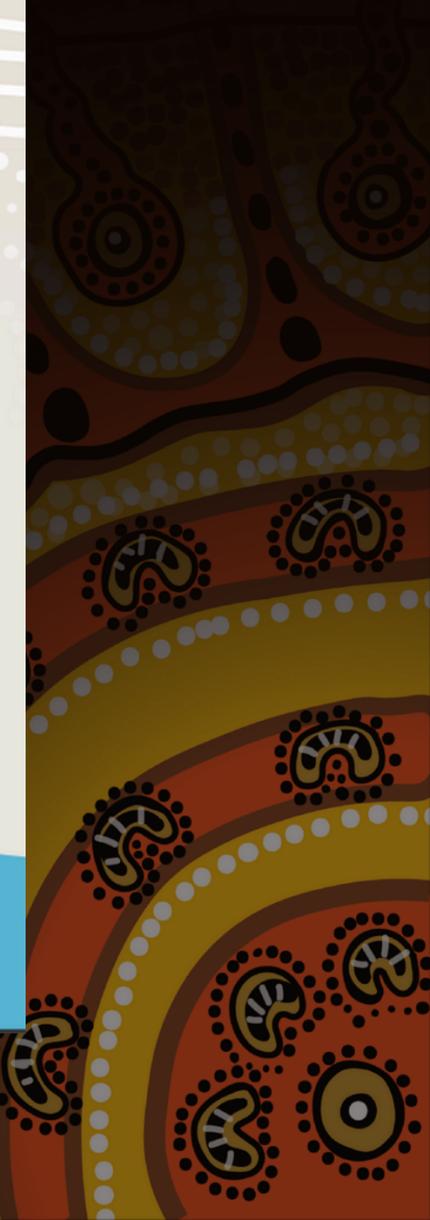
May 2013



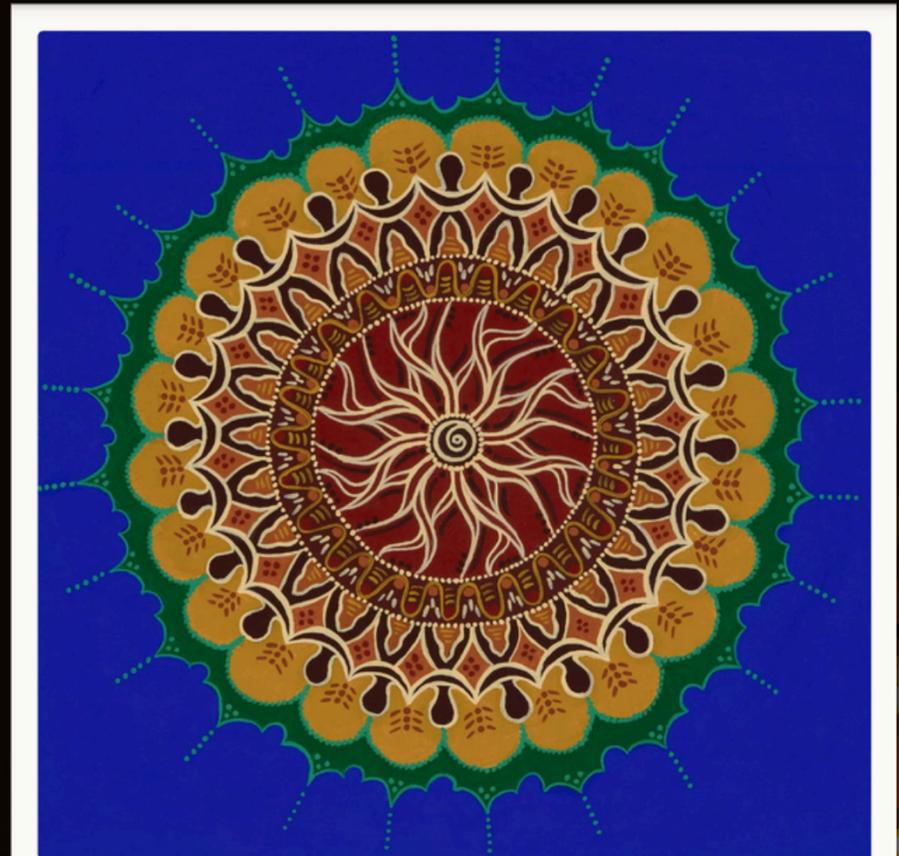
**SOLUTIONS THAT WORK:  
WHAT THE EVIDENCE  
AND OUR PEOPLE TELL US**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander  
Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project Report

