

Media statement

19 March 2015

Funding contributes to Closing the Gap on mental health

Programs to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous Queenslanders will be boosted by \$88,000 in new funding announced today.

This takes the Queensland Mental Health Commission's investment in Indigenous mental health to \$413,000 this financial year.

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Dr Lesley van Schoubroeck said the funding would help reduce suicide and self-harm and improve mental health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders.

"The grant recipients run Indigenous programs that lift awareness about mental health issues, extend prevention initiatives and enhance early intervention services.

"These grants complement the work already being undertaken by the Commission to address the unacceptably high rate of suicide among Indigenous Queenslanders."

Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council member Professor Gracelyn Smallwood said the national rate of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is almost twice that of the non-Indigenous population.

"Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 15 are seven times more likely to suicide.

"Poverty, social, educational and health disadvantage continues to affect the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people," Professor Smallwood said.

"Community action is fundamental to promoting good mental health and wellbeing, reducing community distress and promoting healing."

Coinciding with **National Close the Gap Day***, Dr van Schoubroeck and Professor Smallwood visited Gallang Place Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Corporation at Cannon Hill in Brisbane's east, and committed to further funding for a community-based suicide prevention initiative being developed by Gallang Place.

The "*Live Long, Live Strong*" program will help Indigenous community members to prevent, identify and respond to suicide and suicidal behaviour in their communities.

Dr van Schoubroeck said the program had the potential to be expanded into other communities across the state.

"This year the Queensland Mental Health Commission has also invested \$325,000 in the National Empowerment Project in the Cherbourg and Kuranda communities for support services, training of community workers and a healing program in each community," she said.

Mental health was identified as a priority focus area in the recently released *Progress and Priorities Report 2015* by the Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee. It reported “an entrenched mental health crisis among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples”.

The \$88,000 Queensland Mental Health Commission grants for Indigenous programs include:

- **\$50,000 to the Apunipima Cape York Health Council** for a Wellbeing Leadership program, providing leadership in social and emotional wellbeing for four communities in Cape York (Mapoon, Napranum, Kowanyama and Aurukun).
- **\$14,950 to Solas for Mental Health First Aid Training** to service providers and people working with young Indigenous people in Townsville and Palm Island.
- **\$8,500 to The Healing Centre**, Brisbane, for delivery of Mental Health First Aid courses to Indigenous people across varied age groups, including high school students, parents and guardians.
- **\$15,000 to Accoras** for Youth and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid courses delivered to community members and professional service providers in Brisbane.

Snapshot of Indigenous mental health

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are hospitalised for mental health-related conditions at significantly higher rates than the general population.
- The national rate of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is almost twice that of the non-Indigenous population.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children under 15 years are seven times more likely to suicide.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in the 15 to 24 years age group are 3.6 times more likely to suicide.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the 25-35 years age group are 2.5 times more likely to suicide.

**National Close the Gap Day commemorates the launch of the campaign on 2 April 2007, and is held each year around that time. The day gives people the opportunity to show their support for closing the 17-year life expectancy gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and other Australians.*

The Close the Gap Steering Committee is co-chaired by Ms Kirstie Parker, Co-chair of the National Congress of Australia's First Peoples and by Mr Mick Gooda, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission.

Media contact
Kate Southwell, Queensland Mental Health Commission
(07) 3405 0718 or 0409 275 385