

KALACC February 2024 Response to the November 2023 Future Foundations for Giving Draft Report by the Productivity Commission of Australia.

Commissioner Alex Robson – Deputy Chair

Commissioner Julie Abramson

Commissioner Krystian Seibert Associate Commissioner

Dear Commissioners,

03 February 2024

Please find following the submission from the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre [KALACC] in response to the Productivity Commission's November 2023 ***draft Report - Future Foundations for Giving***.

Whilst this current document runs to some 22 pages in length, the structure of the document is as follows:

- Pages One- Two: Cover letter
- Page Three: Recommendations
- Pages Four – Ten Key Observations and Findings
- Pages Eleven – Twenty Two: Appendix: ***KALACC Briefing Note: Funding pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing.***

Given this structure, the reader can scan this document and understand our key points in the space of less than ten minutes of reading.

A general observation about the *Draft Report* is that it is written and constructed in a legalistic and mechanistic discourse. The *Draft Report* is seemingly also quite divorced from some functional mechanism for addressing vital and key issues that need to be addressed in order to materially advance the contribution that philanthropy makes to Australian society.

In its 12 May 2023 submission to the Productivity Commission [***Review of Philanthropy Australia Council submission***] the Australia Council for the Arts [now Creative Australia], states as follows on page 10:

We need newly diversified relationships to develop the capability of the arts and cultural sector and to enable it to deliver a range of wider social impacts, for example collaborative projects between business partners, creative organisations and philanthropy for social outcomes.

In the recommendations which we provide on the following pages, we provide suggestions to the Productivity Commission, to Creative Australia and more broadly to Government and to the Philanthropic Sector, about key priorities that need to be addressed in order to materially advance the contribution that philanthropy makes to Australian society.

Across pages Eleven to Twenty- Two of this current submission you will find an Appendix:

KALACC Briefing Note: Funding pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing.

In that Briefing Note KALACC states as follows:

- There is substantial Australian Government investment in First Nations clinical mental health services and social and emotional wellbeing programs, including over \$60 million under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Program.
- But there are no commissioning pathways for preventative, whole of community programs to support the cultural determinants of health, which offer significant prospects for improvements in First Nations wellbeing and suicide prevention – an area of devastating policy failure.
- Rather than health services and hospitals, cultural programs are delivered by:
 - First Nations cultural centres, language centres, art centres, media organisations
 - a range of community organisations including Prescribed Body Corporates, ranger groups, service organisations and women’s organisations.

This Appendix does not directly comment on the Productivity Commission’s November 2023 ***draft Report - Future Foundations for Giving***. But in the Draft Report the Commission states that “Charities fill market gaps which cannot be met by directly Government Service Provision.” In regards to the Cultural Determinants of First Nations Health, there is a plethora of reports from 2011 to the present time each addressing the urgent need for commissioning pathways for Cultural programs that contribute towards wellbeing outcomes for First Nations people. After 13 years of Government inaction in this space, it is clear that this policy context is one clear and urgent example of a market gap which cannot be met directly by Government Service Provision. This is a context that the philanthropic sector should urgently turn its attention to.

Yours sincerely,



Wes Morris KALACC Coordinator

“To assist and promote the ceremonies, songs and dance of Kimberley Aboriginal people, to encourage and strengthen their social, cultural and legal values and ensure their traditions a place in Australian society.

Recommendations

1. KALACC endorses and supports the following recommendation from the Australia Council for the Arts, now Creative Australia:

Explore new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review:

Support collaboration between government, industry, the non-profit sector and philanthropists and include new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review.

- a. We need newly diversified relationships to develop the capability of the arts and cultural sector and to enable it to deliver a range of wider social impacts, for example collaborative projects between business partners, creative organisations and philanthropy for social outcomes.

While the Productivity Commission's working definition of philanthropy focuses on activities by donors who do not expect a direct financial return to their giving, new investment models in which philanthropy works in partnership with government and/or commercial entities have the potential to help boost and shape the social impact of Australian arts and culture in the future. There is a need to include new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review, for example social impact investing and social enterprises and/or B corps.

Review of Philanthropy Australia Council submission Australia Council for the Arts, 12 May 2023, page 10

2. That Creative Australia Should Develop both a Terms of Reference and a Co-Investment Strategy relating to the functions of Creative Partnerships Australia, now part of Creative Australia.
3. That Creative Australia [inclusive of Creative Partnerships Australia] trial or pilot the new functions of Creative Partnerships Australia through a focus on Creative Australia's *Connected Lives* [Culture and Mental Wellbeing] Agenda <https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/arts-creativity-and-mental-wellbeing-policy-development-program/>

4. That the Australian Government, inclusive of Creative Partnership Australia, trial or pilot collaboration between government, industry, the non-profit sector and philanthropists and that such a trial should focus on the contributions that Aboriginal Arts and Cultural Organisations [Art Centres, Language Centres, Culture Centres, Women’s Centres and Men’s Centres] make towards advancing First Nations Wellbeing in Australia.

[details on this agenda can be found in the Appendix to this document]

Key Observations and Findings

- **Charities fill market gaps which cannot be met directly by Government Service Provision:**

Direct government provision to address market gaps can also fail to meet community expectations. In these instances, there may be a case for government to intervene indirectly by supporting philanthropic giving or by directing philanthropic giving toward activities valued by the community.

Future foundations for giving Draft report, page 67 [Productivity Commission]

- **Government expenditure is skewed towards costly and expensive crisis services:**

Currently, State Government expenditure in relation to Aboriginal people is skewed towards the crisis category. These services are more cost-intensive, depend more on involuntary or coercive engagement, and involve higher risks. If current trends continue, demand for these “downstream” services is set to increase significantly in coming years. Preventative and early intervention initiatives can bring about positive changes that reduce the need for crisis responses.

WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, Policy Guide, page 33 [WA Dept Premier and Cabinet]

- **More effective and efficient [less costly] solutions can be achieved through a transition to ACCO-Led Service Delivery:**

These issues can be addressed through a more integrated service experience. Greater integration also puts Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in a better position to deliver services to their communities. Integration can be achieved through systemic and structural changes that enable the consolidation of budget processes, policy making, and efforts towards identified outcomes and priorities.

WA Aboriginal Empowerment Strategy, Policy Guide, page 35 [WA Dept Premier and Cabinet]

- **Government has made negligible progress in implementing the four priority reforms of the National Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap:**

- Page 3 - The commitment to shared decision-making is rarely achieved in practice
- Page 3 - Government policy doesn't reflect the value of the community-controlled sector
- Page 4 - The transformation of government organisations has barely begun
- Page 4 - Governments are not enabling Aboriginal- and Torres Strait Islander-led data

Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Draft report [Productivity Commission]

- **Clear strategies are needed to shift service delivery away from Government service providers to Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations:**

The Commission is seeking further information on:

- examples of good practice in transferring service delivery from mainstream organisations to ACCOs
- the risks to the sustainability of ACCOs from simply 'lifting and shifting' mainstream services into ACCO delivery
- putting obligations for governments into service delivery contracts, such as requirements for governments to provide data to ACCOs to enable them to design and deliver services that best meet the priorities and needs of service users
- the extent to which, in transferring service delivery from mainstream organisations to ACCOs, governments are reforming the way that services are contracted, funded, delivered, reported against and evaluated.

Review of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, Draft report

[Productivity Commission] Page 8

- **Strategies for Evaluating program outcomes need to Centre Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges:**

The overarching principle of the Strategy is centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges (figure 1). This principle is about recognising the strengths and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, knowledges, histories and cultures. It is also about building partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to define policy and program outcomes, and decide on evaluation questions, how evaluations will be conducted and how evaluation findings will be interpreted.

A Guide to Evaluation under the Indigenous Evaluation Strategy [Productivity Commission] page 3

- **Philanthropic giving can help overcome some of the reasons government fails to provide an efficient and equitable distribution of goods and service:**

Inquiry participants suggested that one of the primary functions of philanthropy is that it seeks to – and in fact does – fill gaps in government provision (Philanthropy Australia, sub. 162, p. ii; Royal Flying Doctor Service, sub. 126, p. 6). This includes contributing to funding gaps – \$13.4 billion was donated to charities in 2021 – but philanthropic giving can also overcome some of the other failures inherent in government provision by unlocking the benefits to the community of NFP organisations as providers of goods and services on behalf of the government.

Future foundations for giving Draft report, page 71 [Productivity Commission]

- **The largest charities receive the vast majority of donations:**

The number and size of charities in the charity sector has implications for the nature and intensity of competition for donations (box 3.3). In 2016, the largest 10% of charities received 94% of all donations and the 25 largest charities almost 20% of total donations (McLeod 2018, p. 24). During consultations, several participants highlighted that a lack of resourcing, paid staff, brand recognition and awareness of the work of small charities compared to larger charities was a barrier to them accessing philanthropic support (Centre for Social Impact, sub. 191, p. 9; FRRR, sub. 149, p. 13; Jesuit Social Services, sub. 165, pp. 8–9; chapter 10).

Future foundations for giving Draft report [Productivity Commission] page 112

- **Philanthropy can help fill gaps in market and government provision of goods and services:**

Some services, such as health care and suitable housing, can be fundamental to a person’s social and economic participation, while others like arts and cultural institutions can help connect people to their community and promote social inclusion.

Future foundations for giving Draft report [Productivity Commission] page 67

- **Corporate donations are worth \$5 billion per year or more:** As businesses do not report disaggregated donations to the ATO when submitting a tax return, there is limited detailed data on corporate giving. However, multiple studies have estimated that corporate donations are worth \$5 billion per year or more. McLeod (2020), for example, estimated corporate donations to charities were about \$5 billion (or almost 40% of total donations to charities) in 2020 (which is comparable to the \$6.2 billion in 2015-16 in donations estimated by the 2016 Giving Australia study) (Burns et al. 2017, p. 19).

Future foundations for giving Draft report [Productivity Commission] page 105

- **Culture is a foundation for First Nations wellbeing:**

- Culture is a foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing.
- First Nations arts and cultural participation can support the development of strong and resilient First Nations children and communities.
- For First Nations Australians living in remote communities, arts and cultural practices and production are critical for economic autonomy and community life.
- First Nations arts engagement supports empowerment, community connectedness and wellbeing among First Nations Australians and drives outcomes across the Closing the Gap framework.

Review of Philanthropy Australia Council submission Australia Council for the Arts, 12 May 2023, page 3

- **The functions of Creative Partnerships Australia have now been transferred over to Creative Australia:**

To encourage collaboration with private sector support in the arts, Revive will facilitate the transfer of the functions of Creative Partnerships Australia to Creative Australia. Creative Partnerships as a separate organisation came from the 2013 Creative Australia policy to build relationships with arts philanthropists. However, after a decade, there has been a decrease in the direct engagement that the Australia Council has with the philanthropic community. The Government is determined to bring the functions of Creative Partnerships and the philanthropic connections of the separate body within the newly formed Creative Australia. This transfer will include the Australian Cultural Fund so that this mechanism will continue to be available. This reform means publicly funded, philanthropic and commercial interests will all have a home in the same organisation: Creative Australia.

