



25 January 2024

The Hon Mark Butler MP  
Minister for Health and Aged Care  
PO Box 6022  
House of Representatives  
Parliament House  
Canberra ACT 2600

**Copy to:**

Hon Jim Chalmers MP, Treasurer  
Hon Emma McBride MP, Assistant Minister for Mental Health and Suicide Prevention  
Hon Linda Burney MP, Minister for Indigenous Australians  
Senator the Hon Malarndirri McCarthy, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Australians, Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health

Dear Hon Mark Butler MP,

**Prebudget Submission 2024/25 – Greater equity in funding to prevent suicide and improve the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples**

Since 2020, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (GDPSA) has been providing leadership as the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. As a member of the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations, GDPSA also leads action on Outcome 14 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

GDPSA welcomes the Australian government's continued commitment to ensuring Australians can obtain mental health support, and the announcement in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook (MYEFO) to fund \$483.7 million to strengthen Australia's mental health and suicide prevention system.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' social and emotional wellbeing and mental health was significantly impacted by the Voice Referendum. There has been a marked increase in incidents of racism and increased levels of distress since the Voice debate commenced and continues today. GDPSA is calling on the Australian Government to address these impacts, particularly for our young people, when considering the next Federal Budget.

The basis of this pre-budget submission is to request the required funding to undertake several activities to work towards needs-based equity:

1. Secure and sustainable funding for GDPSA to continue its operations as a peak body.
2. Implement the refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (NATSISPS).
3. Social and Emotional Wellbeing Youth Forums to promote healing post-referendum.
4. Full implementation of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration.
5. Provide funding for the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA)
6. Recognise the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' life experiences by embedding cultural safety, co-design, and co-location of service delivery across activities in the budget pillars for all Australians.



GDPSA's proposed 24/25 Budget measures will have the biggest impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community needs and return on investment. Evidence shows that Aboriginal led self-determined solutions have better outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. An example of this was the COVID-19 response in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The below priorities are not listed in order of importance or preference but are equally needed to help support better outcomes.

### **Priority One: Secure and sustainable funding for Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia to continue its operations as a peak body**

In March 2013, the *Whareātā Declaration* was endorsed in Australia by key government mental health agencies. The Declaration was developed by a group of Indigenous mental health leaders from Canada, the United States, Australia, Samoa, and New Zealand. On 27 August 2015, the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration* was launched as a companion document to the *Wharerātā Declaration* and as the touchstone of its work to promote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention.

In 2019, funding was announced to deliver a national plan for culturally appropriate care and make suicide prevention services available and accessible to First Nations people no matter where they live. Following the announcement of this funding, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia was established in late March of 2020, as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention national leadership body.

Since its inception, GDPSA has significantly increased its scope of services to include policy advocacy, leading the SEWB Policy Partnership, and being the Coalition of Peaks' lead on Outcome 14 of the National Agreement on Closing the Gap. To attract and retain good staffing, maintain good governance, and plan for long term and strategic outcomes, secure and stable funding is needed. This is in line with Priority Reform 2 of the National Agreement to build the community-controlled sector and transfer funding and service from non-Indigenous organisations where possible. GDPSA is calling on the government to negotiate four year rolling funding agreements as soon as possible.

### **Priority Two: Implement the refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy**

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy (NATSISPS) 2023-2033 builds upon the foundations of the 2016 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP). It prioritises genuine partnerships with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address suicide through culturally safe solutions.

The NATSISPS was developed through extensive public consultation and a First Nations-led steering committee. It emphasises self-determination and leadership through six key priorities: community leadership, thriving communities, informed support, culturally safe care, a responsive workforce, and evidence-based actions.

Whilst specifically tailored to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the NATSISPS shares core principles and objectives with the broader National Suicide Prevention Strategy, fostering collaborative action and culturally informed solutions across all sectors and communities.

GDPSA will seek government endorsement of the NATSISPS and funding to establish a National Implementation Advisory Group. This group will support the development of an implementation



plan to operationalise the strategy, driving meaningful and sustained reductions in suicide and self-harm among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

### **Priority Three: Social and Emotional Wellbeing Youth Forums to promote healing post-referendum.**

Gayaa Dhuwi proposes to hold nine Youth Forums, one in each Australian state and territory. These Youth Forums will provide a platform to capture the vital perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, a group whose voices are crucial to shaping the future. This will be the first step in a healing journey for our youth who need immediate support and assistance due to increased incidences of racism and distress caused by the referendum debate and no result. For many of our young people, this was the first time they were offered a voice, they spoke up, and they were rejected by the majority of Australia.

