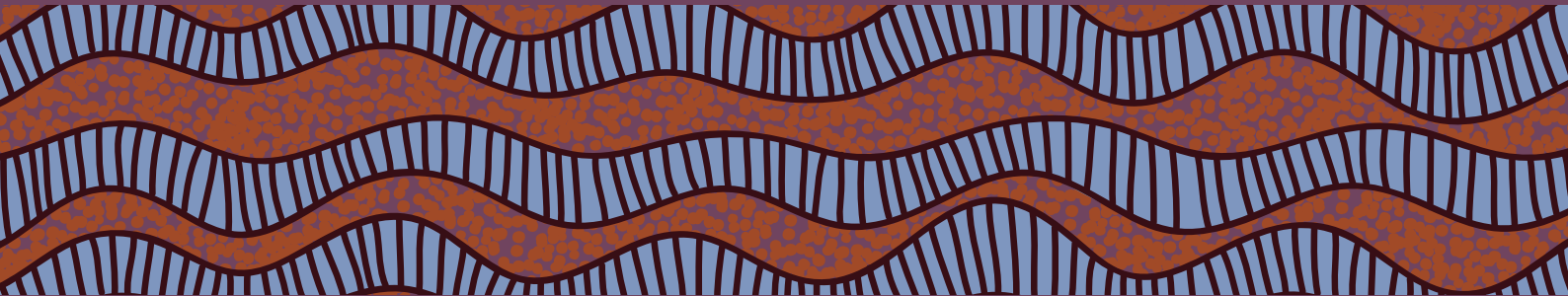


# Mount Druitt

NSW OCHRE Healing Forum

June 2018





#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Mt Druitt Community Healing Forum would not have been possible without the commitment and support of the Local Planning Group, including Aunty Margaret Farrell, Aunty Daisy, Aunty Jenny, Butu Carbin, Mary Kerr, Elaine Gordon, Elizabeth Burke, Helen Dunstan, John Hunter, Karen Syed, Tony Hunter. The wisdom and knowledge of planning group members informed every aspect of the Healing Forum, ensuring the event was relevant and meaningful to the local community.

Images by Roberto Giunta and courtesy NSW Department of Aboriginal Affairs.

# Contents

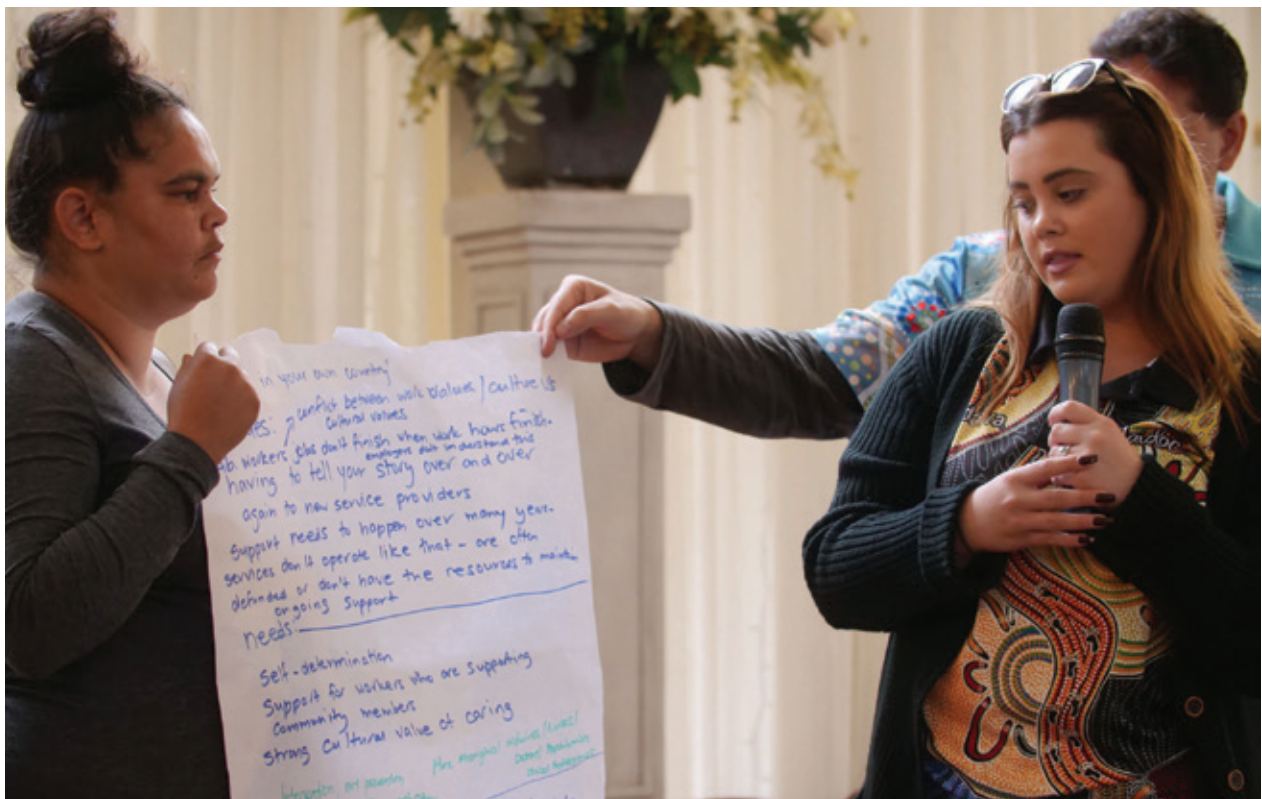
<b>About the NSW OCHRE Healing Forums</b> .....	<b>1</b>
<b>About Baabayn</b> .....	<b>2</b>
<b>Mt Druitt Healing Forum in Context</b> .....	<b>3</b>
<b>Key Findings</b> .....	<b>4</b>
Young Families’ Healing Needs and Supports.....	4
Intergenerational Trauma.....	5
Health and Wellbeing.....	5
The Importance of Getting a Strong Start to Life and Adulthood.....	7
A Non Responsive Service System.....	8
Solutions that Address Community Healing Needs.....	9
Healing and Truth Telling – A Shared Understanding.....	9
Creating Healing for Young Families.....	10
A Responsive Service Sector.....	11
Collaboration to Support Healing for the Mt Druitt Community.....	12
<b>Next Steps for Consideration</b> .....	<b>14</b>