ATSIPEP



# SEWB POLICY PARTNERSHIP



**National Strategic Framework  
for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples'  
Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing**

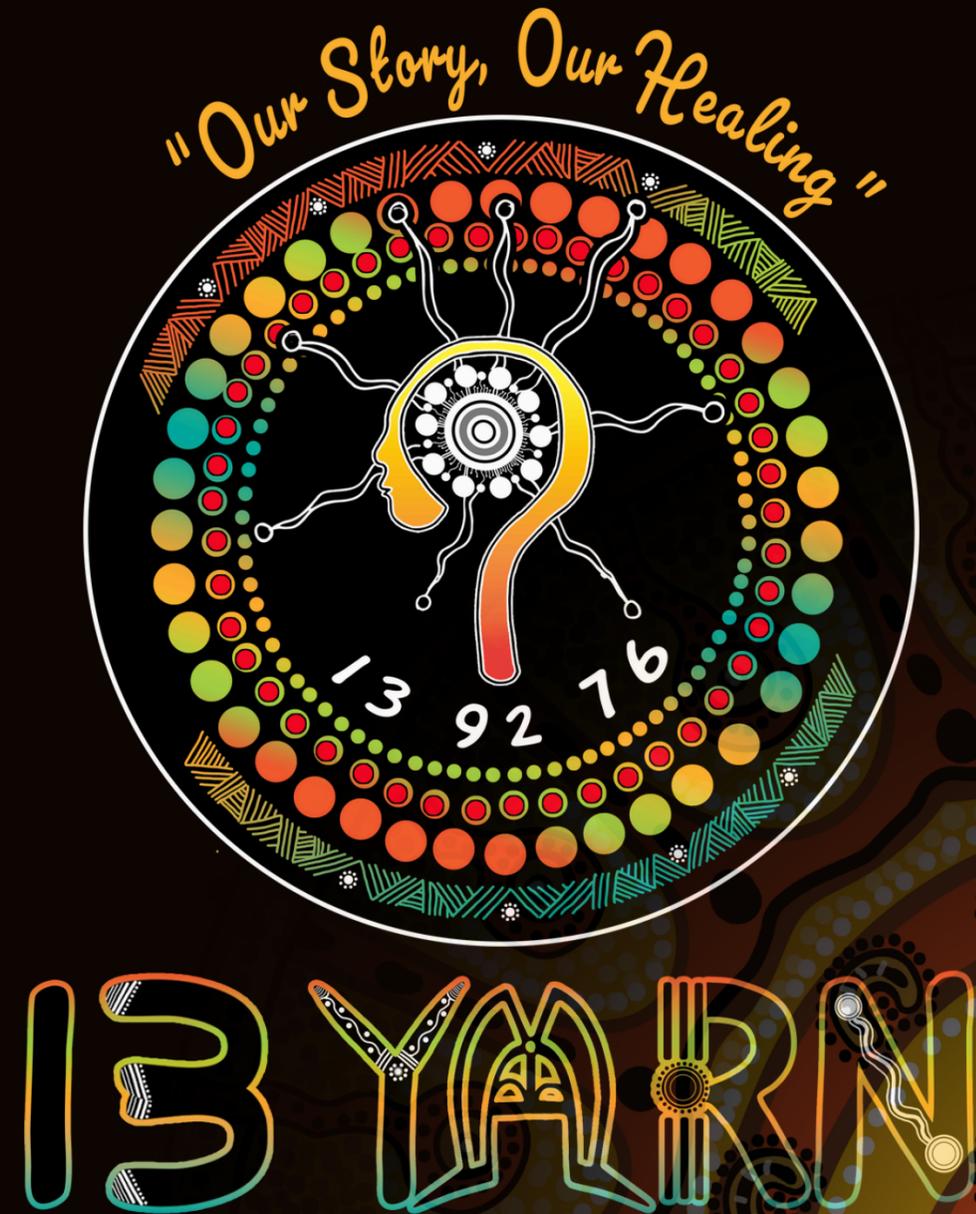
2017-2023



Endorsed by the Australian  
Health Ministers' Advisory Council  
February 2017

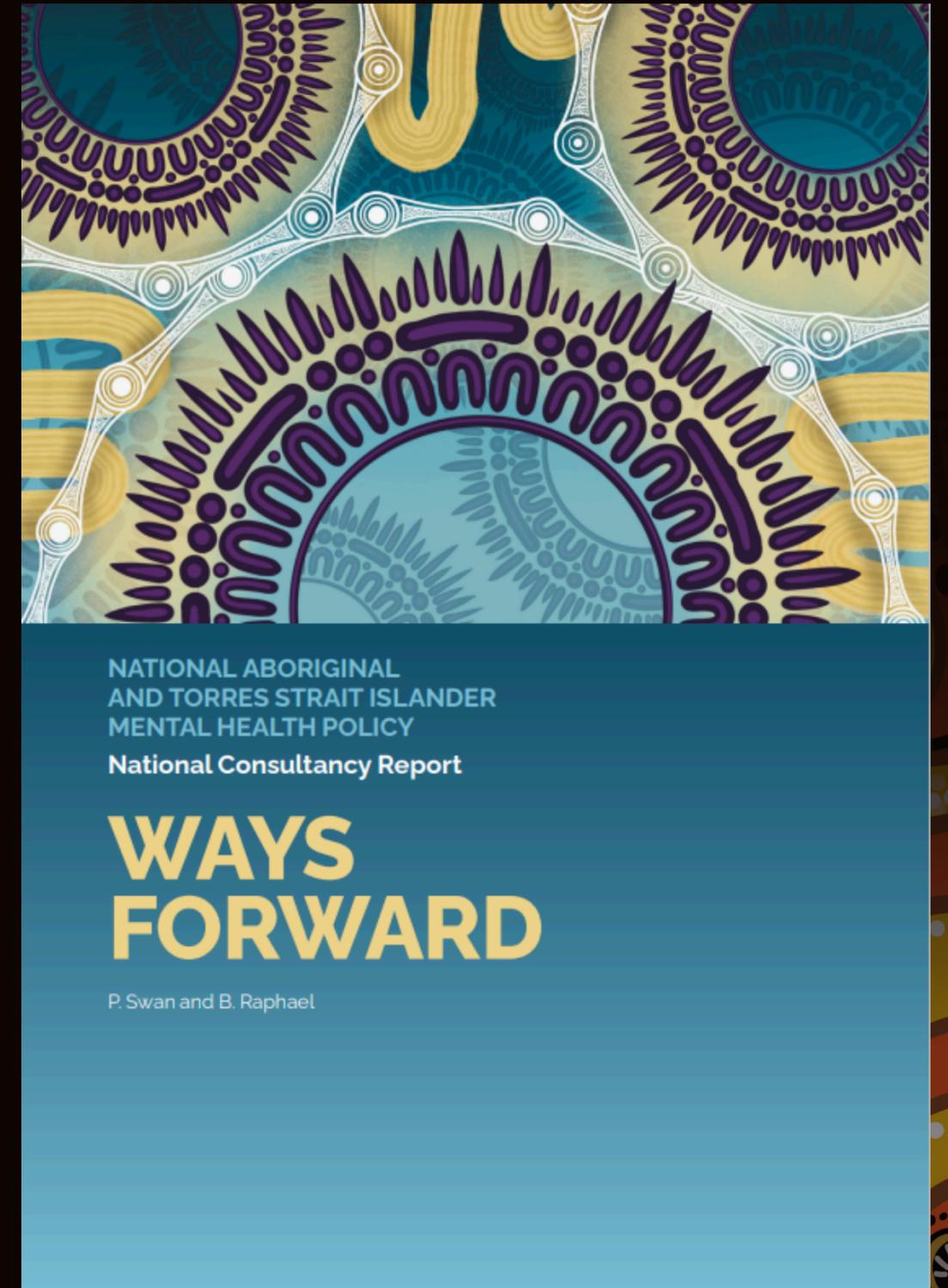
# 13YARN

- Developed in partnership by Lifeline and Gayaa Dhuwi, 13YARN is the first national crisis support line for mob who are feeling overwhelmed or having difficulty coping.
- 13YARN empowers our community with the opportunity to yarn without judgement and provide a culturally safe space to speak about their needs, worries or concerns.



# WAYS FORWARD

- On the 29th and 30th of August 2023, Gayaa Dhuwi held its first face-to-face national conference
- Theme of the conference was 'Ways Forward' drawing from the significant of the *1995 Ways Forward Report* as a milestone in Australia's mental health history
- Launched the republished *1995 Ways Forward Report*



**THANK YOU**

