

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

NORTHERN TERRITORY



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

## NORTHERN TERRITORY

**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 the Northern Territory. 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>Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT)</b> | <p>AMSANT is the peak body for Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services (ACCHSs) in the Northern Territory. It aims to grow a strong Aboriginal community controlled primary health care sector by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supporting Members to deliver culturally safe, high quality comprehensive primary health care that supports action on the social determinants of health, and</li> <li>• representing AMSANT Members' views and aspirations through advocacy, policy, planning and research.</li> </ul> <p>AMSANT is an affiliate of the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO), and a member of the Coalition of Peaks.</p>   |
| <b>Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (Congress)</b>                | <p>Congress is an Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service that also has a research, policy and advocacy role. It makes many submissions to Territory and national policy processes, including in 2023:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Submission to the Australian Government's development of a National Health and Climate Strategy</li> <li>• Submission regarding the Draft Northern Territory Alcohol Action Plan</li> <li>• Input to the Three-Year Review of the Northern Territory Liquor Act 2019</li> <li>• Submission to the Early Years Strategy</li> </ul>   |
| <b>Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory (APO-NT)</b>        | <p><b>APO NT</b> is an alliance comprising the Aboriginal Medical Service Alliance Northern Territory (AMSANT), North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (NAAJA), Central Land Council (CLC), Northern Land Council (NLC), Tiwi Land Council (TLC), Anindilyakwa Land Council (ALC), Aboriginal Housing NT (AHNT) and the Northern Territory Indigenous Business Network (NT IBN).</p> <p>The alliance was created to provide a more effective response to key issues of joint interest and concern affecting Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory, including providing practical policy solutions to government. It is committed to increasing Aboriginal involvement in policy development and implementation, and to expanding opportunities for Aboriginal community control. It is a member of the Coalition of Peaks.</p> |

## Government

| Organisation                                     | Purpose   |
|--|---|
| <b>NT Office of Aboriginal Affairs</b>           | <p>The Office of Aboriginal Affairs (OAA) is the lead agency on Aboriginal affairs within the Northern Territory Government's Department of the Chief Minister &amp; Cabinet. The Office is responsible for providing support, engagement and advice to Aboriginal people and government on significant Aboriginal Affairs priorities through strategic Aboriginal policy matters, key projects and meaningful engagement and partnerships. It champions and accelerates work already underway in Aboriginal leadership, capability and capacity building, and building a culturally responsive public sector, that contributes to the commitments in the 'Everyone Together' Aboriginal Affairs Strategy and National Agreement on Closing the Gap.</p> <p>The work of the Office is guided by the APO NT (Aboriginal Peak Organisations Northern Territory) partnership principles.</p> |
| <b>Northern Territory Health</b>                 | <p>NT Health operates and commissions mental health services which are described in this listing.</p>   |
| <b>Northern Territory Primary Health Network</b> | <p>NT PHN plans and commissions primary health services that meet regional community needs across the NT. It is active in policy development at a Territory and national level, and led the Darwin site of the National Suicide Prevention Trial, one of two Indigenous-specific sites that have been influential in national planning.</p>   |

# Policy documents

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

| Date      | Title  | Organisation                  | About   |
|-----------|--|-------------------------------|---|
| 2019-2029 | Everyone Together Aboriginal Affairs Strategy 2019–2029      | Northern Territory Government | <p>The Strategy is intended to be complementary to the National Agreement of Closing the Gap and comprises 10 focus areas, including the following which are particularly relevant to wellbeing and suicide prevention:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Truth and healing, which acknowledges the importance of grief counselling and trauma-informed responses.</li> <li>• Health, which includes targets to increase service delivery by Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, increase access to targeted suicide prevention awareness and capacity training for NT Health staff, and improve the cultural safety and responsiveness of health services.</li> <li>• The NT government also publishes a <a href="#">Performance and Reporting Framework</a> and <a href="#">Progress Reports</a> to monitor work undertaken through the Strategy.</li> <li>• The framework will gather data that will be used to inform government and community on the outcomes of policies and programs to support future decision making.</li> </ul> |
| 2016-2026 | NT Health Aboriginal Cultural Security Framework 2016 - 2026 | Northern Territory Health     | <p>The Framework outlines the importance of cultural security as a “clinical imperative and must be embedded into systematic business practices ... Aboriginal cultural security is fundamental to NT Health delivering safe, quality health care and addressing the health inequity and the significant burden of disease experienced by Aboriginal people.”</p> <p>The framework offers guidance to NT Health staff to help them understand and implement components of cultural security, with six domains for action:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workforce</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Whole of organisation approach</li> <li>• Leadership</li> <li>• Consumer and community participation</li> <li>• Quality improvement, planning, research and evaluation.</li> </ul> <p>For each domain there are suggested strategies and monitoring tools.</p>   |
| 2021-2031 | NT HEALTH Aboriginal Health Plan 2021-2031                   | Northern Territory Health     | <p>The plan sets strategic directions for improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal Territorians, and is intended to influence and inform strategic and business planning, funding, policy development, communication, relationships and partnerships with Aboriginal people, communities and organisations.</p> <p>The priority directions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improving health service delivery to Aboriginal people and communities</li> <li>• Building effective and sustainable partnerships</li> <li>• Delivering culturally secure and safe services</li> <li>• Strengthening the health workforce</li> <li>• Improving Aboriginal population health and promoting wellbeing</li> </ul>   |