# About the NSW OCHRE Healing Forums

During the consultations, that took place with NSW Aboriginal communities, to inform OCHRE, the NSW government's Aboriginal Affairs policy, healing was identified as a priority. The state-wide *Healing Our Way* Forum held in July 2014 was the first step in formal healing conversations between Aboriginal people and government.

In the *Healing Our Way Forum* report, the NSW Government committed to continue the dialogue with interested communities to understand how agencies can operate to better support healing with Aboriginal people. Building on that commitment, Aboriginal Affairs NSW, in partnership with The Healing Foundation, committed to supporting six OCHRE Healing Forums across NSW. Expressions of interest were invited from organisations / communities to host a forum in their region.

This document presents the findings from the Mt Druitt Healing Forum hosted by Baabayn Aboriginal Corporation ('Baabayn' hereafter).



# About Baabayn

Baabayn (Ancestral Woman) was founded in 2012 by five female Aboriginal Elders. The establishment of Baabayn was the culmination of 18 months of determined and dedicated effort by the Elders. The purpose of the organisation is to *“connect with individuals and families in a welcoming environment, providing them with supports and links to services that help them heal from the past and nurture their sense of confidence and pride in the future”*.

The aims of Baabayn are to:

- Nurture local Aboriginal people’s confidence, self-esteem, spirituality and knowledge of their culture;
- Provide a supportive, healing, low-stress environment for local Aboriginal people;
- Promote networking; help people to link up;
- Form lasting partnerships for the more effective support of disadvantaged people;
- Assist, and advocate for, people who are struggling in their dealings with government departments.

The Local Planning Committee for the Mt Druitt Healing Forum was drawn from Baabayn’s Directors and members who worked tirelessly with staff from The Healing Foundation and Aboriginal Affairs NSW to bring the Healing Forum together.



# Mt Druitt Healing Forum in Context

Mt Druitt, in Western Sydney is home to Darug people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community of Mount Druitt is very diverse and made up from families that originate from all over New South Wales. Mount Druitt has also has one of the largest Aboriginal populations in New South Wales.

The Mt Druitt Healing Forum was held on October 27th 2017 at the Colebee Centre, Nurragingy Reserve, Doonside. There were 100 community members and service providers in attendance, including representatives from health, education, housing, child and family, disability, Council and community services.

The Healing Forum was facilitated by Benny Hodges, being of both Aboriginal (Waanji-Garrawa & Kaureg) and Torres Strait Islander heritage (Erub Bam Le’-Kul Gal Gal). Benny was engaged by The Healing Foundation following discussion with the planning group that recognised the importance of experienced, independent facilitation.

The day incorporated cultural ceremony ensuring the Healing Forum was a culturally safe space for discussions to take place. This was reinforced by Aunty Margaret Farrell, as Chair of Baabyan and the Local Planning Committee. In welcoming us, Aunty Margaret also gave context to the Healing Forum noting the need for culture and belonging to be strengthened so communities can heal from past traumas. Aunty Margaret also spoke of the prevalence of intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal people in Mt Druitt. We were then welcomed to country by Rhiannon Wright and Uncle Wes performed a smoking ceremony. We had didgeridoo performances throughout the day by Gumaroy.

