

Close the Gap Day 19 March 2015

Queensland Mental Health Commissioner Speaking Points

Gallang Place, 57 Southgate Ave, Cannon Hill 4107

Acknowledgements

- I acknowledge the traditional owners of this land where we are meeting today, and pay my respects to their Elders, past and present. I acknowledge the respected persons and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people among us here today.
- I would like to thank Aunty Carol Currie for welcoming us here to country to allow us to highlight the need to close the gap in mental health and social and emotional wellbeing alcohol and drugs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders.
- I must sincerely say 'thank you' to Noeleen Lopes, Chief Executive of Gallang Place and to Stephen Corporal, Chair of the Gallang Place Board for kindly agreeing to host this joint event with the Queensland Mental Health Commission.
- I would also like to welcome Sacha Martin from the local Federal Member's Office, Terri Butler MP.
- I also acknowledge the people living with mental health and drug and alcohol problems, their families and carers.

Theme

- Today is National Close the Gap Day – where we commemorate the launching of the Close the Gap Campaign in April 2007 and keep front-of-mind that equal access to healthcare is a basic human right, and in Australia, we expect it.
- Everyone here today will already know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people can expect to live 10—17 years less than non-Indigenous Australians.
- Poverty, social, educational and health disadvantage continue to contribute to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Queensland health system.

- I am sure you will all agree that the announcement yesterday by the Minister for Health of \$300,000 per year to support the Deadly Choices partnership to prevent chronic physical health problems will go some way to closing this gap.
- But we know that mental health problems also contribute to the shortening of the lives of Indigenous Australians.
- Many here will know that 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”.
- And we know that for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people mental health and social and emotional wellbeing is inextricably linked to culture and family.
- It follows then that building the capacity and opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in mental health and social and emotional wellbeing is vital to closing what is a substantial mental health gap.
- The Mental Health Commission that I lead is a small agency that advises Government and has some capacity to invest directly in good ideas.
- My commitment to you is that the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander will stay on the agenda.
- My commitment to you is that I will use whatever avenues there are to seek advice on what can be done to close this gap, and to foster leadership opportunities and to influence government decisions.
- I am lucky to have someone as informed, passionate and frank as Professor Gracelyn Smallwood on my advisory council. Gracelyn is one of those very rare people who can speak from the experiences of family, community and work and also work at the strategic policy level. She and I have been having some interesting conversations about the potential significance of the Wharerata Declaration which is an international statement that promotes a vision of “healthy Indigenous individuals, families and communities through Indigenous leadership”.
- With the support of Gracelyn, the Queensland Mental Health and Drug Advisory Council Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Committee, and a number of other Indigenous people we have got a few things under way, while some of the more complex issues are being worked through. Community action is fundamental to promoting good mental health and wellbeing, improving awareness, prevention and early intervention for mental difficulties and substance abuse problems, so that is where we have started.

Announcing Grant and other funding recipients

- That is why the Queensland Mental Health Commission has already invested over \$325,000 in the National Empowerment Project to support cultural mental health and social and emotional wellbeing programs in the Cherbourg and Kuranda communities, delivered by Ngoonbi Cooperative Society with partnership with the local communities.
- We have invested in this program because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders across Australia have advised us that it will bring about long term change in the wellbeing of communities. If the outcomes remain promising we will maintain that investment, but more importantly we will have contributed to the evidence for more significant investment from 'big' budget holders.
- We have also invested more than \$500,000 in smaller grants that enhance awareness and contribute to strengthened community mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. \$88,000 if that is focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs.
- I am also pleased to announce:
- **\$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 (namely, Mapoon, Napranum, Kowanyama and Aurukun).
- **\$14,950 to Solas for Mental Health First Aid Training** to service providers and people working with young people in Townsville and Palm Island.
- **\$8,500 to The Healing Centre**, Brisbane, for delivery of Mental Health First Aid courses 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 course delivered to community members and professional service providers in Brisbane.
- AND: We have set aside further funding to support Gallang Place develop and trial of a community suicide prevention, and response program.

Working together to Close the Gap

- All of the above work, the bulk of which is operated by and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled agencies, is either making a difference already or will make a difference over time to improve social, cultural and emotional

wellbeing, reductions in suicide, psychological distress and better community mental health.

- Together we have a shared commitment to work together to get it right and to close a critical gap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – that of mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.