



‘More detail and funding needed’

Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention leaders respond to federal Budget

3 April 2019

Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSIISP) Director Professor Pat Dudgeon and National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILMH) Chair Mr Tom Brideson cautiously welcomed yesterday’s mental health and suicide prevention budget announcements but looked forward to more detail being released before committing to a response. Professor Dudgeon said:

I am especially pleased to see commitments to a National Suicide Information System. This is something that CBPATSIISP and, prior to that, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) called for. But it must operate in our communities and it’s not clear on the information provided whether it will. This is critical, such a system should help us get the people and resources to where they are needed faster, to help prevent suicide ‘clusters’, and better assist Indigenous families and communities after a suicide.

Professor Dudgeon also welcomed a \$5 million commitment to an Indigenous leadership group to implement an Indigenous suicide prevention strategy; and similar funding for Indigenous youth leaders to respond to Indigenous youth suicide. She said:

A national Indigenous suicide prevention strategy was developed in 2013 and about \$20 million implementation funding given to the Primary Health Networks (PHNs). While many PHNs are doing the best they can, the key ingredient – Indigenous governance and leadership in how that money is spent – has too often been lacking. It is my hope that the new Indigenous leadership group will not only lead a more effective and efficient national and regional response to Indigenous suicide, but also address these accountability problems. But again, we need more information about how these bodies will operate, and the leaders must be Indigenous and enjoy wide community support.

Mr Brideson called for greater funding for Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention:

\$15 million Indigenous specific funding in a \$461 million youth mental health and suicide prevention package, within a \$736 mental health package, is not enough to meet our needs.

Indigenous people comprise 3% of the population and have about double the suicide prevention needs, and three times the mental health needs, of other Australians. In terms of equity, we estimate about 9% of the total package, about \$70 million, should be dedicated Indigenous expenditure. While this may seem a significant amount, it should not be forgotten that the bulk of Indigenous mental ill-health is preventable with access to primary mental health care, and yet the social costs of untreated Indigenous mental health difficulties are likely to run into the billions.

In fact, a long called for reinvestment funding approach to our mental health, particularly justice reinvestment, should eventually enable the Australian Government to make savings in many areas as well as making a big contribution to 'Closing the Gap' and Indigenous wellbeing. This is particularly in relation to the enormous cost of imprisoning over 13,000 Indigenous people, many of whom are in prison because of untreated mental health and related issues.

Professor Dudgeon and Mr Brideson closed by calling on Ministers Wyatt, Hunt and Scullion, their shadow ministry counterparts and the newly announced Suicide Prevention Coordinator to meet with them and other Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention leaders to discuss the detail of the package, and ensure that Indigenous peoples get their fair share of the mainstream elements of the mental health, suicide prevention, drug strategy and other budget initiatives:

We will be working with other Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention leaders to ensure our people, and young people in particular, benefit from all the budget measures according to their greater need. This includes the extra funding for headspace, the adult mental health centres and many other promising mainstream initiatives. CBPATSISP and NATSILMH want to see a partnership approach with the Australian Government to help ensure we get the detail right, and that the total \$736 million package results in better mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Indigenous Australians.

END

- For media enquiries and interview requests for Professor Dudgeon, please contact Ms Barb Ahmat on XXXXXXXX. For Mr Brideson, please contact Mr Chris Holland on 0438 409 149.
- For more information about NATSILMH see: www.natsilmh.org.au.
- For more information about CBPATSISP see <https://www.cbpatsisp.com.au/>
- For more information about ATSISEPEP see: <https://www.atsispep.sis.uwa.edu.au/>
- 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