

Media Release

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILMH)
mark National Close the Gap Day, 19 March 2015

Indigenous Mental Health Plan Needed to Close the Mental Health Gap

Indigenous mental health leaders marked National Close the Gap Day by calling on Australian governments to finalise and implement the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2015-2019* as an Indigenous mental health plan to complement the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan*.

NATSILMH Chair Professor Pat Dudgeon said: "Indigenous Australians don't yet have a dedicated mental health plan. The completion and implementation of the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing* will go some way to closing this gap in Indigenous health planning, and help close the mental health gap itself."

"Mental health conditions, self harm and suicide are reported among Indigenous Australians at over double the rate of other Australians. The development of the Framework provides a unique opportunity to create a dedicated action plan that focuses on mental health conditions and the mental health system's response. This plan will complement the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan* which is largely focused on chronic disease and other physical health issues."

NATSILMH member Dr Tom Calma AO, while complimenting the Australian Government for its support for the critical evaluation of Indigenous suicide prevention programs, also called on all Australian governments to go further and develop an Indigenous mental health plan as a priority.

“Better Indigenous mental health will support the Australian Government’s Indigenous Affairs priority goals of reducing unemployment and truancy and increasing community safety, and the COAG target to close the life expectancy gap”, said Dr Calma.

“On National Close the Gap Day 2015, we call on the Australian Parliament and all governments to provide multi and bipartisan support to finalising and implementing the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing* as an Indigenous mental health plan. This current gap in Indigenous health planning can easily be closed,” said Professor Dudgeon and Dr Calma.

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- Available for interview: Prof. Pat Dudgeon (Chair) and Dr Tom Calma AO
- For more information about NATSILMH: www.natsilmh.org.au.
- For more information about the mental health gap, see the factsheet attached to this release.
- For more information on the appropriate reporting of mental illness and suicide see the Mindframe initiative: <http://www.mindframe-media.info>
- Lifeline: 131 114
- Kids Helpline: 1800 551 800
- Mensline: 1300 78 99 78

Factsheet on the Indigenous Mental Health Gap

- **Stressful Life Events:** Indigenous Australians report these at 1.4 times the rate of other Australians.ⁱ Stressful life events can be traumatic and impact on mental health. They include: serious illness, serious accident, mental illness, serious disability; death of a family member or close friend, divorce or separation, not able to get a job, Involuntary loss of job, alcohol or drug-related problems, gambling problems, witness to violence, abuse or violent crime, and trouble with the police.ⁱⁱ
- **Psychological Distress:** In 2012–13, 30 per cent of respondents to the *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey* over 18 years of age reported high or very high psychological distress levels in the four weeks before the survey interview.ⁱⁱⁱ That is nearly three times the non-Indigenous rate.^{iv} In 2004-05, high and very high psychological distress levels were reported by 27 per cent of respondents suggesting an increase in Indigenous psychological distress rates over the past decade.^v
- **Trauma:** Trauma is a complex phenomenon, has many symptoms and is hard to measure in a population. Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is one manifestation of trauma. A 2008 study of Indigenous prisoners in Queensland reported 12.1 per cent of males and 32.3 per cent of females with PTSD.^{vi}
- **Mental Health Conditions:** Over the period July 2008 to June 2010, Indigenous males were hospitalised for mental health-related conditions at 2.2 times the rate of non-Indigenous males; and Indigenous females at 1.5 times the rate of non-Indigenous females.^{vii} Rates of psychiatric disability (including conditions like schizophrenia) are double that of other Australians.^{viii}
- **Suicide:** The overall indigenous suicide rate was twice the non-Indigenous rate over 2001-10.^{ix} Approximately 100 Indigenous deaths by suicide per year took place over that decade. In 2012, 117 suicides were reported.^x

ⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Family stressors' *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: First Results, Australia, 2012-13*, ABS cat. no. 4727.0.55.001, 27/11/13, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Latestproducts/COE1AC36B1E28917CA257C2F001456E3?opendocument [Verified 6/7/14].

ⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Health Survey: Users' Guide, 2011-13*, ABS cat. no. 4363.0.55.001, ABS, Canberra, 2012.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Psychological Distress' *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, First Results, 2012*, ABS cat. no. 4727.0.55.001, 13, 27/11/13, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/9F3C9BDE98B3C5F1CA257C2F00145721?opendocument [Verified 15/7/14]

^{iv} Australian Bureau of Statistics, 'Psychological Distress' *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey, First Results, 2012*, ABS cat. no. 4727.0.55.001, 13, 27/11/13, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/9F3C9BDE98B3C5F1CA257C2F00145721?opendocument [Verified 15/7/14]

^v Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey: First Results, Australia, 2012-13*, ABS cat. no. 4727.0.55.001, 27/11/13, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/9F3C9BDE98B3C5F1CA257C2F00145721?opendocument [Verified 18/8/14].

^{vi} Heffernan E, Andersen K, Dev A, et al., *Prevalence of mental illness among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Queensland prisons*. *Med J Aust* 2012; 197 (1): 37-41.

^{vii} Based on combined data from New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, Western Australia, South Australia and the Northern Territory. Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework 2012: detailed analyses*, Cat. no. IHW 94. Canberra, 2013, p.639.

^{viii} Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 'Psychiatric Disability Support Services', *Mental Health Services in Australia*, May 2014, <http://mhsa.aihw.gov.au/services/disability-support/> [Verified 14/8/14].

^{ix} Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Suicides, Australia, 2010*, ABS cat. no. 3309.0, 24/07/12, www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Products/3309.0~2010~Chapter~Aboriginal+and+Torres+Strait+Islander+suicide+deaths?OpenDocument [Verified 15/7/14].

^x Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Causes of Death 2012* (ABS cat. no. 3303.0), 25/3/12, [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/by_per_cent_20Subject/3303.0~2012~Main_per_cent_20Features~External_per_cent_20Causes_per_cent_20\(V01-Y98\)~10021](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@nsf/Lookup/by_per_cent_20Subject/3303.0~2012~Main_per_cent_20Features~External_per_cent_20Causes_per_cent_20(V01-Y98)~10021) [Verified 29/7/14].