



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

# KidsMatter

## Early Childhood Social and Emotional Wellbeing Initiative

A project in partnership between  
the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care  
(SNAICC),

the Australian Psychological Society (APS) and  
*beyondblue*: the national depression initiative



Australian Government

Department of Health and Ageing

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initiative



# The Broader Initiative



KidsMatter Early Childhood is a national early childhood mental health promotion, prevention and early intervention initiative developed in collaboration with the Australian Government Department of Health and Ageing, *beyondblue*: the national depression initiative, the Australian Psychological Society, Early Childhood Australia and the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care.

# The four components of KidsMatter Early Childhood

## Component 1

Creating a sense of community

## Component 2

Developing children's social and emotional skills

## Component 3

Working with parents and carers/families

## Component 4

Helping children who are experiencing mental health difficulties



# Objectives

The project's objective is to build the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services.

We will develop appropriate staff training and resources to:

- Promote the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from birth to five, including the early identification of mental health problems and appropriate response;
- Provide a positive and healthy environment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood settings;
- Support families and communities in the area of children's social and emotional wellbeing;
- Support early childhood workers' self-care;
- Build partnerships with other child and family services and the community to collaboratively respond to mental health difficulties in children.





# Our journey so far...

- Project Advisory Group established
- National Stakeholder workshop
- Literature Review
- Scoping and mapping of early childhood social and emotional wellbeing initiatives and programs



# Preliminary Literature Review Findings



# Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander KidsMatter Early Childhood

1. What we know about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child mental health issues
2. What we know about SEWB for staff who work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and families
3. What works best in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health prevention, promotion and early intervention
4. Gather evidence base for resource development and training programs





# Definition of Mental Health

- Mental health as seen by western research and health professionals
  - A state of wellbeing in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully and is able to make a contribution to his or her community (WHO 2001)
- Mental health to Aboriginal and Torres strait islander people likely to incorporate connection to land, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community

# Children's Social and Emotional Wellbeing

- Concern for the person as a child, and as a future adult
- Concern that they are thriving in the face of adversity rather than avoiding negative life events
- Definition incorporates wide range of individual and environmental dimensions
- Includes feelings, behavior, relationships, goals and personal strengths which are culturally dependent





# Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People

- Incorporates Social Determinants of Health
- Connection to culture, spirituality, and family
- Combination of health, social and community factors, the child is a product of these environmental factors

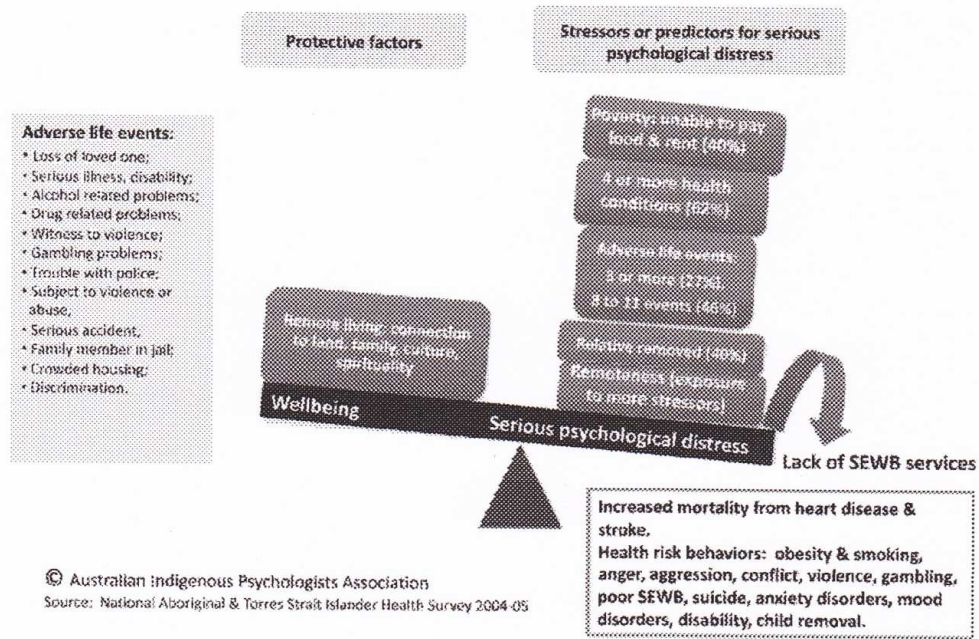


## SEWB impacting factors unique to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

- Negative life events
  - Stolen generations
  - Widespread grief and loss
  - Child removals
  - Cultural dislocation and identity issues
  - Economic/social disadvantage
  - Contact with criminal justice system
  - Violence
  - Substance use/abuse

# Risk and Protective factors

Figure 1: Risk and protective factors for serious psychological distress





# Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey

- The survey is the largest and most comprehensive study of Aboriginal child health and development
  - Aim was to improve community and scientific understanding of health Aboriginal child development
- Survey gathered data on:
  - Physical health
  - Social and emotional wellbeing
  - Educational experiences
  - Families and communities



# Footprints in Time Results

- A study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander babies aged between 6 and 18 months, and children aged 3 ½ to 4 ½ years old
- Asked parents and carers about
  - Health
  - Languages
  - How the family spent their time
  - The role of culture in their children's lives

# Promotion, Prevention and Early Intervention

- Ingredients for success
  - Flexible structure (research/practice)
  - Community involvement/management
  - Avocation and long term goals/outcomes
- Examples of successful early intervention
  - Lets Start Exploring Together
  - Positive Parenting Program (PPP) adapted for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families
  - Families and Schools Together (FAST)
  - Social and Emotional Early Development Strategy (SEEDS)





# Summary

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children's mental health needs to be seen within context
- That family environment is a mix of risk and protective factors and that these combinations vary across circumstance
- The fate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children is not locked in stone, changes in environment, parenting and balance of risk and protective factors moderate SEWB



# Capacity building

- Strengths based approach
- Training needs identified
- Staff self care
- Training and Resource Development



# Collaboration

- Collaborative action research
- Site selection
- Service visits
- Supporting connections with families and communities
- Accountability





‘There is an enormous amount of stress, chaos and trauma in our communities and families but within our communities there is also strengths – wisdom, knowledge and experience.’

*Developing Therapeutic Communities for Abused Aboriginal Children and Their Families: An Indigenous Practitioners’ Cooperative Inquiry*



Please list some of the strengths that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood services have in supporting children's social and emotional wellbeing?



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