



STRATEGIC CONVERSATION: ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Communique

Continuing the conversation

The Queensland Mental Health Commission was privileged to hear from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about ways that Queensland can support improved social and emotional wellbeing.

On 29 February 2016, the Commission hosted a strategic conversation which focused on what good social and emotional wellbeing means for Queensland. Facilitated by Murray Saylor, representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and government and non-government organisations shared their experiences and views.

The conversation was an important step in the development of a new whole-of-government Queensland Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Action Plan. The conversation focused on:

- What Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing means in Queensland
- What needs to change.

This communique outlines the main themes from the conversation.

What does Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing mean in Queensland?

Participants indicated that social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people means achieving your full potential, being happy and fully participating in the community. This includes have a strong sense of identity, being connected and knowing and where you fit within your community. Feeling and being safe (not only physically) and valued by the broader community was seen as essential. At the heart of good social and emotional wellbeing is pride in culture.

What needs to change?

Working from a strengths base, rather than from a perspective that focuses on disadvantage is important. There needs to be acknowledgement that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, cultures and peoples are resilient. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander customs need to be nurtured and valued by the broader community. Self-determination and reconciliation were identified as being important to social and emotional wellbeing.

There is also a need to focus on healing. Ongoing trauma relating to historical practices and present day circumstances needs to be addressed. For example, the result of children being taken from their families under past policies has led to a loss of parenting skills. A holistic approach is needed to address these issues and to address grief and trauma.

Services and responses need to be culturally capable to remove barriers to access, as well as ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are receiving the most effective support available, for example the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Triple P Parenting Program. There is also a need to ensure that all government officers and service providers are culturally capable through training, but also possible accreditation. Participants thought that a representative body that provided advice on government policies, programs and services was needed.

Participants spoke of the number of government policies and strategies that already exist but are uncoordinated. There is a need to align all of this work and for services to be mapped.

Racism and discrimination was identified as one of the main issues impacting social and emotional wellbeing. It directly impacts on self-esteem but also acts as a barrier to services and supports. While there are laws in place to

protect people from racism, participants indicated that it could be difficult to enforce their rights to be treated fairly and equally.

A bi-partisan approach is needed to enable strategies and programs the time they need to be effective. Short-term funding arrangements should be reviewed as they prevent services from being implemented effectively and having an impact.

Our next steps

The Commission will be consulting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the broader Queensland community about how to improve social and emotional wellbeing.

A discussion paper will be released on 31 March 2016 seeking views and community forums will be held in major regional centres, Thursday Island and Brisbane.

A second strategic conversation with representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, and government and non-government organisations is planned for mid-2016 before finalising the Action Plan.

Further information

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