|      |   |                                      |   |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|---|
| 2022 | Northern Territory Treaty Commission Final Report | Northern Territory Treaty Commission | <p>The NT Treaty Commissioner recommended:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The establishment of a First Nations Forum through which Aboriginal Territorians can endorse a Treaty model and decide how First Nations should be represented in Treaty negotiations.</li> <li>• The development of a Treaty process that allows for the negotiations of many individual Treaties between the NT Government and First Nations (or coalitions of First Nations)</li> <li>• The development of a process for First Nations to gain official recognition as First Nations and transition to a First Nation Government.</li> <li>• The development of an Office of Treaty-Making within the NT Government to coordinate NT Government responses to Treaty-making.</li> <li>• The extension and expansion of the Treaty Commission to become a Treaty and Truth Commission under new Territory legislation, to progress truth-telling work across the NT and practically support First Nations prior to and during the Treaty negotiation process.</li> <li>• The creation of an Aboriginal Ombudsman position to respond to complaints regarding government participation in the Treaty process.</li> <li>• The creation of a First Nations Treaty Tribunal to deal with disputes in relation to First Nation membership and boundary, and in relation to Treaty performance.</li> <li>• The delivery of significant legislative reform to underpin this work.</li> <li>• Ensuring both First Nations and the NT Government take concerted steps to become 'Treaty-ready' and in a position to negotiate and implement treaties on equal footing.</li> </ul> |
|------|---|--------------------------------------|---|

### Whole of community

| Date      | Title   | Organisation            | About  |
|-----------|---|-------------------------|--|
| 2018-2023 | Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Strategic Framework 2018-2023                       | NT Department of Health | The Framework prioritises Indigenous people (more than 25% of the population of the NT), drawing on ATSIPEP for its approach to community-level wellbeing as a protective factor against suicide. It also addresses different patterns of suicidal behaviour in the Indigenous community and social determinants including the effects of over-incarceration at individual and community levels. |
| 2023-2028 | Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Implementation Plan Keeping Everyone Safe 2023-2028 | NT Department of Health | The Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Implementation Plan Keeping Everyone Safe 2023-2028 emphasises empowerment and leadership of Aboriginal community-controlled organisations in building capacity and resilience and responding to suicidality in culturally appropriate ways.   |

|           |   |   |   |
|-----------|---|---|---|
| 2019-2025 | Northern Territory Mental Health Strategic Plan 2019-2025                           | NT Department of Health                                 | <p>The Northern Territory Mental Health Strategic Plan 2019-2025 aligns with the Northern Territory Suicide Prevention Implementation Plan Keeping Everyone Safe 2023-2028 and the Fifth National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan. Its priorities are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coordinated care through regional planning</li> <li>• Culturally secure, safe and trauma informed care focussed on recovery</li> <li>• Person centred supports and services with consumers and carers at the front and centre of care</li> <li>• Community information and education to increase mental health knowledge to reduce stigma</li> <li>• Safety, quality, data collection, evidence based service and investment in evaluation</li> <li>• Equity, sustainability and a stepped care approach</li> <li>• It emphasises working with Aboriginal communities, particularly in suicide prevention and developing culturally-responsive mental health campaigns, and in growing and supporting the Aboriginal health workforce.</li> </ul> |
| 2021-2022 | Northern Territory Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Foundation Plan 2021 - 2022 | Northern Territory PHN, NT Department of Health, AMSANT | <p>The Northern Territory Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Foundation Plan 2021 – 2022 outlines priorities for a more integrated mental health and suicide prevention service system across the Territory, encompassing Aboriginal community-controlled, community-based and hospital services. It prioritises five key action areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Early engagement with at-risk populations</li> <li>• Clear pathways for people with moderate mental illness</li> <li>• Greater support for people with severe and complex needs</li> <li>• Joined-up services for children and young people</li> <li>• Using technology for better outcomes</li> </ul> <p>The Foundation Plan is expected to pave the way for a more detailed, implementation-focused Joint Regional Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Plan for the Northern Territory.</p>   |
| 2022-2026 | <a href="#">Bilateral Schedule on Mental Health and Suicide Prevention</a>          | Northern Territory Government, Commonwealth Government  | <p>The Bilateral Schedule is the NT 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 NT-specific commitments including funding allocations and sites for service expansion.</p>  |