In planning the Mt Druitt Healing Forum, the Local Planning Committee identified the following goals:

- A shared understanding across community, government and non-government partners of the healing needs and aspirations for the Mt Druitt community;
- Young Mums and Dads would have the opportunity to identify their healing needs and aspirations and will be supported to address those needs moving forward;
- Identify a way forward for the Mt Druitt community to pursue longer term healing goals.

In order to meet the goals of the Healing Forum the Local Planning Committee developed three associated questions to be explored during the Yarning Circles. These were:

- **Yarning Circle 1** – What are our young Mums & Dads’ healing needs and how do we support them to address those?
- **Yarning Circle 2** – How do we embed an understanding of our healing needs across the service sector?
- **Yarning Circle 3** – What are the steps to ensure ongoing collaboration between community and service providers to support healing for the Mt Druitt community?

The Yarning Circles were facilitated by local community members and conversations scribed for reporting back to the broader group. These conversations for the basis of the findings presented in this report.

# Key Findings

*We live here in Mt Druitt in changed but beautiful places. We have not lived the past 200 years unchanged but the spirits still walk amongst us so listen well today and into the future*

Over the course of the conversations held in each Yarning Circle the following themes emerged.

## Young Families' Healing Needs and Supports

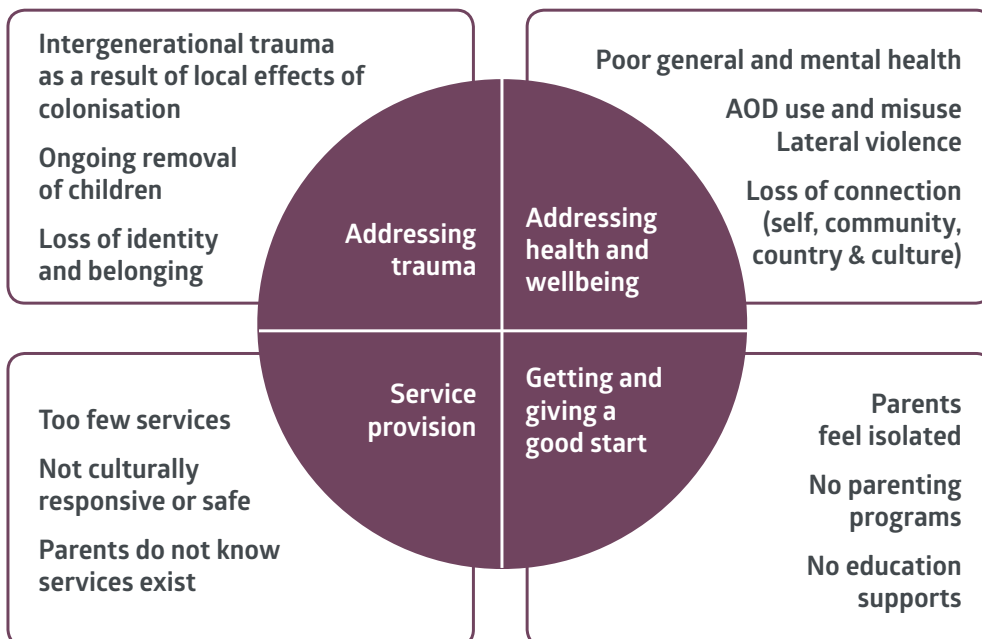
*We have high levels of distress with little understanding in our young people about the cause of their distress. For our young mums and dads ... there is a perception you are on your own and within a culture that is built on connection to self, land and others that is really sad (Community Member)*

In terms of the healing needs, the Healing Forum paid particular focus to young parents and families. Healing needs related to recognition that parents:

- Carry and pass on trauma
- Have specific needs relating to improved health and wellbeing
- Need support to give their children the best opportunities available
- Need more knowledge of the services available.

These themes are inter-related as outlined in Diagram 1 below.

**Diagram 1: Young parents healing needs identified by Mt Druitt community**



## Intergenerational Trauma

Trauma and healing were key themes raised throughout the Healing Forum. Community / collective trauma was seen to be the result of the local impacts of colonisation and successive government policies. Past and present removal of Aboriginal children from their families and communities have had a devastating and lasting effect on the Aboriginal communities of Mt Druitt.

