

# Policy Concordance: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health, Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention

NEW SOUTH WALES



The Centre of Best Practice in  
**Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander**  
Suicide Prevention



# Policy Concordance: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health, Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Suicide Prevention

NEW SOUTH WALES

**In Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention, government policies are critically important because they influence what services are available and how they are delivered – with enormous consequences for people’s lives.**

This Concordance is a collection of guides to policy and decision-making at national and State/Territory levels. It includes:

- profiles of key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, government departments and agencies and other organisations with an important role in policy processes
- formal policies that describe governments’ commitments to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, and how they intend to deliver on them
- other essential documents – for example community submissions to policy processes and the most influential research reports.

The Concordance is for anyone seeking information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention policy in any part of Australia, including government and ministerial policy staff, researchers, service providers and community organisations. The focus is on current

policy documents. However some older publications are included where they have been particularly influential, and policies and strategies are included after their intended finish date if they have not yet been replaced and are still guiding practice.

Social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention are complex and multi-faceted and do not fall neatly into a single policy domain. This Concordance focuses on the organisations, processes and policies most directly related to these issues, acknowledging that important policy work also takes place in other domains – including education, justice and family services. The Concordance is a living resource and the CBPATSISP welcomes suggestions for additional inclusions.

This section of the Concordance focuses on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health, social and emotional wellbeing and suicide prevention policy in New South Wales. Chapters on the other States and Territories, and national policy, can be found at [cbpatsisp.org.au](http://cbpatsisp.org.au).

# Key organisations

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community

| Organisation   | Purpose   |
|--|---|
| <b>The Aboriginal Health and Medical Research Council (AH&amp;MRC)</b> | <p>The AH&amp;MRC is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) across NSW, committed to ensuring our 47 Member Services have access to an adequately resourced and skilled workforce.</p> <p>The AH&amp;MRC Policy Team delivers advocacy and escalates system and policy issues that affect the ACCHO sector and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in accessing health care, advocating for health policies and programs that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• improve access to health services for Aboriginal communities in NSW</li> <li>• support the delivery of culturally safe health care services</li> <li>• are co-designed with and /or reflect the collective views of the ACCHO sector and promote genuine partnership; and</li> <li>• are evidence-based and build on best practice community-controlled models of care.</li> </ul> <p>As a member of the NSW Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations (NSW CAPO) and the National Coalition of Peaks, the AH&amp;MRC also plays a central role in the delivery of Closing the Gap in NSW and at the Commonwealth level, representing the ACCHO sector on Closing the Gap negotiations and collaborating to drive progress against the National Agreement.</p> |
| <b>Coalition of Aboriginal Peak Organisations</b>                      | Convened within the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, CAPO leads delivery of Closing the Gap initiatives in NSW.   |

## Government

| Organisation                                     | Purpose  |
|--|--|
| <b>Aboriginal Affairs NSW</b>                    | Aboriginal Affairs NSW was established to advocate and enable Aboriginal communities to lead accountability and change across the NSW Government. It implements <b>OCHRE</b> , the NSW Government's plan for Aboriginal affairs, establishes partnerships for economic prosperity, supports Aboriginal community governance and supports communities to strengthen cultural identity and language.   |
| <b>NSW Health</b>                                | NSW Health is the state health system, managing public hospitals, out-patient, community health and public health services and the Justice Health network.   |
| <b>NSW Health – mental health services</b>       | This online listing provides details of all NSW Health mental health services.   |
| <b>NSW Ministry of Health</b>                    | The NSW Ministry of Health supports the Secretary of NSW Health, the NSW Minister for Health and Minister for Regional Health, Minister for Mental Health and Minister for Medical Research in their roles, developing policy and strategy and overseeing finances.  |
| <b>NSW Health - Centre for Aboriginal Health</b> | <p>The Centre for Aboriginal Health was established within the NSW Ministry of Health to work in partnership to build a culturally safe and responsive health system, where Aboriginal people have the same health outcomes as non-Aboriginal people.</p> <p>The centre's role is to support positive, holistic health and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal people and communities through health system change. This includes supporting the health system to engage and listen to the needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people including about the social and cultural determinants of health, the effects of colonisation and inter-generational trauma, and how Aboriginal peoples' experience of education, housing, employment, racism and discrimination affects their access to and utilisation of health services.</p> |

---

**NSW Ministry of Health  
– Mental Health Branch  
and Chief Psychiatrist**

The Mental Health Branch of the NSW Ministry of Health is responsible for developing, managing and coordinating policy, strategy and program funding relating to mental health and maintaining the mental health legislative framework. It works to implement this work in partnership with local health districts and specialty health networks, community managed organisations, research institutions and other partners.

