



MENTAL HEALTH FACTSHEET:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

The Productivity Commission's Mental Health Inquiry Report presents a long-term plan to improve mental health services in Australia. While this is a responsibility for all, key to this is the role and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within mental health policy and services, to support people in positively shaping and controlling their futures.

What does this mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?

We make a number of recommendations to the Australian Government that focus our mental health system on the needs, preferences and aspirations of the people who rely on its supports and services. Several of the recommended actions relate specifically to empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to make decisions about their social and emotional wellbeing:

- Designating Indigenous-controlled organisations as preferred providers of mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (action 23.6).
- Empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to prevent suicide through self-determination and local leadership by:
 - implementing a renewed Indigenous-led National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy and Implementation Plan to guide suicide prevention in Indigenous communities (action 9.2)
 - ensuring Indigenous organisations are the preferred providers of suicide prevention activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (action 9.2)
 - providing culturally capable aftercare to anyone who presents to a hospital, GP or community mental health service following a suicide attempt (action 9.1).
- Undertaking an evaluation of programs that use traditional healers in partnership with conventional mental health services (action 8.3).
- Expediting and resourcing the development of an implementation plan for the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023. Development of this plan should be led by Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (action 22.2).
- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in discussions to develop any targets for key mental health and suicide prevention outcomes that may affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (action 24.4), including targets to reduce the gap in life expectancy between people with severe mental illness and the general population (action 14.1).

Services that are culturally capable

We also recognise that mainstream services — within and beyond the healthcare system — need to be able to provide support that better meets the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This includes:

- aligning the cultural capability of mental health practitioners with the needs of individuals through the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy (action 16.1)
- making sure that all people with mental illness who leave hospitals, correctional facilities or institutional care have access to short-term housing when they need it (action 20.2)
- additional support for police responding to mental-health incidents should be tailored to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (action 21.2)
- making sure that services within correctional facilities and post-release care are culturally capable (actions 21.4 and 21.6).



Making our mental health system focus on the people who need it

These recommendations are part of a broader plan to make our mental health services and supports more responsive to the needs of all people who need care and assistance. We have provided the Australian Government with 22 recommendations, including around 100 actions, across a wide range of mental health services and supports. Our goal is to create a mental health system that:

- adopts a whole-of-life approach based on early intervention and prevention that empowers individuals and their families, kinship groups, and carers, and supports them to maintain their health and recover within their community
- places people at the centre of the design and delivery of all clinical and community-based mental health support services
- improves access to the right services at the right time — local service planning, better use of technology, and strategies to grow the workforce are key to improving access for people, especially those in regional and remote Australia
- recognises that the value of a service is the value of the outcome to the person who receives the service, and makes sure that services are monitored and evaluated on the basis of these outcomes.