People described how young parents are carrying intergenerational trauma and suggested the healing needs of young families were not fully known. More needed to be done to better understand their particular healing needs. One participant noted:

*What do we mean by healing when we have we been disrupted by colonisation and the policies governments still enforce on us... how can we heal? What actually are the healing needs of our young people*

The Healing Forum noted that there was an ongoing issue with children still being removed at high rates from young families in the region. The process and outcome was producing trauma and re-triggering past trauma for older members of the community and Stolen Generations members. Further, when children are removed and not cared for by Aboriginal families, community reported there was a loss of identity and belonging:

*I know of one child that had been in care and when s/he got the opportunity to go home to community and go on country they said that was the first time they felt like they 'belonged' (Community Member / Service Provider)*

## Health and Wellbeing

People described how young people and families face some big challenges with regard to general health and mental health in particular. It was noted that there was the lack of services and further, that where health and wellbeing services exist the service offered is generally poorly aligned with the specific needs of Aboriginal people, with community members describing them as not culturally responsive and / or culturally safe.

For young families, these health challenges were reported to be the result of the intergenerational trauma and the loss of connection to land, culture, self and others. Too many young parents in the community are “*lost, isolated, disconnected and suffering from low self-esteem and confidence*”. When carried into parenting roles this was described as having a devastating effect on families generally and young families in particular:

*There is poor support and nurturing for young Mums and Dads, who feel lost, inadequate, and the shame or the stigma associated with being young parents... Young parents lack the confidence to be good and strong parents and there are no role models and seems like there is no-one to talk to (Community Member)*



Overall, the issues raised that impacted on young families related to poor general health, high rates of mental health issues, high rates of incarceration (and the lack of support for people coming out of prison – especially parents), Alcohol and Other Drug (AOD) use and misuse, lateral violence, bullying, teenage pregnancies:

*There is too much going on in the community ... for example AOD is a big challenge and drugs generally are too available and there needs to be a focus on nutrition and healthy lifestyles... how can our babies get a good start when parents are struggling in the first instance  
(Community Member)*

People reported the need for more Social and Emotional Wellbeing programs and more resources offered into the region. Additional programs to address AOD use and misuse that are culturally appropriate and trauma-informed are required as well as specialist services that understand some distinct needs. For example, Otitis Media (OM) is a major issue for young Aboriginal children with significant effects on learning. Notably over 90 per cent of young people in the juvenile justice system have hearing problems as a result of OM.



## The Importance of getting a strong start to life and adulthood

The Healing Forum strongly noted that Aboriginal families are too often struggling in their parenting roles and often felt that they were not connected to other people, to services or to their community. This generally meant that newborns were not getting off to the kind of start in life that sets them on a good path. This can then be a factor that leads to the removal of children by the Department of Families and Community Services (FaCS):

*Our babies get off to a poor start and Fathers don't know how to be fathers. They need mentoring groups for boys and young men... the outcome of these poor starts means our babies get removed*

There was a lot of discussion about the kinds of supports that can be offered to young parents in the pre- and post-natal periods. In terms of pre-schooling, there was a reported need for more parenting programs that support increased positive outcomes for the first 1,000 days of life.

Beyond that, the education system is seen to be poorly suited to young peoples' social and emotional wellbeing and learning needs. It was reported that young people generally have a poor understanding of their culture and identity and what is causing their distress. Importantly one participant suggested that *"our kids are losing their Aboriginality in the education system"*, while others suggested Aboriginal students are reluctant to identify as Aboriginal due to the fear of being bullied and / or shame:

*The education system is largely letting down Aboriginal students and there is a lack of trauma-informed practice in schools. Teachers not educated about Aboriginal history and therefore trauma and distress is not understood and schools become culturally unsafe places for Aboriginal students (Community Member)*

There was a noted lack of involvement of Aboriginal parents in schools with forum participants outlining that in their experience parents generally feel culturally unsafe in school environments that are not welcoming for Aboriginal parents. There was some discussion about funding supporting Aboriginal students in schools with a bias towards boys (e.g. Clontarf) and too few programs supporting young Aboriginal girls. Increasing self-esteem, self-worth and pride was an identified issue and the shortage of Aboriginal Education / Liaison Officers and Counsellors in schools – *"that make a big difference to Aboriginal students"* – a critical issue.

The poor understanding and teaching of Aboriginal culture and heritage in schools was of concern – though some working in the sector identified some key developments in this area, relating to more inclusion in the curriculum of Aboriginal heritage and histories.

## A Non Responsive Service System

There was a reported poor understanding of the healing needs of Aboriginal people within the service sector. This was largely due to the lack of understanding and acknowledgement of the past and present levels of trauma in the community.