The Branch includes the office of the Chief Psychiatrist, whose role is to provide:

- high level advice to the Executive Director of the Mental Health Branch on the mental health needs of the NSW population
- professional leadership to NSW mental health clinicians across all areas
- clinical input to policy development and implementation to improve the mental health status of target groups.

---

**Mental Health  
Commission of New  
South Wales**

The Mental Health Commission of New South Wales is an independent statutory agency responsible for monitoring, reviewing and improving mental health and wellbeing for people in NSW. The Commission works with government and the community to secure better mental health and wellbeing for everyone, and availability of appropriate supports in or close to home when people are unwell or at risk of becoming unwell.

The Commission promotes policies and practices that recognise the autonomy of people who experience mental health issues and support their recovery, emphasising their personal and social needs and preferences. It was established under the Mental Health Commission Act 2012.

---

## Policy documents

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

| Date      | Title   | Organisation           | About   |
|-----------|---|------------------------|---|
|           | Opportunity, Choice, Healing, Responsibility, Empowerment (OCHRE) | Aboriginal Affairs NSW | OCHRE is the community-focused plan for Aboriginal Affairs in NSW. It commits the NSW Government to working with and in support of Aboriginal communities by building strong working partnerships that have at their heart respect for local Aboriginal culture, leadership and decision making.  |
| 2020-2025 | NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025     | NSW Health             | <p>The NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 supports and assists NSW Health services in delivering respectful and appropriate mental health services in partnership with Aboriginal services, people and communities.</p> <p>This strategy is designed to support and assist NSW Health services in delivering respectful and appropriate care in partnership with Aboriginal services, people and communities. The strategy is the foundation for change that will support a future way of working under the national Agreement for Closing the Gap in Aboriginal Health outcomes.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The Strategy is supported by three goals:</li><li>• Holistic, person and family-centred care and healing</li><li>• Culturally safe, trauma-informed, quality care</li><li>• Connected care</li></ul> <p>Each goal is underpinned by strategic directions that provide clear guidance for NSW Health services on what actions are required to achieve it.</p> |

---

|           |  |   |   |
|-----------|--|---|---|
| 2020-2025 | NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 Monitoring and Reporting Framework | NSW Health                              | <p>The Monitoring and Reporting Framework for the NSW Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2020-2025 was developed to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• provide a structure for the reporting, monitoring and accountability mechanisms that support implementation and evaluation of the Strategy</li> <li>• determine whether the goals outlined in the Strategy are being achieved</li> <li>• increase the transparency of the Strategy and progress with implementation through public reporting of performance and evaluation information.</li> </ul> <p>It is committed to recognising Aboriginal data sovereignty, drawing from existing data where possible to minimise reporting burden, minimising consultation burden, recognising Aboriginal perspectives, values and traditions, incorporating a social and emotional wellbeing perspective, including qualitative as well as quantitative measures, and keeping the community informed about how the strategy is working.</p>  |
|           | Building on Aboriginal Communities' Resilience – a Towards Zero Suicides Initiative              | NSW Health                              | <p>Part of NSW Health's Towards Zero Suicides policy, the Building on Aboriginal Communities' Resilience initiative is funding 12 Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs) to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• deliver locally-relevant programs to local Aboriginal communities across NSW</li> <li>• increase access to culturally responsive suicide prevention activities, including cultural restoration and healing</li> </ul>  |
|           | Aboriginal Health Impact Statement   | NSW Health Centre for Aboriginal Health | <p>The mandatory Aboriginal Health Impact Statement support NSW Health staff and organisations to by systematically applying an 'Aboriginal health lens' to all new and revised policies and programs, aiming to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embed careful consideration of the health needs of Aboriginal people at an early stage in the process of revision or development of policies, programs and strategies</li> <li>• Guide the systematic examination and assessment of health system barriers, enablers and linkages in relation to Aboriginal health to identify opportunities to improve access to healthcare as well as adverse impacts to be mitigated</li> <li>• Reduce disparities for Aboriginal people by ensuring that policies and programs strive to achieve equity for Aboriginal people, and actively monitor and evaluate outcomes</li> <li>• Support NSW Health staff and organisations to develop effective partnerships and strategies to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal stakeholders and communities.</li> </ul> |