Revive, the National Cultural Policy Pages 67, 68 [Australian Government]

- **Australian Charities are under enormous strain due to the lack of Administrative and Operational Funding:**

Thriving not-for-profit organisations are critical to the future productivity and wellbeing of Australia. But right now, when they are needed most, many not-for-profits are struggling. Over the past year we have explored financial vulnerability of charities in our Partners in Recovery series of reports, which included an analysis of the financial health of over 16,000 charities using Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) data. The reports have shown that:

- Many charities operate with thin or no margin and did so even before the COVID crisis.
- Many charities operate with limited reserves.

- A majority of charities reported that recent events had put strain on their financial operations, and more than half of the organisations were worried they would not be able to provide their services in the current economic climate.

Paying what it takes: Funding indirect costs to create long-term impact SVA, Centre for Social Impact, Philanthropy Australia. Page One

- **Explore new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review:**

Support collaboration between government, industry, the non-profit sector and philanthropists and include new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review.

- We need newly diversified relationships to develop the capability of the arts and cultural sector and to enable it to deliver a range of wider social impacts, for example collaborative projects between business partners, creative organisations and philanthropy for social outcomes. While the Productivity Commission's working definition of philanthropy focuses on activities by donors who do not expect a direct financial return to their giving, new investment models in which philanthropy works in partnership with government and/or commercial entities have the potential to help boost and shape the social impact of Australian arts and culture in the future. There is a need to include new investment models that explore impact and blended finance as a component of the Productivity Commission's scope of this review, for example social impact investing and social enterprises and/or B corps. ***Review of Philanthropy Australia Council submission*** Australia Council for the Arts, 12 May 2023, page 10

- **By demonstrating to government the success of the community-led model, the Bourke Tribal Council was now able to position itself as an equal partner involved in designing solutions – an approach that worked for their community:**

Box 2.3 – Case study: Maranguka initiative The Maranguka initiative is a First Nations, community-led place-based model of justice reinvestment in Bourke, New South Wales. The intention of the initiative is to redirect resources that would be spent on prison back into the community, to address the underlying causes of imprisonment, and provide support to children and families. The Maranguka initiative was the first major justice reinvestment project in Australia. An impact evaluation found that this all of community collaboration had reduced family violence, increased participation in schooling at Year 12 and reduced the number of days a person spends in custody. From the perspective of Maranguka ... The local community of Bourke decided to step away from

working with government, since the approach government adopted was not aligned with how the community wished to work, nor was it producing the outcomes they were seeking. During this time, Maranguka was able to attract the support of philanthropy, including from the Dusseldorp Forum, the Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation and Lendlease. The relationship between Dusseldorp Forum and Maranguka was based on trust – the foundation only acted with the permission of the community represented through the Bourke Tribal Council. After working with philanthropy and demonstrating the benefits of the justice reinvestment approach, including through impact evaluation, the community of Bourke was able to return to all levels of government and invite them to be involved in Maranguka, this time on the community's terms. By demonstrating to government the success of the community-led model, the Bourke Tribal Council was now able to position itself as an equal partner involved in designing solutions – an approach that worked for their community. The partnership approach, first between Maranguka and its philanthropic partners, then government, is an important feature of the model, with each party bringing their respective expertise and experience. The partnership model is supported by a governance ecosystem that brings together all decision-makers to provide transparency, accountability and support collaboration. From the perspective of the Dusseldorp Forum ... Dusseldorp Forum and Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation partnered with Maranguka and provided both financial and capacity-building support. For Dusseldorp Forum, the work of Maranguka aligned with their foundation's principles of respecting First Nations self-determination and working alongside communities driving long-term systemic change. Dusseldorp Forum is aiming to demonstrate better ways foundations can work to improve outcomes for communities including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. They adopt a partnership-based approach to working with communities, recognising the different experiences each party brings to the partnership. In the example of Maranguka, Dusseldorp Forum's role was both a funder and a 'filter' or 'bridge' between Maranguka and philanthropy, by helping to manage and coordinate broader philanthropic support for Maranguka. For example, they identified suitable philanthropic partners that aligned with Maranguka's purpose, ensured that support was provided on the community's terms through untied funding, and that philanthropists did not impose a major reporting burden on Maranguka. This approach enabled Maranguka to focus on practical implementation of the model in the community in a manner that supported a community-led approach to change, rather than diverting resources away from core service delivery toward seeking out philanthropy. Dusseldorp have used this partnership-based model elsewhere, for example in supporting the Colman Education Foundation's expansion of the Our Place place-based approach to schools across 10 locations in Victoria. This illustrates how philanthropy can play a role disseminating ways of working and effective models for social change

to significantly improve outcomes for children and their families. Sources: Alister Ferguson and Teya Dusseldorp, pers. comm., 6 October 2023; Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (2023); Just reinvest NSW (2023).

