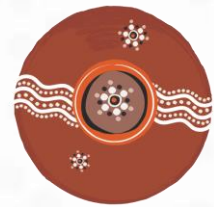
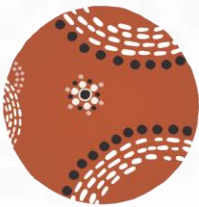


2019 Coronial Findings on the Deaths of Young People in the Kimberley Region

This fact sheet describes the 2019 coronial findings on the deaths of 13 Aboriginal young people in the Kimberley region that occurred between 2012 - 2016



The Western Australian Coroner investigated **the deaths of 13 Aboriginal young people aged from 10 to 24 years old that occurred between 2012 – 2016** in the Kimberley region together because they occurred in similar circumstances. The Coroner, Rosalinda Fogliani, traced contributing events across the life courses of each of the young people in attributing the causes of death. In her 2019's final report¹, she determined that **12 of the 13 deaths occurred by suicide.**



Prior to Birth

The Coroner confirmed that **legacies of colonisation and dislocation** from family and Country and their **impacts on contemporary circumstances**, including transgenerational trauma, were key drivers of the suicide deaths of young people.

Trauma was transmitted down the generations by behaviours that are themselves symptomatic of trauma. Among the 12 young people who died by suicide, the Coroner found that:

- seven had witnessed severe and chronic **domestic violence** in the home
- almost all grew up in homes where they witnessed high levels of **alcohol misuse**

The Coroner also suspected that developmental impacts relating to **Fetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder (FASD)** may have played a role in the deaths. Although none of the young people had been diagnosed with FASD, the Coroner found there was a sufficient history of prenatal alcohol exposure, and early developmental difficulties, to support that conclusion. Additionally, six of the young people had been diagnosed with failure to thrive in early childhood, which can be caused by exposure to toxic agents in utero.





Adverse Childhood Experiences

The early life experiences of the young people indicated a continuing pattern of adverse, potentially **traumatising events**, for example:

- most were informally **placed into the care of other family members** for extended periods,
- two of the male young people allegedly experienced **extra-familial child sexual abuse**,
- several young people experienced **alcohol or other drug misuse** from a young age,
- some of the young people had **voiced threats of self-harm** more frequently in the setting of alcohol intoxication,
- most had previously **voiced suicidal ideation or intent**, and
- three young people also experienced **domestic violence** in their own relationships

Most of the young people had **NO** contact with the mental health services prior to their death

The Coroner found that despite their experiences, most of the young people had no contact with mental health services. Further, most of their friends and family had not understood the seriousness of the challenges facing the person and had not known who to turn to for help.



Immediate Causes and Means

Immediate circumstances and causes for deaths included family fights, relationship breakdowns, and being shamed.

While **impulsivity** is discounted in all but two of the deaths, in seven of the cases there was **significant alcohol use** in the lead up to the deaths, and at least two of the young persons had very **high blood alcohol levels** when they died.



Recommendations

The recommendations made by the Coroner are well considered and far reaching. They highlight the importance of addressing alcohol through the development of a holistic approach to alcohol, drugs, and mental health. The Coroner also highlighted the need to provide 1) wrap-around services for families, which address the social determinants of health, and 2) mental health treatment plans for Aboriginal people, which offer the inclusion of traditional cultural healing.





Recommendations (Contd.)

Additionally, the Coroner also recommended expansion of the **Yiriman Project²** or now known as the **Jalngangurru Healing Trial³** that recognises the importance of supporting connection to culture and Country. In all, the Coroner made 42 Recommendations.

In the last recommendation (item 42), the Coroner stated that: the principles of **self-determination and empowerment** be given emphasis in initiatives, policies, and programs relating to Aboriginal people in WA and that the WA Government introduce measures to enable Aboriginal people and organisations to be involved in setting and formulating policy that affects their communities;

- that in developing such measures, consideration be given to negotiating mutually agreed outcomes, with service delivery responsibilities between the WA Government and Aboriginal people and organisations; and
- the WA Government develop a state-wide Aboriginal cultural policy that recognises the importance of cultural continuity and cultural security to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this State.

The CBPATSISP asserts that this overarching recommendation should guide the implementation of the other 41 recommendations. Professor Pat Dudgeon, Director of CBPATSISP, commended the WA Government’s commitment to implement the majority of the Recommendations:

“I am encouraged that the WA government’s response to the Coroner’s findings, and to the earlier Message Stick report, promises Indigenous leadership in both immediate interventions to address the current suicide crisis and in the longer term to build on our cultural strengths and restore the resilience of our people and communities.”⁴



References

- [1] Fogliani, R. V. C. (2019 February 7). *Inquest into the 13 deaths of children and young persons in the Kimberley region*. Coroner’s Court of Western Australia. <https://www.coronerscourt.wa.gov.au/files/inquest-2019/13-Children-and-Young-Persons-in-the-Kimberley-Region-Finding.pdf>
- [2] Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre. (2022). *Yiriman Project*. <http://kalacc.org/youth-projects/yiriman-project/>
- [3] Kimberley Aboriginal Law & Cultural Centre. (n.d.). *Jalngangurru Healing Trial* <https://kams.org.au/jalngangurru-healing-trial/>
- [4] The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention. (2019 May 24). Indigenous leader commends the WA Government commitment to the recommendations of the coronial report into the deaths of 13 children and young people. <https://dbpatsisp.com.au/2019/05/24/indigenous-leader-commends-the-wa-government-commitment-to-the-recommendations-of-the-coronial-report-into-the-deaths-of-13-children-and-young-people/>



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