

# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project

The Australian Government has funded a national **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP)**.

This Project is being undertaken by the School of Indigenous Studies in partnership with the Telethon Kids Institute/University of Western Australia. Professor Pat Dudgeon from the School of Indigenous Studies at UWA is leading the Project and A/Prof Roz Walker from the Centre of Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing (CREAHW), Telethon Kids Institute is overseeing the development of the evaluation.

The project is formally evaluating a range of existing Indigenous suicide prevention programs and services to develop a much-needed evidence base for 'what works' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention.

Professor Jill Milroy, Dean of School of Indigenous Studies, UWA and Executive Director, Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and Prof Tom Calma AO, Co-Chair of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Advisory Group* and Prof Pat Dudgeon, UWA are providing direction to the Project. The UWA management team consisting of Prof Pat Dudgeon, Prof Jill Milroy and A/Prof Roz Walker are responsible for overseeing the Project implementation and outcomes.

Prof Dudgeon, Chair of *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILIMH)* said it was evident there was a growing gap between the mental health of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.



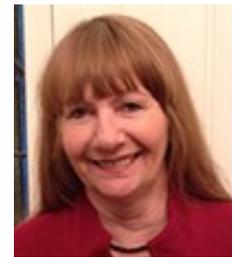
Prof Jill Milroy



Prof Tom Calma



Prof Pat Dudgeon



A/Prof Roz Walker

The available data suggests that the suicide rate for Indigenous peoples has, on average, been twice as high as that recorded for other Australians over the last decade. (AIHW 2014, 2015) The gaps are considerably greater in some regions and vary markedly by age and gender. Suicide rates are typically much higher among Indigenous men than women. The peak age of suicide is 30-34 years for Indigenous men (3 times the rate of other men of this age) and 20-24 years for Indigenous women (4 times the rate of other women).



The School of Indigenous Studies  
The Poche Centre for Indigenous Health



ATSISPEP is funded by the Australian Government  
through the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet



## Rationale for the project:

- ◆ Suicide is one of the most common causes of death among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. On average, over 100 Indigenous Australians end their lives through suicide each year, accounting for 1 in 20 Indigenous deaths.
- ◆ Indigenous people between the ages of 15 to 34 are at highest risk, with suicide the leading cause of death, accounting for 1 in 3 deaths. While these numbers reflect that Indigenous suicide is a significant public health issue, they are likely to underestimate the true scale of the problem.
- ◆ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at risk of suicide must determine appropriate responses.
- ◆ There is a need to formally evaluate the many different suicide prevention programs already operating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- ◆ There is a need for a systematic approach to building the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce and to improving specific skills in suicide prevention and supporting social and emotional wellbeing.
- ◆ There is a need to develop an evidence base of what works to ensure funding is effectively targeted.
- ◆ Without an evidence base for what works it will be not be possible to make recommendations for systemic changes to tackle suicide.
- ◆ In June 2014, over 50 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous leaders, experts and stakeholders met in Perth to identify the actions needed to turn the high rates of suicide around. The resulting [Call to Action](#) affirms culture as central to improving social and emotional wellbeing and mental health and reducing suicide. It affirms that action to reduce suicide should be informed by culturally informed research, knowledge and evidence and support whole of community and whole of Government approaches.

In summary, there is a need to develop an evaluation framework that can measure the effectiveness and appropriateness of the range of actions directed at addressing the complex issue of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide, underpinned by understandings of suicide identified by communities and by international best practice.

## Project objectives:

- ◆ To evaluate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention services and programs.
- ◆ To identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community suicide prevention needs.
- ◆ To identify system-level change for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention.
- ◆ To inform the implementation of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy.

The above objectives are to be informed by international models of best practice and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community perspective.

## Project methodologies:

The project utilises a variety of methodologies including: a comprehensive review and analysis of all relevant literature, research and extensive community consultations; development of culturally appropriate frameworks to evaluate programs and services; application and analysis of national coronial data to highlight patterns and trends of suicide over time and between regions across Australia; and hosting a national summit on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention.