At the government level, community members felt that there was a lack of inclusion and respect for Elders in the policy and program planning cycle and that this was a significant problem. Many felt that when governments intervened to help or address issues they took a command and control approach. Communities therefore generally felt disempowered and that governments were: *“telling us what our problems are and what needs to be done to fix them”*.

Therefore, policy development was seen to be characterized by disempowering relationships and a non-responsive service system that did not listen to, acknowledge and / or understand Aboriginal people, their needs and their culture.

Community members also outlined a lack of collaboration, consultation and processes of co-design, with a general lack of service coordination. Community members felt that there was poor accountabilities within the service system for positive outcomes for Aboriginal people and lack of cultural knowledge. This had the effect of creating culturally unsafe places in the service sector for Aboriginal people when accessing mainstream services.

Within the Mt Druitt region Aboriginal people reported feeling alien in a system that is supposed to serve their needs. People described the need for a change in the relationship between communities and government and the service system. This is, a shift from governments and agencies assuming what the community wants, to listening and getting fully committed to co-design processes.

The community suggested there was confusion as to why there was a lack of trauma-informed services, since *“trauma is at the base of all community challenges so why are there no investments in healing outcomes and services? There needs to be more investment in spiritual, social and emotional wellbeing”*.



## Solutions that Address Community Healing Needs

The solutions that emerged from the Healing Forum to address the healing needs of families were diverse and detailed.

### Healing and Truth Telling – A Shared Understanding

The very process of yarning and having conversations with government and agencies led to many stories being told and shared. Embedded understanding across the service sector of healing needs would be best supported by the community having one unified voice and vision. A vision that can be delivered to government and that tells the story of the Mt Druitt community / communities.

The theme of ‘story’ and story-telling continued to be raised. While communities are wanting governments and agencies to listen better, they are also ready with their stories:

*There are powerful stories to be told and shared and there is a need in this room and in our communities to be able to tell our stories and have the truth heard... We need to tell the Mt Druitt story because the answers are in this story to the community challenges (Elder)*

Senior people and Elders must be able to tell their stories and bring their voices of experience and wisdom into the healing processes of others. However, these were and are not easy conversations within and outside of communities:

*Our past is confronting and healing is challenging. It's confronting and we are asking our children and services to understand significant and complex issues. We are asking them to understand things that are not around anymore... it's a sad story at one level but one of survival and they can be proud*

Such stories are part of holistic healing approaches that can strengthen at the very least an understanding of community healing needs within the service sector – “*healing needs to be promoted as an investment not a cost*”.

Further, more forums and conversations such as were taking place were required to support greater understanding of healing within the service sector – “*this is just the start and we need more where we can tell our stories and provoke thinking and discussion*”. That is, more gatherings that are focused on healing, with healing as a priority on all projects and embedded in them through the inclusion of culture, art, music, dance and therapy and delivered in safe places.

*You will understand our healing needs by spending time with us and listening to our stories and our needs. We have to find a way to bring healing and culture into the home, into the education system and into the services that we access*

## Creating Healing for Young Families

To best support the healing needs of young Mums and Dads, the community wanted to build a unified voice and “*get a place at the table*” where decisions are made about the supports needed. There was acknowledgement that more needed to be done to fully understand the healing needs of “*our families and communities but that there needs to be a safe place*” where people can have a sense of belonging and where opportunities for healing can take place. There was an expressed need to “*heal our parents so they can support and heal their children... we need to heal our Mums and Dads*” and that healing “*starts at home*”

The best supports for the healing needs of young Mums and Dads in Mt Druitt are presented in Diagram 2 below.

**Diagram 2: Mt Druitt community views on how to create healing for young families**



It was reported that supports need to be focused on:

*... building strong families and strong communities... we need to tell our young people our story, our culture and our world view – lots of our young people do not know our history and what has happened to us*

A key theme of the Healing Forum was determining how to provide more support for families and how community solutions can be incorporated into responses at the government level. Forum participants in answering this questions emphasized that wrap-around services need to be culturally responsive and safe and community needs to ensure every young parent is reached out to, supported and given a mentor:

We need to help our young people identify, connect and belong and nurture our young parents and help them know where they can get help, who can help and have a range of supports in place

There was an identified need for greater advocacy on behalf of young families for child minding, improved access to transport, and parenting programs – including having Elders teach cultural ways to build stronger connections with young families that need networks of support.

There also needs to be forums or mechanism for young peoples' voices to be heard and that are supported towards connection with culture and having a strong identity.

