



## Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

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

# Nine principles of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing

First proposed in the 1989 National Aboriginal Health Strategy, these principles were expanded in the 1995 Ways Forward Report and summarised in the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2004–2009 in the form below. They were adopted as a part of the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration and have remained relevant over time.

1. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context, that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land and sea\* are central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that when the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill-health will persist.
2. Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.\*\*
3. Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health problems generally, and mental health problems, in particular.
4. It must be recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss, present since European invasion, are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing. Trauma and loss of this magnitude continues to have inter-generational effects.
5. The human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be recognised and respected. Failure to respect these human rights constitutes continuous disruption to mental health, (versus mental ill-health). Human rights relevant to mental illness must be specifically addressed.
6. Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors and have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and wellbeing.
7. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognised as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.
8. There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships, and tribes, as well as ways of living. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may currently live in urban, rural or remote settings, in traditional or other lifestyles, and frequently move between these ways of living.
9. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have different cultures and histories and in many instances different needs. Nevertheless, both groups are affected by the problems that face them as Indigenous peoples of Australia. The differences must be acknowledged and may need to be addressed by locally developed, specific strategies.

\*The original principle referred only to land. Contemporary understandings of this principle include 'sea' with land in acknowledgement of the importance of the connections to the sea to some Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

\*\*These are now known as Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.