

Truth-telling about suicide is important



Prof Pat Dudgeon

At the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) we share evidence on what works best when it comes to suicide prevention and support for our people. We are always working to empower First Nations individuals, families, and communities. It is not easy to talk about suicide, especially publicly and in a culturally safe way, but sometimes it can be healing. This is why we created a resource, in collaboration with the national Mindframe project, to help our people share their experiences, and tell stories of their loved ones.

"A lot of our Mob keep a lot of stuff bottled up, especially our young ones. And that's where we see suicide, suffering in silence." - WA media training program participant

We developed the First Nations guide for truth-telling about suicide to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples when talking publicly about suicide, in ways that are safe for themselves, their family and others in the community.

The guide grew out of a media training program co-designed and delivered by Megan Krakouer, Aboriginal media expert, social justice advocate, and the Director of the National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project, and with support from Gerry Georgatos, mentor for the National Suicide Prevention and Trauma Recovery Project. We are very grateful to the 18 Aboriginal community members who participated in the pilot program. Their stories and deep knowledge, acquired through lived and living experiences of mental-health concerns, informed all aspects of the guide. Their strength and resilience are formidable.

Truth-telling about suicide

Truth-telling is a practice that corrects the record and presents a more accurate account of



Ted Wilkes, Megan Krakouer, Pat Dudgeon and Gerry Georgatos debriefing on the media training program.

Australia's history; at a community level, it is a powerful way of recognising the strength and contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledging the historical silencing of injustices and ongoing impacts of colonisation on First Nations peoples.

In the context of suicide, truth-telling can include individual people sharing their personal experiences and stories that honour their loved ones or advocating for better support or services. These acts of truth-telling about suicide can improve understanding and support for people in distress, reduce the fear, shame and loneliness that often surrounds suicide, highlight community needs, and help change how the media tell our stories.

Some people find that sharing stories in a culturally safe space is a healing experience, and it can also encourage others to reach out for help.

However, sharing our stories publicly can compound the traumatic effects of suicide if we have negative experiences with the media. Our guide offers advice on what to think about when deciding whether to engage with the media, and on preparing for interviews if you do decide to go ahead. It is a vital resource in making sure our stories are told by our people, on our terms.

Of course, the media has a

big part to play here too. Australian journalists must ensure they are working in safe and respectful ways when sharing stories about our peoples' experiences of suicide. We ask that journalists engage with respect, spend time in community before developing a story on suicide, and take time to talk with a community spokesperson.

Importantly, the media should not wait until after a passing to report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide.

Stories about people surviving a suicidal crisis, about what is working well in communities, or about available supports or services, may contribute to preventing future suicides, and we urge the media to cover those things too.

For more information on truth-telling about suicide, visit the fact sheet on our website at <https://cbpatsisp.com.au>.

Please be aware this resource provides general advice only; for people who are considering sharing their stories, we recommend seeking further specific advice from Elders or community leaders.

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A First Nations guide for truth-telling about suicide

This guide supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to talk publicly about suicide in a way that is safe for you, your family and others in the community.

Reasons some people share their stories

- Improve understanding and support for those who are distressed
- Reduce fear, shame and loneliness around talking about suicide
- Encourage others to reach out for help when they need it
- Highlight what is needed in a community
- To help reduce suicide rates in First Nations communities
- Reduce racism and stereotyping of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- Help change how media tell these stories.

What truth-telling can look like

- Sharing your own experiences and thoughts about what has happened
- Advocating for better support or services
- Telling the stories of loved ones you have lost to suicide
- Sharing what's working in your community
- Sharing unmet community need.



The guide helps people navigate the difficult subject of suicide.