



# Cultural Safety in Mental Health Service Provision

## About Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention. As a community-controlled organisation, it is governed and controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts and peak bodies, working in these areas to promote collective excellence in mental health care.

## Summary

Cultural safety in the context of mental health service provision is providing mental health services that are respectful of the cultural values, beliefs, and practices of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it is an essential element in delivering high-quality mental health care which recognises that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people may have a different understanding of mental health and social and emotional wellbeing than the mainstream sector.

It is the position of Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia that:

- To achieve Cultural Safety within mental health provision it requires more than Cultural Awareness training, but an ever-evolving development approach to provision of high-quality care. The mainstream health system needs to acknowledge the systemic barriers and biases that exist and aim to overcome them to ensure equitable care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership within the mental health workforce is an enabler of a culturally safe environment and facilitates improved care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Cultural Safety can only be achieved when all aspects of the Australian mental health system work together. The public sector working with the community-controlled sector supporting self-determination across all aspects of health.
- Mental health care providers need to address and implement new models of care that address and overcome the systemic barriers and biases that affect equitable access and care provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Mental health care providers should be committed to ongoing professional development to enhance their Cultural competence and provide Culturally safe and effective mental health care.

This position statement intends to make public Gayaa Dhuwi stance on cultural safety and its role in mental health service provision and our intent to continue to have a collective voice for strengthening the role of cultural safety in the Australian mental health system.



## Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention

### What is Cultural Safety?

Gayaa Dhuwi supports the definition of cultural safety as per the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020)<sup>i</sup>, which articulates the following:

*“Cultural safety is about overcoming the power imbalances of places, people and policies that occur between the majority non-Indigenous position and the minority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person so that there is no assault, challenge or denial of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person’s identity, of who they are and what they need. Cultural safety is met through actions from the majority position which recognise, respect, and nurture the unique cultural identity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Only the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person who is recipient of a service or interaction can determine whether it is culturally safe.”*

### Cultural Safety in Service Provision

At a national mental health system level, the *Cultural safety in health care for Indigenous Australians: monitoring framework*<sup>ii</sup> developed by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) is centred around three modules that focus on the delivery of health care, the experience of health and the access of healthcare. The monitoring and evaluation framework uses a range of state and commonwealth government data to determine the Australian health systems progress towards providing a culturally safe system.

Recognising that the experience of cultural safety can only be defined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person as a recipient of the service<sup>iii</sup>, there are building blocks that promote an environment in which cultural safety can occur.

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership in all areas of the health system and services that support improved outcomes under the social determinants of health.
- More care in the community, providing an integrated health system where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have choice about receiving care on country and are met with familiar faces.
- Flexible models of mental health service delivery that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to determine their own care and cultural needs.
- Strong governance structures that promote a zero-tolerance of racism policy.
- Ongoing education and improved literacy for mental health professionals to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.

These building blocks are also articulated within the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia Declaration<sup>iv</sup>. The Declaration focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership across all parts of the Australian mental health system to achieve the highest attainable standard of mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Drawing on the nine principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing developed in the 1995 Ways Forward Report<sup>v</sup>, the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration focuses on a ‘best of both worlds approach’ highlighting five themes.



### Conclusion

Gayaa Dhuwi will continue to advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have access to mental health services that meet their needs. This means the right to access culturally appropriate care, where cultural care is as important as clinical care. In line with the commitment in the National Agreement (2020) made by all levels of government, particularly with respect to Priority Reform three: Transforming Government organisations, all mental health service providers have a responsibility to deliver culturally safe care. Providing culturally safe care will require ongoing education and development for the mainstream workforce, review of westernised systems and policies that support the health system and increasing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership within the system.

*Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia would like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of country throughout Australia, and pay respects to all Elders, past, present, and emerging.*

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<sup>i</sup> National Agreement on Closing the Gap | Closing the Gap. (2020). <https://www.closingthegap.gov.au/national-agreement>

<sup>ii</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2022) Cultural safety in health care for Indigenous Australians: monitoring framework, AIHW, Australian Government, accessed 12 May 2023.

<sup>iii</sup> S. McGough, D. Wynaden, S. Gower, R. Duggan & R. Wilson (2022) There is no health without Cultural Safety: why Cultural Safety matters, *Contemporary Nurse*, 58:1, 33-42, DOI: [10.1080/10376178.2022.2027254](https://doi.org/10.1080/10376178.2022.2027254)

<sup>iv</sup> Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (2023) Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia Declaration. Gayaa Dhuwi Declaration | Gayaa Dhuwi accessed 12 May 2023.

<sup>v</sup> Swan, P., & Raphael, B. (1995). Ways forward. National Consultancy Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health, Part 1 and Part, 2.