



Pictured (standing, left to right): **Dr Tim Allen** - A/Principal Policy Officer, Mental Health, Alcohol and Drug Directorate of Tasmania; **Dr Paul Gray** - Associate Professor, Jumbunna Institute of Indigenous Education and Research, UTS; **Zaccariah Cox** - Senior Manager, Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services; **Donna Murray** - CEO Indigenous Allied Health Australia (IAHA); **Monica Kelly** - Mental Health and Wellbeing Promotion Adviser, Executive Director, Mental Health and Wellbeing Division, Department of Health, Victoria (VIC), **Danielle Dyll** - SEWB Project Manager, Danila Dilba Health Service; **Rachel Fishlock** - CEO Gayaa Dhuwi; **Maureen Lewis** - Commissioner, WA Mental Health Commission; **Tanya McGregor** - Director Aboriginal Health, Department for Health and Wellbeing of South Australia; **Cecelia Gore** - Executive Director, Mental Health, Alcohol and Other Drugs for NT Health; **Elizabeth Moore** - Coordinator-General, The Office for Mental Health and Wellbeing, ACT Health.

Seated: **Professor Pat Dudgeon** – First Nations Co-chair and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (GDPSA) Board Director; **Bronwyn Field** – Interim Government Co-chair, Department of Health and Aged Care (DoHAC).

Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing Policy Partnership - Meeting 3 Communique

The Closing the Gap Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Policy Partnership held its third meeting on the 9th of November 2023, in Naarm (Melbourne). The meeting was co-Chaired by Professor Pat Dudgeon, GDPSA and Bronwyn Field (interim co-chair), First Assistant Secretary, DoHAC.

The meeting took place shortly after the Referendum on The Voice to Parliament. There was acknowledgement that the referendum has increased incidents of racism in the community and distress is being felt by individuals and communities with impacts on SEWB and mental health workers.

Updates from members included following themes:

The need to centre First Nations governance and leadership

- South Australia (SA) has established a joint governance group for social and emotional wellbeing for Aboriginal children and adolescents.

- Western Australia (WA) is strengthening the Mental Health Commission and recruiting First Nations Leadership for Assistant Commissioner, mental health and Alcohol and Other Drugs (AOD) roles.
- In the Northern Territory (NT), Dorelle Anderson, Central Australian Regional Controller, is directing investment in Central Australia. NT seeking First Nations leadership for suicide prevention work.
- The Australian Capital Territory (ACT) government Community Services Directorate has created a new Aboriginal services development branch to support the development and enhancement of established and new Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations (ACCOs) across the ACT region to deliver human services.
- Tasmania (TAS) has established a SEWB sub-working group.
- The Commonwealth department of Health and Aged Care is establishing a First Nations governance group to provide strategic direction across health programs.

Responding to issues arising from Institutional Care and Family, Domestic and Sexual Violence

- Healing Foundation advocacy for members of the Stolen Generations accessing Aged Care services to improve cultural safety.
- WA Mental Health Commissioner has joined a taskforce on Family and Domestic Violence which is due to report in mid-2024.
- The NT Coroner is taking a systems lens to deaths associated with family, domestic and sexual violence.
- The National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA) and SNAICC are releasing 10 modules under the National Action Plan of the National Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Child Sexual Abuse - Believe Inquire and Respond to Disclosure (BIRD).

Legislative work and reports

- ACT has tabled their Closing the Gap response and raised the age of criminal responsibility.
- VIC have decriminalised public drunkenness.
- Productivity Commission Closing the Gap review report due for release in December 2023.

Workforce

- Members report post-Referendum stress being experienced by workforce which includes Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in Government, service delivery, peaks and community support roles, as well as non-Indigenous staff working in support of SEWB/Mental health policy and service delivery for First Nations communities and individuals. First Nations members highlighted the need to provide SEWB supports to SEWB/Mental Health workforce.
- WA Mental Health Commission is planning a cultural immersion course for staff.
- VIC is offering 25 Mental Health scholarships.

Investment and implementation updates

- WA has 5 pilot sites for SEWB and a budget bid for Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD) supports.
- ACT investing in Ngunnawal language program and also in postvention supports.
- NSW building on Aboriginal Community Resilience program.
- TAS government mapping SEWB investment in North West.
- VIC testing financial sustainability of Yarning Safe and Strong crisis line.
- Queensland (QLD) implementing Cultural Information Gathering tool.
- Many services are feeling the administrative burden of multiple funding sources.



Collaboration

- A tripartite approach in NT includes a First Nations Model for whole of community care in Darwin region.
- TAS government is collaborating with Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre (TAC).
- High levels of collaboration in the Kimberley to support flood recovery.
- There is interest in cross agency and cross jurisdictional collaboration and information sharing.
- All members see the benefit of collaborating with other policy partnerships.

Across the agenda, the following discussion themes emerged:

Racism

- Emerging from an agenda item relating to the approach being taken in schools to address racism and support mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, there was discussion of the importance of protection for First Nations, especially youth; the need to understand what is driving racism; and the role of non-Indigenous leadership in stopping racism.
- Desire to elevate racism as an issue across all policy partnerships.

SEWB planning, investment and implementation

- Bringing a First Nations focus to work on influencing systems change including reducing the administrative burden; differentiating between community controlled and Aboriginal-led; and enhancing self-determination.
- Defining and measuring SEWB.

Key Decisions by the Partnership:

1. Actions to promote collaboration with other Policy Partnerships and escalate issues to Joint Council and Ministerial meetings, including issues related to addressing racism.
2. Development of a discussion paper on supporting the workforce development needs of the SEWB and mental health workforce.
3. Development of a paper on principles for a commissioning framework.
4. Elevate the issue of increased racism and required responses to the Joint Council under Closing the Gap to address structural issues as it impacts other Policy Partnerships.
5. Raise racism and online harm being experienced by First Nations people as a priority area for consideration at the Online Harm Ministers' meeting.