Further, forum participants felt that there needs to be more Aboriginal people (community members) connected into schools providing support. This helps create pride for Aboriginal students in Aboriginality and builds identity and belonging. Also, the schools themselves needed to better recognise and place the unique needs of Aboriginal students within the mainstream education system. There is also a specific need for programs that build the confidence and self-esteem of Aboriginal students, where they can feel proud to identify and proud of their culture:

*Our young people need tools – weapons and spears – that help them understand and connect to their culture and identity and understand what causes their distress and helps them to heal from our trauma and their own (Community Member and Service Provider)*

## **A Responsive Service Sector**

The community generally felt the service sector was not responsive (overall) to Aboriginal peoples' needs. They felt the solution to this issue was a service sector that has an embedded understanding of the healing needs of the Aboriginal communities in the Mt Druiitt region.

Community members felt that all services need to be a trauma-informed across all aspects of service delivery with more cultural education and cultural sensitivity. This will lead to an understanding of difference as well as a knowledge of needs, and therefore the different solutions Aboriginal clients require compared to the mainstream clients – *“educate the 97 per cent of the population rather than the 3 per cent and focus on the mainstream rather than the ‘other’”*.

The community also suggested service providers, agencies and government generally need to *“slow down and stop moving so fast... we can't keep up and that causes anxiety and stress and trauma”*.

In terms of embedded understanding across the service sector of the healing needs specific actions and outcomes reported by the community were:

- Schools valuing Aboriginal culture and teaching the truth of Aboriginal history in a caring and supportive way with Aboriginal stories told by Aboriginal people and therefore enhancing cultural pride
- Non-Indigenous people having an increased understanding of White privilege and learning about Aboriginal culture
- Healing places, spaces and processes supported and embedded in all programs and Aboriginal people having a seat at “*a table where cultural values are prioritised*”
- More Aboriginal workers across the service sector and specifically more Aboriginal trained health and allied health workers (e.g. midwives, nurses, doctors, clinical professionals).

### **Collaboration to Support Healing for the Mt Druitt Community**

In supporting the healing needs of Aboriginal people in the Mt Druitt communities detailed that there needs to be more ongoing collaboration between the community and service providers. The foundation of this collaboration was outlined as increased trust between communities and services. Participants in the forum felt that this could best occur through services increasing their knowledge and understanding of the impact of colonisation and building capacity to engage with communities in meaningful, respectful ways. A key step to increasing the possibilities and realities of collaboration, is for service provision and service providers to enhance the cultural responsiveness of their services and ensure services are culturally safe for Aboriginal people.

Forum participants were encouraged by the extent of service provider participation at the Healing Forum, however noted the absence of some critical service providers, such as Police. Forum participants explained the importance of service providers sending senior staff to community forums and planning meetings, to ensure that the Aboriginal community has an opportunity to advise and engage individuals that have adequate ‘decision-making authority’.

It was felt that relationships needed to be characterized by respect and transparency, and they need to be supportive. Many participants detailed that from the government perspective silos need to be broken down and red tape reduced – with specific regard to funding (application and reporting). Indeed, some solutions offered included funding agreements reflecting a streamlined approach with a commitment to longer term and more sustainable funding models. These allow for greater collaboration using a “*pilot, demonstrate and fund*” model:

*There is a need for government to listen and really listen like never before and to have such listening characterized by empathy and sensitivity to the trauma and levels of distress. They need to get out into the community more and work with us*

A further step towards securing ongoing collaboration would be built-in accountability into workplaces and services that are designed around Aboriginal best practice and Aboriginal cultural knowledge – “*we know what we need!*” That is, workforce training in services that are welcoming and culturally safe for Aboriginal people.

Communities need to be involved in the services they access in order for collaboration and information-sharing that leads to two-way education on Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of doing business. This will mean community and services will get together more often and in different ways so trusting relationships can be built.

In terms of moving forward, The Healing Forum was seen a good conversation and a first step in improved relations and services. The recommendations below emerged from these conversations.