## Project outcomes/outputs:

By the end of 2015 the team will have completed the following:

- ◆ A summary of work completed.
- ◆ A final report outlining an evidence base of 'what works' in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention for individuals, families and communities.
- ◆ Recommendations for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention services and programs.
- ◆ Recommendations for systemic changes to prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide.
- ◆ Recommendations for future action at a national level to inform the National Strategy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and develop a position paper.
- ◆ A national interactive consultation map and a spatial analysis map.
- ◆ A series of fact sheets.
- ◆ A culturally appropriate evaluation framework and indicators.
- ◆ An extensive consultation process throughout Australia.
- ◆ Identified future work.
- ◆ A website communication and dissemination portal.

## The ATSIPEP Team at UWA



Prof Pat Dudgeon is a Professor in the School of Indigenous Studies at UWA. Prof Dudgeon will oversee the project.



Mr John Shevlin is a consultant on the project. Formerly a Commonwealth public servant, he has extensive knowledge working with government.



Gerry Georgatos is working on the project with UWA conducting community consultations.



Ms Adele Cox is working on the project with UWA conducting community consultations.

## The ATSIPEP Team at Telethon Kids Institute



A/Prof Roz Walker, Principal Investigator Telethon Kids Institute/ CREAHW will lead the evaluation project.



Dr Clair Scrine, Senior Research Officer, Telethon Kids Institute.



Prof Sven Silburn is Co-Director of Centre for Child Development and Education, Menzies



Dr Carrington Shepherd, Research Fellow, Telethon Kids Institute/ CREAHW.



Dr Brad Farrant will undertake spatial analysis, Telethon Kids Institute.



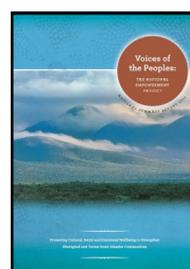
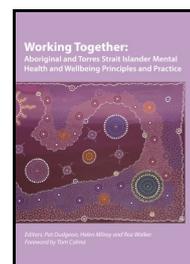
Scott Sims, Biostatistician, Telethon Kids Institute is building the interactive maps.



Lana Hill, Research Officer, Telethon Kids Institute.

## Publications

1. **Hear our Voices - Final Research Report, March 2012** - This report was initiated in response to the high number of suicides in the Kimberley, north Western Australia over more than ten years. Community consultations took place to develop an Empowerment, Healing and Leadership Program for Aboriginal people living in the Kimberley, WA.
2. **The Elders' Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-harm & Youth Suicide** - This report into preventing Indigenous self-harm and youth suicide was produced between 2007 and 2014 by Indigenous led social justice organisation - People Culture Environment in partnership with Our Generation Media. It was developed in response to a massive and unprecedented increase in Indigenous youth self-harm and suicide that has occurred over the past 20 years across Australia's Top End.
3. **Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice, 2nd edition 2014** - This book written by recognised experts, practitioners and researchers within the mental health field provides a variety of perspectives related to the causes and possible solutions to many of the social and emotional mental health issues experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Several chapters discuss suicide
4. **Voices of the People: National Empowerment Project 2014** - Promoting cultural, social and emotional wellbeing to strengthen Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This project is an Aboriginal-led initiative that undertook research with eight Aboriginal communities over 2013.
5. **Suicide Roundtable Call to Action and Report of Proceedings 2014** - The Roundtable brought together Aboriginal community leaders and experts in Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention to Perth for a 2-day discussion. The call to action was developed by all participants to deliver to Government.



**ATSISPEP** was announced soon after the Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing/Telethon Kids Institute in partnership with UWA, the Poche Centre at UWA hosted a roundtable on suicide prevention on June 23-24, 2014 which resulted in the Call to Action.

### The Call to Action 2014

- Action 1** Prioritise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ways of Working
- Action 2** Establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Youth Forum
- Action 3** Strengthen the evidence base for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention
- Action 4** Develop an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Framework for Suicide Prevention Services and Programs

### Contacts for the Project:

**Lobna Rouhani (UWA)** (08) 6488 1570 **John Shevlin** 0435 968 936 **Jacqui Bradley** (Telethon Kids) (08) 9489 7780