

COVID-19 puts extra strain on wellbeing of Indigenous Australians

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Indigenous communities must be empowered to address the social and emotional wellbeing needs of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders, with COVID-19 putting an additional strain on mental health, a national consensus report led by The University of Western Australia has revealed.

The National COVID-19 Pandemic Issues Paper on Mental Health and Wellbeing For Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples summarizes the perspectives of a working group of more than 30 Indigenous leaders Australia-wide.

It lists five priorities to mitigate the impact of the pandemic on the psychological wellbeing of Indigenous people as restrictions ease.

These include the right to self-determination, health and [mental health](#) of the workforce, social and cultural determinants of health, digital and telehealth inclusion with immediate attention to an Indigenous helpline and evaluation that includes Indigenous data sovereignty. Within each key recommendation, several key actions are outlined.

Professor Pat Dudgeon from UWA's School of Indigenous Studies, who led the working group, said Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders were already more than twice as likely as other Australians to die by suicide.

"COVID-19 has put many more Indigenous Australians at risk of severe psychological distress," Professor Dudgeon said. "Prior to the pandemic, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people already faced health and mental health disadvantages and inadequate and inequitable access to [mental health care](#). Now modeling shows that a severe increase in suicide rates could be expected, and Indigenous people are already over-represented in suicide rates in Australia, especially youth."

Professor Dudgeon, director of the Center of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention and the Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing project, said it was important for the government to respond to the clear findings in the report with equitable investment to support Indigenous-led initiatives to protect health and wellbeing.

"Culturally safe, trauma-informed, lived-experience solutions that respond to the [health](#) and [wellbeing](#) needs have been established, but are under-resourced," she said. "The national pandemic response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and communities must be a priority, led, developed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations, communities and people."

More information: National COVID-19 Pandemic Issues Paper on Mental Health and Wellbeing For Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Peoples, [www.cbpatisp.com.au/wp-content ... h-Response-Final.pdf](http://www.cbpatisp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/National-COVID-19-Pandemic-Issues-Paper-on-Mental-Health-and-Wellbeing-For-Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-Peoples-h-Response-Final.pdf)

Provided by University of Western Australia

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