

Media statement

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Cairns to welcome Indigenous mental health leaders

Cairns is hosting local, national and international Indigenous mental health leaders as part of the 2017 International Initiative for Mental Health Leadership (IIMHL) exchange.

The Far North Queensland event on 26-28 February is the key Indigenous IIMHL leadership exchange forum nation-wide, and is hosted by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILMH) in partnership with the Queensland Mental Health Commission and Queensland Health.

The theme of the exchange is Healing and Empowerment: Indigenous Leadership in Mental Health and Suicide Prevention.

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck said discussion would focus on cultural healing and the empowerment of communities to improve their social and emotional wellbeing.

“This forum is a platform to share successful approaches and practices across the world — and showcase promising local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-led initiatives that work towards closing the gap for health, wellbeing and life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians.”

Chair of NATSILMH Professor Pat Dudgeon said the value of Indigenous control and leadership in mental health, and suicide prevention advocacy, policy development and service delivery was well established.

“The Indigenous leadership exchange in Cairns is a rare opportunity to network and workshop ideas, as well as problem-solve with leaders facing similar challenges.”

Dr van Schoubroeck said the forum included visits to the Kuranda National Empowerment Project and to the Family Wellbeing Program at Yarrabah — both local initiatives that understand the healing role of culture, spirituality and community connectedness in wellbeing.

Speakers include Professor Pat Dudgeon, Dr Mark Wenitong of Apunipima Cape York Health Council and the Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council, Donna Blair from the Te Utuhina Manaakitanga Trust in New Zealand and Rose LeMay from the Canadian Foundation for Healthcare Improvement.

About every two years IIMHL brings together Indigenous leaders in mental health under the banner of the international Wharerata Declaration, which supports and promotes Indigenous leadership in mental health services. Wharerata provided the genesis of Australia’s own *Gayaa dhuwi* declaration and NATSILMH itself.

IIMHL is a worldwide collaborative to improve mental health, addiction and disability services through international networking, innovation sharing and problem solving across multiple countries.

More details on [IIMHL forums](#) in Cairns and across Australasia.

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Media contact: Kate Southwell 07 3033 0340 or 0409 275 385

