

Urgent Close the Gap action required to halt suicide rate

Closing the gap in mental health and social and emotional wellbeing is the only way to reduce the alarming Indigenous suicide rate and improve health, education and employment rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians, according to the Healing Foundation.

Forcibly removing children from their families, identities, lands, languages and cultures has resulted in trauma, trauma that has been passed down from generation to generation and continues to profoundly affect our peoples' health and wellbeing.

Healing Foundation CEO Richard Weston said investment in trauma informed, healing responses has been the missing piece in the ten year strategy to Close the Gap so far.

Trauma is not well understood by policy makers who operate from a western framework that undervalues Indigenous knowledge systems.

"We cannot expect people to achieve their potential if they are grappling with the debilitating effects of trauma" Mr Weston said.

"The Healing Foundation has found that when you work in partnership with communities to identify and address this trauma you can achieve exceptional results quite quickly.

"In the remote Northern Territory communities of Maningrida, Wurrumiyanga and Ngukurr our men's healing programs have led to greater assistance for men struggling with distress and increased their access to supports and employment over a two year period.

"We have also worked with communities like Kununurra in remote Western Australia and those from across the Torres Strait to identify the challenges they are facing and the most appropriate community-led solutions to these issues.

"The fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians continue to take their own lives at almost double the rate of non-Indigenous Australians is unacceptable. It is clear the current approach is not working and a new strategy is needed," Mr Weston said.

"What our communities are crying out for is more trauma informed, culturally appropriate services; community healing strategies; and opportunities to come together for group healing.

"These healing responses must be implemented as a priority, in a coordinated way, across every state and territory" Mr Weston said.

The Healing Foundation is a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation with a focus on building culturally strong, community led healing solutions. More information is available at www.healingfoundation.org.au

Media contact: Raina Hunter 0407 120 401

(1) Australian Bureau of Statistics Catalogue 3303.0 Cause of Death Australia, 2014, released 8 March 2016

(2) <http://www.mindframe-media.info/for-media/reporting-suicide/facts-and-stats>