### Whole of community

| Date      | Title  | Organisation                            | About  |
|-----------|--|---|--|
| 2022-2026 | Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention | NSW Government, Commonwealth Government | <p>The Bilateral Schedule is the NSW agreement under the <a href="#">National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement</a>, which sets out the shared intention of the Commonwealth, state and territory governments to work in partnership to improve the mental health of all Australians, reduce the rate of suicide toward zero, and ensure the sustainability and enhance the services of the Australian mental health and suicide prevention system.</p> <p>The Bilateral Schedule include NSW-specific commitments including funding allocations and sites for service expansion.</p> |

|           |  |   |  |
|-----------|--|---|--|
| 2022-2027 | Shifting the Landscape for Suicide Prevention in NSW A whole-of-government Strategic Framework for a whole-of-community response 2022-2027 | Mental Health Commission of New South Wales | Indigenous perspectives are embedded throughout this framework, including a section on suicide prevention that draws on ATSIPEP.   |
| Current   | NSW mental health legislation, policy directives and guidelines  | NSW Health                                  | <p>Includes links to</p> <p><b>Legislation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health Act 2007</li> <li>• Mental Health Regulation 2019</li> <li>• Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Act 2020</li> <li>• Mental Health and Cognitive Impairment Forensic Provisions Regulation 2021</li> <li>• Guardianship Act 1987</li> <li>• Mental Health Commission Act 2012</li> </ul> <p><b>Policy directives</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PD2019_045 - Discharge Planning and Transfer of Care for Consumers of NSW Health Mental Health Services</li> <li>• PD2022_043 - Clinical care of people who may be suicidal</li> <li>• PD2012_053 - Mental Health Triage Policy</li> <li>• PD2012_050 - Forensic Mental Health Services</li> <li>• PD2020_004 - Seclusion and Restraint in NSW Health Settings</li> <li>• PD2021_039 - Mental Health Clinical Documentation</li> <li>• PD2017_033 - Physical Health Care Within Mental Health Services</li> <li>• PD2005_484 - Trust Fund Procedures - Mental Health Hospitals</li> </ul> <p><b>Guidelines</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• GL2014_002 - Mental Health Clinical Documentation Guidelines</li> <li>• GL2012_008 - Call Handling Guidelines for Mental Health Telephone Triage Services</li> <li>• GL2021_006 - Physical Health Care for People Living with Mental Health Issues</li> </ul> <p><b>Information bulletin</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• IB2023_032 - Healthcare Rights</li> </ul> |

|           |  |                                 |   |
|-----------|--|---------------------------------|---|
| 2018-2022 | NSW Strategic Framework and Workforce Plan for Mental Health 2018-2022: A Framework and Workforce Plan for NSW Health Services                             | NSW Health                      | <p>The NSW Strategic Framework and Workforce Plan for Mental Health 2018-2022 provides overarching guidance for NSW Health in implementing reform directions, including those of <i>Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014-2024</i>. It includes the following approaches to strengthening services for Aboriginal people:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement the Cultural Respect Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health 2016-2026 and promote the importance of Aboriginal leadership in mental health through the Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration</li> <li>• Implement and evaluate mental health programs for Aboriginal people to contribute to the growing evidence base for effective models and interventions NSW Health</li> <li>• Participate with the Australian Government and other governments to develop guidance and resources for mental health services working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people</li> </ul> <p><b>Workforce-related actions include:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collect Aboriginal mental health worker data through routine reporting</li> <li>• Recruit to new Aboriginal mental health worker positions</li> <li>• Improve role delineation for Aboriginal mental health worker positions</li> <li>• Promote clinical placements for Aboriginal mental health trainees in a variety of mental health settings including subspecialty streams (child and youth, perinatal and older persons' settings)</li> <li>• Explore a range of training programs and pathways to increase Aboriginal staff in mental health Workforce Plan</li> <li>• Finalise and implement a renewed Aboriginal Mental Health and Wellbeing Policy</li> </ul>                          |
| 2014-2024 | Living Well: A Strategic Plan for Mental Health in NSW 2014-2024<br><br>Living Well: Putting people at the centre of mental health reform in NSW: A Report | Mental Health Commission of NSW | <p>Living Well is NSW's 10-year reform strategy, taking a whole-of-government approach to system reform with a strong lived experience perspective. Actions specific to Aboriginal people and communities include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strengthen partnerships and relationships among Aboriginal communities and service providers by assessing the quality and effectiveness of the relationships and taking steps to improve them. The strategies for evaluating and strengthening the relationships are to be determined in partnership by the Aboriginal communities and service providers.</li> <li>• Establish mechanisms by which non-Aboriginal organisations can access expert, practical advice from Aboriginal people on strategies to improve the cultural appropriateness of their services.</li> <li>• Measure and publicly report: - perceptions of service quality and workplace supports of Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing workforces - Aboriginal consumer and carer experience of services.</li> <li>• Strengthen Aboriginal participation in the design, implementation and evaluation of NSW Government policies and initiatives to improve the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal people.</li> <li>• Encourage Aboriginal people to train as mental health professionals to work in all settings, including by continuing to support and develop the NSW Aboriginal Mental Health Workforce Program and vocational and educational training initiatives.</li> <li>• Enhance culturally appropriate mental health first aid and mental health literacy training for Aboriginal communities, including programs delivered by Aboriginal trainers with a lived experience of mental illness.</li> </ul> |