Future foundations for giving Draft report, pages 75, 76 [Productivity Commission]

Appendix: KALACC Briefing Note: Funding pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing

KALACC Briefing Note: Funding pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing



For: Hon Susan Templeman, Special Envoy for the Arts
Jade Christian, Arts Adviser to the Hon Minister Burke
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Assistant Minister for
Indigenous Health

Subject: Commissioning pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing as recommended in the *Connected Lives* report

Contact: Wes Morris, KALACC Coordinator;

Date: October 2023

Key points:

- There is an urgent need for funding pathways for cultural programs to support First Nations wellbeing and suicide prevention.
- The *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031* recognises culture as a protective factor and expresses the clear need to invest in the cultural determinants of health, as have many reports over recent years.
- There is substantial Australian Government investment in First Nations clinical mental health services and social and emotional wellbeing programs, including over \$60 million under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Program.
- But there are no commissioning pathways for preventative, whole of community programs to support the cultural determinants of health, which offer significant prospects for improvements in First Nations wellbeing and suicide prevention – an area of devastating policy failure.
- Rather than health services and hospitals, cultural programs are delivered by:
 - First Nations cultural centres, language centres, art centres, media organisations
 - a range of community organisations including Prescribed Body Corporates, ranger groups, service organisations and women’s organisations.
- Funding programs supporting cultural determinants of health could be administered by either the Department of Health or the National Indigenous Australians Agency.
- The macro-policy frameworks are the Health Plan (which currently has no Implementation Plan), Closing the Gap, and the whole-of-government National Cultural Policy, *Revive*.
- The upcoming event in Parliament House may be an opportunity to discuss an interagency strategy.

Background – Creative Australia’s Connected Lives event:

- On 16 November, Creative Australia is holding an event at Parliament House Canberra to socialise recommendations from the [Connected Lives](#) report with a cross-portfolio audience of Ministers and advisors.
- This includes recommendation 2: Develop commissioning pathways for First Nations programs in cultural healing, for example, by including these programs in the implementation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*.

Attachments:

- Attachment A: The funding gap in the cultural domain of First Nations health and wellbeing policy
- Attachment B: Reports on the need for investment in cultural determinants of health and wellbeing

Attachment A: The funding gap in the cultural domain of First Nations health and wellbeing policy

	Domain #1: Clinical mental health	Domain #2: Social and emotional wellbeing	Domain #3: Cultural determinants of health (upstream, preventative, whole of community programs)
Key reports	Reviews and reports by the Productivity Commission and the Mental Health Commission.	A variety of reports from NACCHO or from the UWA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP)</u> (2016, UWA) • <u>My Life My Lead – Report on the national consultations</u>, (2018, Department of Health) • <u>Country Can't Hear English</u>, (2020, Arabena) • <u>Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy</u> (Lowitja Institute, 2021)
Policy responses	<u>Australian Government response to review of mental health programmes and services</u> , 2015	<u>Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership</u> (2023, Dept of Health)	<u>National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031</u> (2021, Dept of Health) <u>Closing the Gap</u> (Languages only)
Commissioning and implementation	Spending on mental health-related services increased from \$9.3b in 2016-17 to \$11.6b in 2020-21.	There are 145 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services affiliated with NACCHO. Considerable funding is allocated to SEWB programs, ¹ including over \$60 million under the <u>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Program</u> .	There are currently no implementation plans or commissioning pathways for cultural maintenance programs to support health, wellbeing and suicide prevention outcomes.

¹ Information would be available from NACCHO.

Attachment B: Reports on the need for investment in cultural determinants of First Nations health and wellbeing

Timeline of recent reports

There have been a number of significant Australian reports released in recent years on the need for investment in cultural determinants of Indigenous health, including:

- Feb 2018: [*My Life My Lead – Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations December 2017*](#) (Dept of Health)
- June 2020: [*'... Country Can't Hear English...'*](#) – A guide to implementing cultural determinants (Arabena)
- Feb 2021: [*Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy*](#) (Lowitja Institute)
- Dec 2021: [*The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*](#) (Dept of Health)
- Sept 2022: [*Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis*](#) (Australia Council)
- March 2023: [*Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future*](#) (Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023)

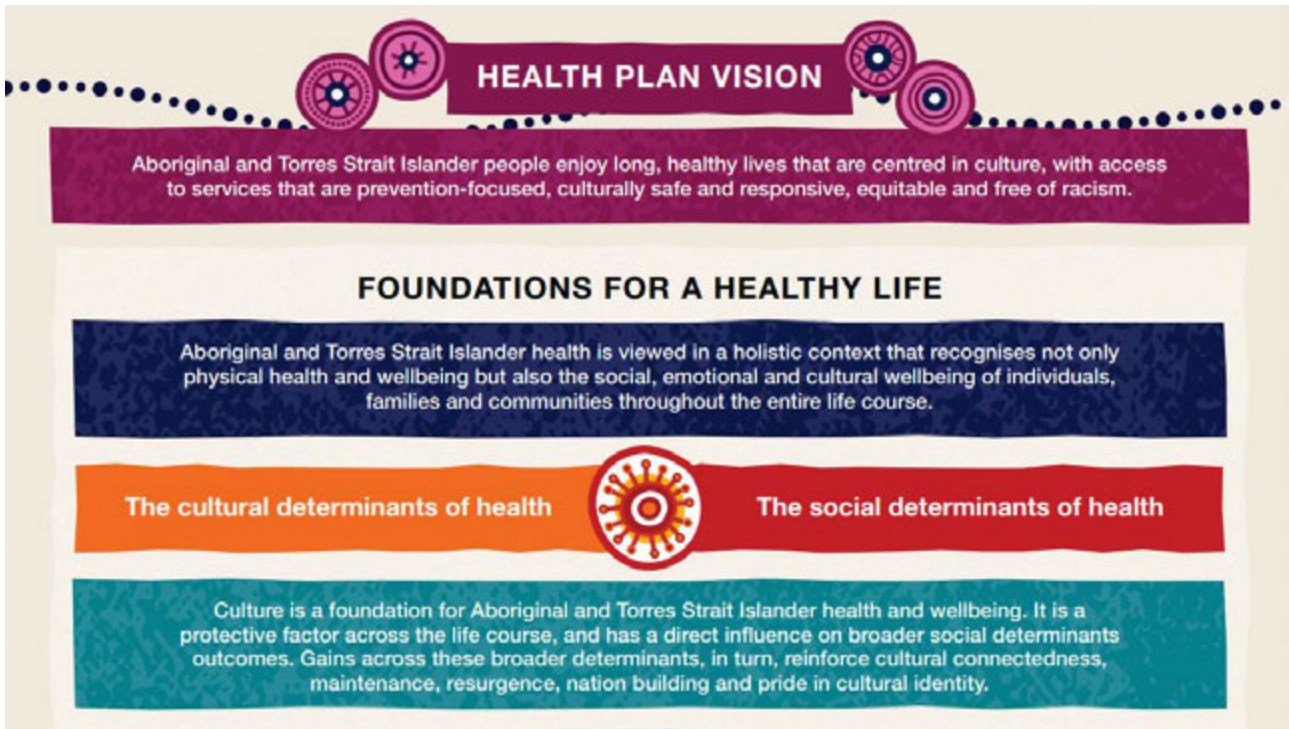
As *The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031* is a major juncture on the path towards cultural determinants of health, key aspects of that document are provided here before other reports.

