



THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA
School of Indigenous Studies
Poche Centre for Indigenous Health

MEDIA STATEMENT

Tuesday 24 June 2014

**SUMMIT TO ADDRESS UNACCEPTABLY HIGH RATES OF ABORIGINAL AND
TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SUICIDE**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are dying at twice the rate of other Australians from suicide, and among younger age groups the rate can be six times higher. In some communities, suicide clusters involving up to 20-plus deaths in a short time-frame take a terrible toll not only in terms of wasted lives, but also devastate communities and those left behind. “As a nation we must work to reduce the unacceptably high rates of suicide in our communities” said UWA’s Professor Pat Dudgeon. “This will involve building on our cultural, family and community strengths, ensuring mental health and suicide prevention services are culturally appropriate, and that our communities are at the centre of the design and delivery of programs.”

Next week in Perth, three key events are planned over 23 – 24 June at the Nedlands Yacht Club that have the potential to help turn things around.

1) The first is a two-day Roundtable at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, youth leaders, health professionals, academics, social justice campaigners and government representatives will meet for a ‘third conversation’ with Professor Michael Chandler, a noted expert in suicide prevention among people in Canadian First Nations. This will provide a forum to discuss solutions in Australia being led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the importance of culture and self-determination in suicide prevention.

Some of the 29 Elders from Cape York to the Kimberley who contributed to the landmark *Elders’ Report into Preventing Indigenous Self-Harm and Youth Suicide* will attend the roundtable. In his Report foreword, ATSI Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda wrote that what makes the Report different “is that the solutions come from the people”.

<https://bepartofthehealing.org/EldersReport.pdf>

2) During the Roundtable the second edition of the ground-breaking book *Working Together Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing, Principles and Practice* will be launched. This excellent resource for all those who work in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and suicide prevention is edited by UWA’s Professor Pat Dudgeon – the first Aboriginal psychologist – Professor Helen Milroy – the first Aboriginal

psychiatrist – and Associate Professor Roz Walker from the Telethon Kids Institute, UWA. <http://aboriginal.telethonkids.org.au/kulunga-research-network/working-together-2nd-edition-2014>

3) Finally, *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health* will be officially launched on 24 June by Professor Dudgeon and endorsed by NSW Mental Health Commissioner John Feneley and Western Australian Mental Health Commissioner Timothy Marney.

The group has coalesced around a core group of senior Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people based in, or associated with, the various mental health commissions across Australia. The emergence of this leadership group signals a new era in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in the areas of mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention.

ENDS

WHAT: The Third Conversation: Has Anything Changed? Indigenous Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Roundtable hosted by the Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, Telethon Kids Institute, the University of Western Australia's School of Indigenous Studies, the Poche Centre for Indigenous Health, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health group.

WHEN: Tuesday 24 June 2014

WHERE: Nedlands Yacht Club, The Esplanade, Nedlands, WA