

# Media statement

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## Dreaming big, having hope and celebrating cultures

Celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and strong community connections has been highlighted among strategies to improve social and emotional wellbeing.

Marking **NAIDOC Week 2016**, the Queensland Mental Health Commission today released its progress report on the development of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Action Plan.

The report summarised feedback from more than 200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders and other stakeholders during a consultation about social and emotional wellbeing and priority actions for the Queensland Government.

It noted the importance of acknowledging and celebrating cultures to promote the strength and resilience of Queensland's diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"Being connected to community, family, culture, land and sea as well as having a strong identity and spirituality were all identified as critical to social and emotional wellbeing," the report said.

"The need to acknowledge, accept and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders is not only needed in service delivery but also in the media and in the broader community.

"Fear of being subjected to racism and discrimination lead to many feeling culturally unsafe, influencing their participation in the community."

The report also highlighted the impact of grief and trauma resulting from past policies and practices.

"The effects of historical policies and events as well as present day circumstances impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Queenslanders," the report said.

"Reduced life expectancy and a high suicide rate also mean that communities are continually attending funerals and experiencing Sorry Business.

"The process of healing for their communities and families will take decades but it is important that communities own their own journey of healing" and are supported.

The Commission's consultation highlighted a strong sense of community as central to social and emotional wellbeing – or what communities talk about as "dreaming big", "having hope" and "being healed".

The report highlights the suggestions made by community members to support social and emotional wellbeing including:

- Celebrating traditions, cultures and customs
- Ensuring the history of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders has a greater focus in all schools
- Providing opportunities for communities to come together to resolve issues
- Ensuring that people living with mental illness and problematic alcohol or other drug use are actively involved in decisions about their care
- Ensuring that governments recognise and enable local Indigenous leadership to have a greater role in the development of policies, programs and the delivery of services
- Increasing community awareness about mental health, alcohol and other drug use, and suicide prevention through culturally-capable and safe programs.

The Commission is working with State Government agencies and other stakeholders to identify priorities and actions based on the experiences and views shared during the consultations.

It expects to release the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing Action Plan* later this year.

**Further information** is available at [www.qmhc.qld.gov.au](http://www.qmhc.qld.gov.au)

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**About QMHC:** *The Queensland Mental Health Commission was established to improve the mental health and wellbeing of all Queenslanders by driving ongoing reform.*

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