The purposes of the Gayaa Dhuwi Youth Forums are to:

- Connect with young people and ensure their views are included in our advocacy approach.
- Promote emotional intelligence and resilience strategies for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Showcase opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to get involved in the social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention workforces.
- Promote healing after the referendum and ensure our young people can continue to aspire to be leaders.

GDPA anticipates each of the Youth Forums will have up to 100 places. Given the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people across Australia, and the financial difficulty some young people may be experiencing due to cost of living, Gayaa Dhuwi is proposing to hold a Youth Forum in every Australian state and territory.

### **Priority Four: Full implementation of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration**

In the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, all Australian Governments agreed to “recognising and promoting the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership and supporting the implementation of the Declaration”. This was the first time the unique need of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples had been prioritised within a national mental health plan.

It was identified that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people face various barriers to accessing mental health services, including exclusion, victimisation, discrimination, racism, and cost. Many of these barriers remain today and seek to be addressed by the GDPSA’s Implementation Plan for the Declaration. GDPSA requests the Government commit to the full implementation of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Implementation Plan.

### **Priority Five: Provide Funding for the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA)**

Gayaa Dhuwi supports the funding proposal from the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA), dated 10 November 2023. Formed in 2008, AIPA is the representative body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists in Australia and has established itself as a strong voice in social and emotional wellbeing and mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.



The work of AIPA is strongly linked to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (2020), specifically through Priority Reforms 2: Building the Community Controlled Sector and 3: Transforming Government Organisations, as well as working towards a significant and sustained reduction in suicide towards zero (target 14).

AIPA is currently unfunded and relies on volunteer experts. AIPA is in urgent need of funding to continue their important work, and to continue to be a national voice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists. AIPA is a member of Gayaa Dhuwi, working alongside our organisation to promote collective excellence in mental health care. AIPA aims to improve the social and emotional wellbeing and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

**Priority Six: Recognising the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' life experience by embedding cultural safety, co-design, and co-location of service delivery across activities in the budget pillars for all Australians.**

There is a funding gap between Aboriginal-specific service provision and service provision that accommodates for the diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are made up of many cohorts across urban, rural, and remote locations with unique mental health needs across the lifespan and specific needs of the diverse groups within.

The budgetary implication in mental health of recognising a higher level of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversity in Pillars 1-3 and 5 for All Australians, includes increasing funding across all service areas for:

- culturally safe training for the entire mental health workforce in service provision for all cohorts including appropriate tools.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community co-designed service delivery to better meet the needs across mainstream services.
- Co-located service provision in Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) and Aboriginal Medical Services (AMSs).

Further funding should also be directed towards ACCHOs and AMSs as the preferred providers of mental health services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Evidence from the 2021 evaluation of the National Suicide Prevention Trial Sites that focused on, and exclusively served, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, recommended that suicide prevention strategies must originate from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific evidence and knowledge, and genuine Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance is fundamental to success.

To enable the biggest impact, similar strategies should be applied across all mental health initiatives provided in the 24/25 Budget.

If you have any questions or would like to discuss Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia's submission, please contact me at [rachel.fishlock@gayaadhuwi.org.au](mailto:rachel.fishlock@gayaadhuwi.org.au) or on (02) 5134 2102.

Regards,  
Rachel Fishlock  
Chief Executive Officer  
Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia





**Attachment A**

Proposed funding

	Y1	Y2	Y3	TOTAL
Continue the establishment of GDPSA as a national leader in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and suicide prevention. As part of its role, GDPSA is required to advise Government in implementation of key initiatives, , support the implementation of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration and deliver targeted initiatives to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and suicide prevention outcomes.	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$2,500,000	\$7,500,000
Continue funding to provide secretariat services to the SEWB Policy Partnership	\$1,750,000	\$1,750,000	\$1,750,000	\$5,250,000
Implement the refreshed National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Advisory Committee	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	\$1,250,000	\$3,750,000
Support youth across the country to promote healing, ensure young people feel heard, do not disengage and their views can be captured in our policy and advocacy.	\$500,000	\$550,000	\$0	\$1,050,000
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$6,000,000</b>	<b>\$6,050,000</b>	<b>\$5,500,000</b>	<b>\$17,550,000</b>