Excerpts from the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*²

We have ensured that the Health Plan reinforces the importance of strengths-based and human rights approaches that embed the cultural determinants and our holistic ways of knowing and being that have continued unbroken for over 60,000 years. This includes the fundamental role that connection to Country, family, kinship and community play in our health and wellbeing.³

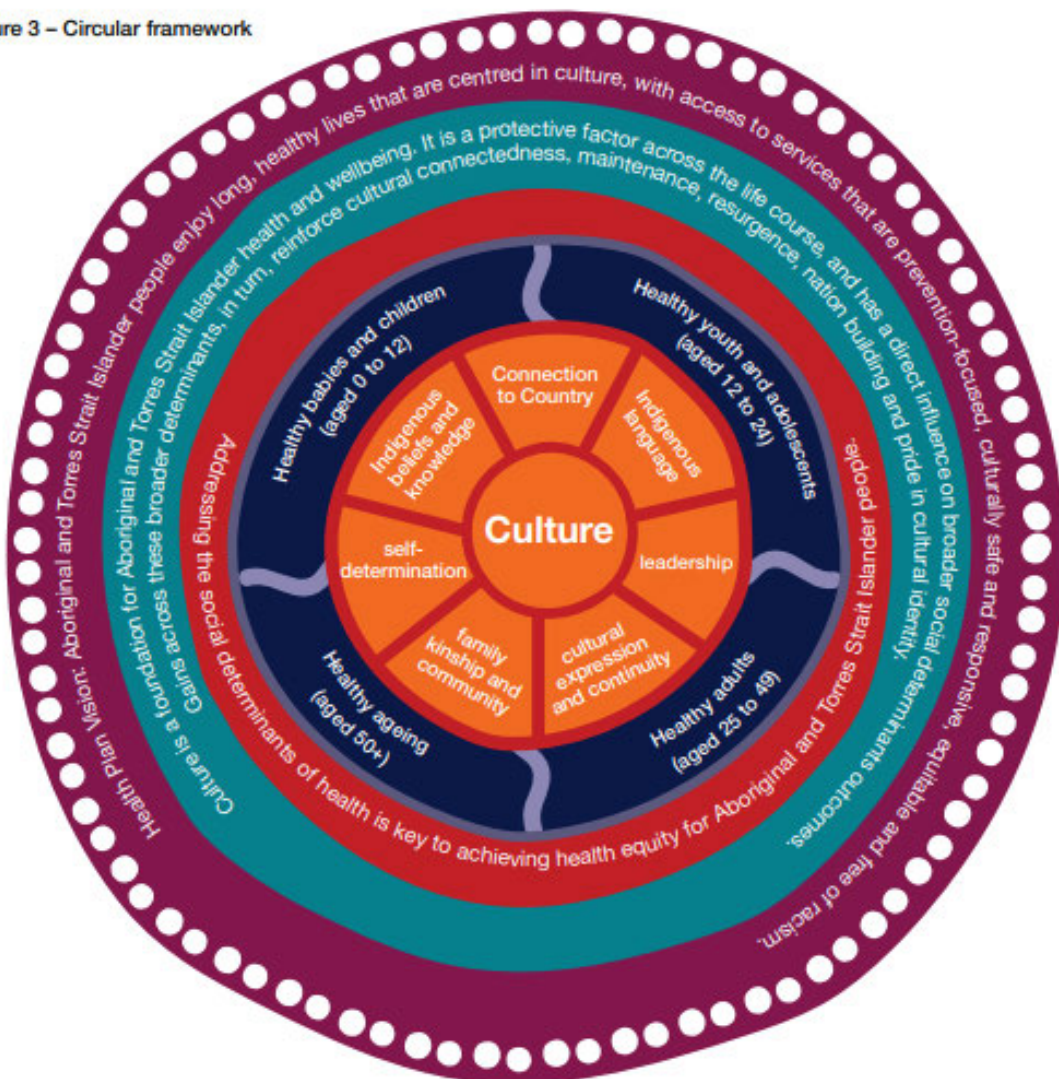
² Australian Government Department of Health 2021, [*National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*](#).

³ As above, p.4.



(page 6)

Figure 3 – Circular framework



(Page 17)

Cultural determinants of health

The cultural determinants of health are the protective factors that enhance resilience, strengthen identity and support good health and wellbeing. These include, but are not limited to, connection to Country; family, kinship and community; beliefs and knowledge; cultural expression and continuity; language; self-determination and leadership.