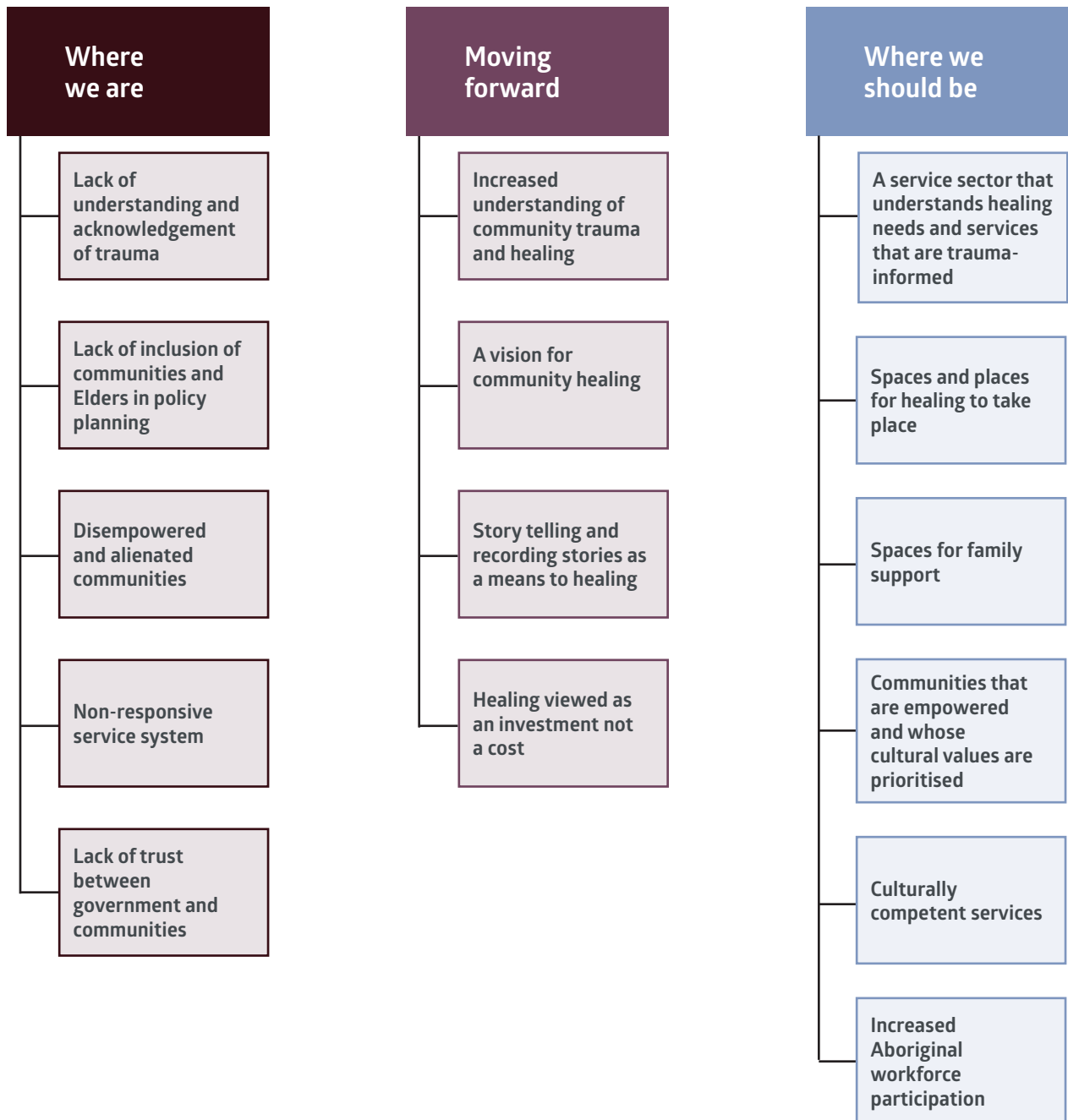


# Next Steps for Consideration

Many solutions were discussed at the Healing Forum. The following outlines some possible actions for consideration to support Mt Druitt Aboriginal community achieve the next steps on their healing journey. They are drawn from input across the day.