Cultural determinants are the ways of knowing, being and doing that encompass a holistic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understanding of health and wellbeing. This strengths-based approach affirms that celebrating and connecting to culture, community and Country builds negative risks.

Embedding cultural determinants means recognising:

- the direct protective and strengthening impact that practising culture has on health and wellbeing
- the impact of cultural determinants on the social determinants of health
- that laws and policies that disconnect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from culture have led to disparities in health outcomes and opportunities, including through child removal, disconnection from Country, loss of language and racism.⁴

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the holders of cultural knowledge and practice. They must therefore define how the cultural determinants of health are embedded in policy and programs. This means ensuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership to shift current policymaking and program implementation practices. This will require shared commitment and collaboration across all levels of government to truth-telling, including a recognition of racism as a barrier to implementing cultural determinant approaches.

Adopting cultural determinant approaches will require system reform and collaboration across governments.

This will enable:

- all governments, sectors, and levels of program development – including research, implementation and evaluation – to embed cultural determinants (a ‘culture-in-all-policies’ approach)
- the aspirations and leadership of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities, and peak and community controlled organisations to maintain, revitalise and practice culture, including strengthening cultural authority through traditional community governance and nation building
- human rights-based approaches, including self-determination, consistent with UNDRIP.

Significant to implementing cultural determinant driven policy is the recognition that policy making does not occur in the absence of culture: it is very much informed and shaped by the culture of predominantly non-Indigenous policy makers. A cultural determinants approach must seek to balance this structural inequality by empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and voices throughout the policy process.⁵

Focusing on prevention

Prevention means keeping people healthy and well to avoid the onset of illness, disease or injury. An effective prevention system protects, maintains, and promotes the health and wellbeing of individuals, families, communities and environments. To do this, prevention takes a holistic approach to people, processes, activities, settings and structures, and the dynamic relationships that operate between them.

Historically, health care policy in Australia has focused on the medical treatment and management of illness and conditions. However, there is now a greater focus on targeting action towards the historical, social, political, cultural and environmental factors that influence health. This is closely aligned with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of holistic health and wellbeing.⁶

⁴ As above, p.18.

⁵ As above, p.19.

⁶ As above, p.32.

Culture and wellbeing data

Mayi Kuwayu: The National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing is making strides towards culturally responsive data mechanisms. It commenced in 2018, and was created by, and for, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The study aims to understand the links between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and health and wellbeing.

It outlines 6 cultural domains that are anchored in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and identity, and that have been passed down through complex kinship systems, law, lore, ceremony and song:

1. Connection to Country – spiritual connection, health and traditional foods, living on Country, land rights and autonomy, caring for Country.
2. Family, kinship and community
3. Indigenous beliefs and knowledge – spiritual and religious beliefs, traditional knowledge, traditional healing, knowledge transmission and continuity.
4. Cultural expression and continuity – identity, cultural practices, art and music.
5. Indigenous language – impacts of language on health, language revitalisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language education.
6. Self-determination and leadership – cultural safety, self-determination and wellbeing, leadership.⁷

Excerpts from *My Life My Lead – Report on the national consultations (Dept of Health, 2018)*⁸

WHY IS A SOCIAL DETERMINANTS AND CULTURAL DETERMINANTS TO HEALTH APPROACH NEEDED?

As displayed in Figure 1, at least 34.4 per cent of the health gap between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and non-Indigenous Australians is linked to social determinants, which rises to 53.2 per cent when combined with behavioural risk factors, such as tobacco use, alcohol use, dietary factors and physical inactivity. Consideration of the cultural determinants of health is just as important for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as a strong connection to culture is strongly correlated with good health, through strengthened identity, resilience and wellbeing.

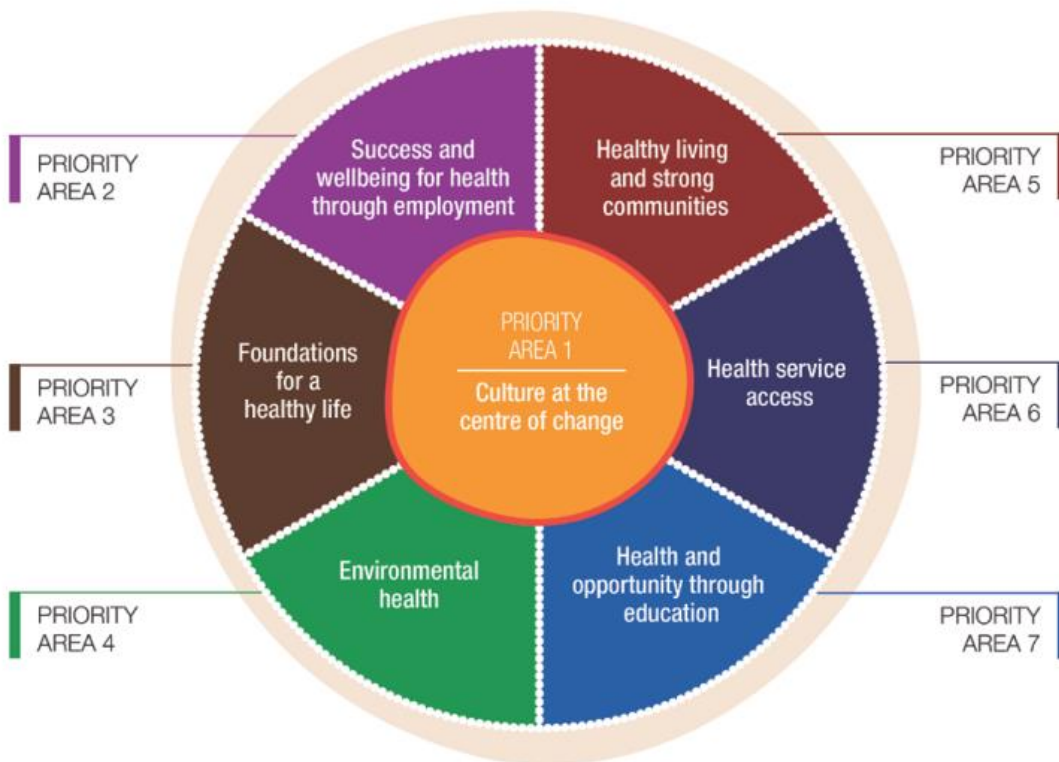
The cultural determinants of health encompass the cultural factors that promote resilience, foster a sense of identity and support good mental and physical health and wellbeing for individuals, families and communities. While the cultural determinants of health is a less understood concept compared to the social determinants of health, there is strong evidence emerging around the various ways that culture can support better health outcomes.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are the oldest living cultures in the world, which exemplify the dynamic and adaptive nature of these cultures. Cultural determinants are enabled, supported and protected through traditional cultural practice, kinship, connection to land and Country, art, song and ceremony, dance, healing, spirituality, empowerment, ancestry, belonging and self-determination. While many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities that reside in metropolitan and regional areas are separated from their Country and kin, strong cultural determinants of health can still be enabled and maintained through languages, relationships, customs and community networks

⁷ As above, p.72.

⁸ Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health 2018, [My Life My Lead - Opportunities for strengthening approaches to the social determinants and cultural determinants of Indigenous health: Report on the national consultations December 2017](#), excerpts from pages 1–10.

Figure 2: Priority areas to address the social determinants and cultural determinants of health



Consultations and online submissions emphasised that culture needs to be at the centre of policies and programs. The Australian Government is also committed to addressing the ongoing barriers that impede access to health, education, employment and other essential services.

From a systems lens, government programs and policies must also acknowledge and respond to the impacts of racism in the health system, and intergenerational trauma to support access and quality within broader service systems, and improve the evidence-base that informs government and community action.

Progress against this priority area can be made by building on existing effort to improve how governments engage with and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The Empowered Communities initiative establishes a new way for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and governments to work together. This approach puts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture and participation front and centre of government decision-making.

Excerpts from '*...Country Can't Hear English...*' – A guide to implementing cultural determinants (Arabena, 2020)⁹

This Guide acknowledges the centrality of culture, the role of cultural determinants and how these align with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' holistic understanding of health, wellbeing and safety. Further, it prioritises the importance of applying a cultural determinants approach as an effective way for families, community organisations and services to coordinate efforts in implementing cultural protection for children and families. The connection between culture and wellbeing has been affirmed by evidence of positive links between the practice of culture and self-esteem. Numerous culturally oriented programs have generated beneficial and measurable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Burgess et al. 2009; Lovett et al. 2017).

Although many have articulated the importance of culture, the fullness of cultural expression has been challenging to describe and even more difficult to build into health and wellbeing programs as a stand-alone determinant (Hunt 2013a; Hunt 2013b; Morley 2015; Closing the Gap Clearinghouse 2013). Cultural determinants originate from and promote a strengths-based perspective that builds stronger individual and collective identities. In so doing, they

⁹ Arabena K 2020, '*Country Can't Hear English*': A guide supporting the implementation of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, Karabena Publishing, Melbourne, excerpts from pages 1–5.

create a sense of pride, resilience and improved outcomes across the other determinants of health, including education, economic stability and community safety (Brown 2013).

Culture is both a set of rules or behaviours and a set of standards that guide how to view the world (OAH 2003). There are public and private cultural practices, some of which are gender-specific, while others are inter-generational. Culture links people across places, songlines and with totems. Culture is not static; it is changing, dynamic and expressed by people irrespective of where they live. While cultural aspirations, traditions and experiences differ across the nation, all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have a right to a cultural life and a responsibility to ensure cultural continuity for this and future generations.

This Guide seeks to describe how to implement cultural determinants of health. To do so, it proposes a framework to be used as a companion resource to the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan Implementation Plan (Australian Government 2017a).

Facilitating and implementing cultural determinants of health and wellbeing requires a shift in emphasis from attitude to behaviour from those in the health system and in society more generally.

Cultural actions and activities are diverse, as they can be:

- age and gender specific
- funded (e.g. festivals, exhibitions, mentoring and repatriation)
- formal (e.g. health service delivery, ethical research, natural resource management)
- informal (e.g. caring for children in extended family arrangements, advocacy and political protest)
- obligatory (e.g. food sharing, storytelling, genealogical recording, teaching language, and ceremonial such as Welcoming Babies to Country).

All implementation activities advocated for in this Guide need to be informed by, and be responsive to, cultural authority and cultural leadership, particularly that which engages with Elder wisdom.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies are led by Elder wisdom, with cultural knowledge coded and transmitted through adherence to protocols and forms of cultural leadership that are informed, credible, strategic, connected and sustainable. The successful implementation of cultural determinants will require people engaged in the process to address power imbalances at the community and local levels, to work on co-design and the development of protocols, and to build the competence of families to deliver cultural health and wellbeing.