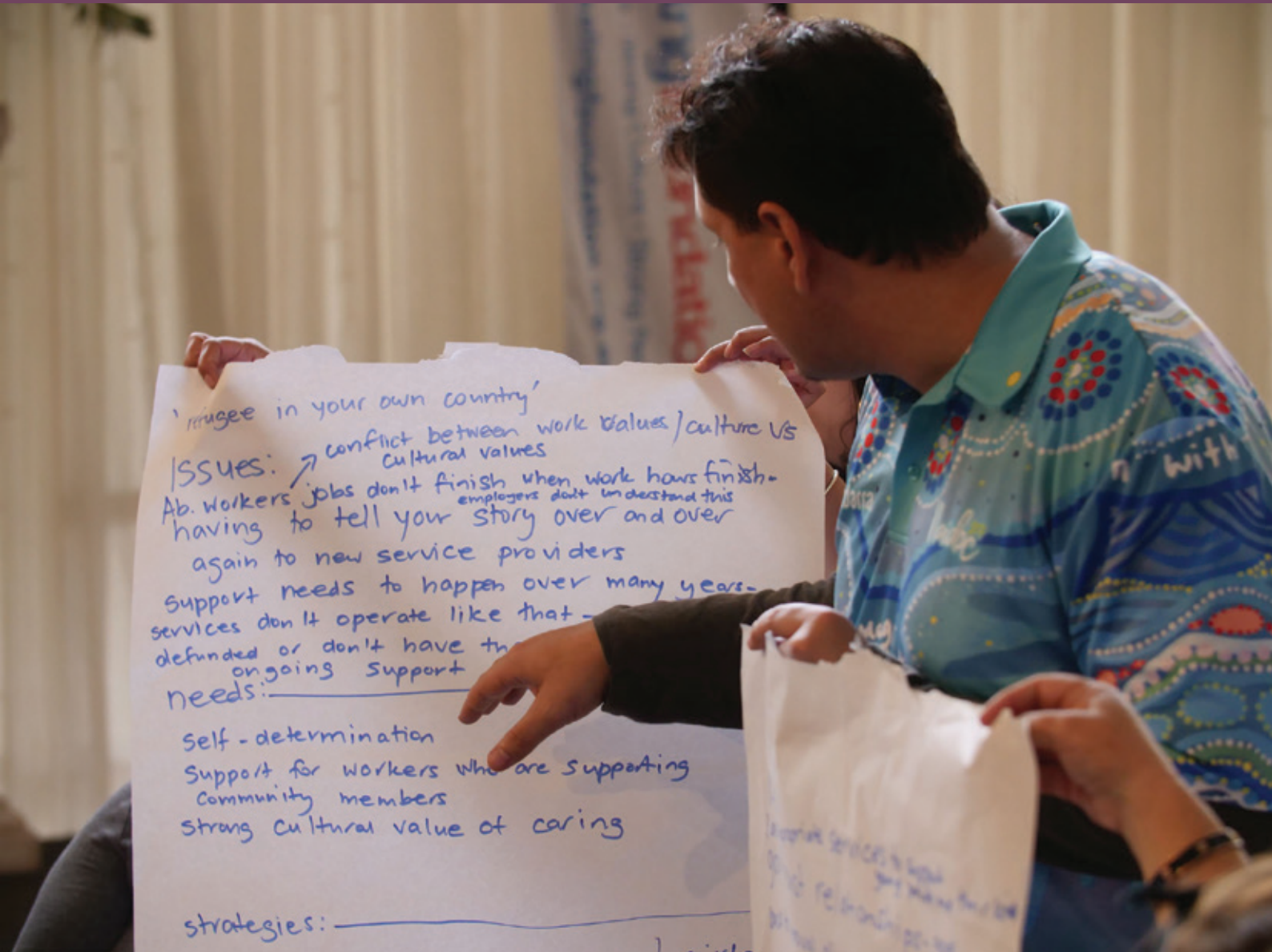
1. **Addressing intergenerational trauma is critical and healing needs to be placed at the centre of all policies and practices.** Possibilities for action include:
  - » Development of a Mt Druitt Healing Strategy that includes as a priority the identification / establishment of healing spaces, places and opportunities within and across communities
  - » Communities / Elders writing and telling their own stories of healing and the Mt Druitt story of colonisation, survival and healing recorded and promoted
  - » Healing forums including youth forums where community voice can be heard and where meaningful conversations held between community, NGO and government can be deepened and strengthened.
2. **Develop a network of supports that ensures young families have what they need to be strong:**
  - » Develop a system / strategy that provides wrap around services (primary health, mental health, AOD, etc.) for young Mum's and Dad's
  - » Develop or identify existing programs that build parenting skills and confidence
  - » Ensure services are culturally responsive and culturally safe for young parents by having the voices of local Aboriginal parents inform the way services are designed and delivered.
3. **Build a culturally responsive service sector through:**
  - » Services committing to trauma-informed training and trauma-informed practice to build healing capacity and healing approaches into service delivery. Services need to partner with communities to do this
  - » Increased focus on self-determination with services by having Aboriginal people involved in service co-design, Elders at the table on advisory groups and Aboriginal staff in the workplace informing policy and practice
  - » Embedding cultural values and Aboriginal knowledge frameworks into policy and programs through meaningful engagement with local communities
  - » Increasing the number of Aboriginal employees in the services that deliver services to Aboriginal people
  - » Build collaborative and trusting relationships between government and community through the inclusion of communities in the design and implementation of the programs communities themselves identify as addressing healing needs
  - » Agencies demonstrating a commitment to working in genuine partnership with the community, by actively engaging in ongoing community planning meetings and future forums. This includes agencies sending senior staff with adequate decision-making authority to meetings and forums.

Diagram 3: A model to increase understanding of healing in the Mt Druitt service sector



#### 4. Young People and Identity

- » Mentoring and cultural camps with a focus on identity and self-esteem – especially for Aboriginal children in care that have very limited contact with their family and communities and boys and young men to develop parenting skills and confidence.



*You will understand our healing needs by spending time with us and listening to our stories and our needs. We have to find a way to bring healing and culture into the home, into the education system and into the services that we access*