Excerpts from *Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy* (Lowitja Institute, 2021)¹⁰

Calls to Action: Implementing the cultural determinants

1. Develop a whole-of-government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures policy that:
 - affirms the centrality of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, wellbeing, and identity
 - informs the development of all policies and programs that impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
 - informs the government's investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives, and activities
 - explicitly links and measures its investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives, and activities, to sustained improvements in family/community cohesion and health outcomes.

¹⁰ Lowitja Institute 2020, [Culture is Key: Towards cultural determinants-driven health policy – Final Report](#), Lowitja Institute, Melbourne, excerpts from pages 5–6.

2. Support for the maintenance and revitalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures needs to extend to investment in initiatives that strengthen cultural authority, including traditional community governance and nation building.
3. Implement strategies and actions to support strengths-based approaches to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health policy that include:
 - a. Building conceptual understanding through information resources and policy guidance.
 - b. Ensuring that health funding program guidelines are in line with the Reframing Discourse project findings on what works – such as funding that embraces holism, innovation and responsiveness and changes to the way financial reporting is managed and funding relationships operate.
4. Reform the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, funding, evaluation and reporting is undertaken by government to empower community driven policy and decision making through strategies that include:
 - a. Instigating a formal data partnership between key government organisations (i.e. ABS, AIHW, Department of Health) and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations and experts to guide action and reforms in line with Indigenous Data Sovereignty principles, including investigating leading international practices and their application in Australia.
 - b. Implementing ‘Action 6 - Agencies should strengthen and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s capability to engage, partner and lead in evaluation’ in the Productivity Commission’s Indigenous Evaluation Strategy through a focused plan of action.
 - c. Ensuring that the Priority Reform Actions under the Closing the Gap Agreement, including increased investment in community control, are extended to government research funding bodies and the grant processes that they administer.
 - d. Investing in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce, and the application and development of Indigenous research methodologies, including participatory action research models.
 - e. Shaping an approach to funding relationships that emphasise partnership and/ or co-design principles, and looks at more flexible and collaborative process tools for grant applications and reporting that embrace Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledge and cultural expression.

Excerpts from *Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis* (Australia Council, 2022)¹¹

Recommendation 2:

Develop commissioning pathways for First Nations programs in cultural healing, for example, by including these programs in the implementation of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031*.

Policy that recognises the connections between First Nations culture and wellbeing is already relatively mature, underpinned by an enormous amount of research and a huge evidentiary basis. There is currently an opportunity to implement such policy, ensuring that First Nations social and cultural programs are eligible for support within Indigenous health.

Once recognised, such programs could inform those tailored for non-First Nations communities as well, increasing and fostering cross-cultural understanding and appreciation of First Nations knowledge in cultural healing.

¹¹ Australia Council 2022, [Connected Lives: Creative solutions to the mental health crisis](#), excerpts from pages 22 and 17.

The leadership provided by First Nations knowledge

First Nations peoples are clear leaders when it comes to understanding the links between arts, culture and wellbeing.

First Nations conceptions of wellbeing expand beyond individual experience and encompass health of the community and Country. Culture is also understood to be a protective factor, embedded within everyday experience and essential to a healthy community. This holistic view of culture can provide a model for a ‘whole of government’ approach when looking at arts, creativity and wellbeing.

First Nations communities are also leaders in health policy and advocacy, having committed years of research and advocacy towards the successful inclusion of social determinants within Indigenous health policy. For example, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 incorporates the cultural and social determinants of health in its design.

Despite this, there are still no commissioning pathways for programs that operate in the social and cultural determinants of health domain. \$60.8 million will soon be made available under the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Program,¹² but cultural healing organisations are ineligible to apply.

Key stakeholders in the policy program urged that the first implementation plan of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan address this gap, ensuring that public policy acknowledge cultural healing organisations in its programs of commissioning and support. Such a move would enable this relatively mature policy space to move from design to implementation.

Excerpts from *Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our Legacy, Our Future (Close the Gap Campaign Report, 2023)*¹²

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

Address the social and cultural determinants of health through equitable, sustainable, and long-term needs-based funding.

Suicide Prevention

Recommendation 3

Accelerate action on, and implementation of, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031, and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan 2021–2031. In recognition of the need for trauma-aware and healing-informed care™, and the work and expertise undertaken by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project, we support in full their key findings and recommendations, as noted in the next recommendation.

Recommendation 4

A government commitment to ensure that all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention activity includes:

¹² Close the Gap 2023, [Strong Culture, Strong Youth: Our legacy, our future, Close the Gap Campaign Report 2023](#), excerpts from pages 4–5.

- a). Community-specific and community-led upstream programs focused on healing and strengthening social and emotional wellbeing, cultural renewal, and improving the social determinants of health that can otherwise contribute to suicidal behaviours, with an emphasis on trauma informed care.
- b). A commitment to, and a provision for, the evaluation of the activity and the dissemination of findings to further strengthen the evidence-base.
- c). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people and related peak bodies and organisations codesigning youth-focused healing programs as a critical component of positive long-term health outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Policy

Recommendation 8

Australian governments partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to develop, fund and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural policy that:

- a) Complements and reinforces the Revive – National Cultural Policy that respects the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the Australian arts, entertainment and cultural sectors.
- b) Asserts the centrality of culture to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- c) Informs investment in cultural governance, maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives and activities both for community and nation building.
- d) Provides environmental and heritage protections for sites that are sacred or culturally significant, recognising the impacts on Country, social and emotional wellbeing and the cultural determinants of health.
- e) Improves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community access to opportunities and resources that support the cultural determinants of their health and wellbeing according to their needs, priorities and aspirations.
- f) Includes cultural knowledge holders in decision-making positions that affect communities.
- g) Establishes a monitoring, evaluation and action learning framework.