

The background features several traditional Aboriginal art motifs. On the left, there are two large, vertically aligned circular designs. The upper one has a central blue circle with white dots, surrounded by red and black concentric rings with white dots. The lower one has a central black circle with white dots, surrounded by red and black concentric rings with white dots. On the right, there are several smaller circular designs, some with red centers and black outlines, and others with black centers and red outlines, all surrounded by white dots. The background is white with faint, light gray concentric circles scattered across it.

Mental Health Impacts of Climate Change and COVID on Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Communities

Professor Pat Dudgeon

Poche Center of Indigenous Health

School of Indigenous Studies

The University of Western Australia

COVID-19

Roadmap to Recovery

A Report for the Nation

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy quality of life through whole-of-community self-determination and individual spiritual, cultural, physical, social and emotional well-being.

Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands



NACCHO

Vision statement

9 The Care of Indigenous Australians

Current Context

The disproportionate impact of pandemics on Indigenous populations worldwide has been well documented. In responding to the global COVID-19 pandemic, Australian Indigenous organisations have shown exemplary leadership and innovation in their efforts towards preparedness. Urgent action is required to ensure Australia's indigenous community is protected from COVID-19, now and especially in the recovery phase as the nation 'reopens'. Plus, the inevitable recession will aggravate an already critical situation for many Indigenous people.

Recommendations and Key Findings

It is recommended that the Government addresses four key issues to design the COVID-19 recovery roadmap for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities.

- **The right to self-determination & coordination**
- **Housing Supply**
- **COVID-19 Public Health and Clinical Responses should be maintained**
- **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Workforce Review**



A National COVID-19 Pandemic Mental Health Response

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples

Authors and Affiliations

Pat Dudgeon (Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention; Poche Centre for Indigenous Health; University of Western Australia)

Kate Derry (University of Western Australia)

Kerry Arabena (Thirili; University of Melbourne)

Tom Brideson (Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia)

Sheree Cairney (Flinders University; Interplay Project)

Tom Calma (Poche Indigenous Health Network; University of Canberra; University of Queensland; University of Sydney)

Tania Dalton (Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association)

Leilani Darwin (Black Dog Institute)

Belinda Duarte (Culture Is Life)

Danielle Dyal (Aboriginal Medical Services Alliance Northern Territory)

Graham Gee (Murdoch Children's Research Institute; University of Melbourne)

Paul Gibson (Indigenous Allied Health Australia)

Paul Gray (Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association, Jumbunna Institute, University of Technology Sydney)

Allan Groth (Indigenous Allied Health Australia)

Tanja Hirvonen (Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association)

Chris Holland (Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia)

Carolyn Mascall (Langford Aboriginal Association; Relationships Australia)

Rob McPhee (Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services)

Helen Milroy (Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia; University of Western Australia)

Donna Murray (Indigenous Allied Health Australia)

Kristen Orazi (Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services)

Angela Ryder (Langford Aboriginal Association; Relationships Australia)

Rachael Schmerl (Thirili)

Gracelyn Smallwood (James Cook University)

Stewart Sutherland (Australian National University)

Angela Threfall (Thirili)

Richard Weston (Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care)

Michael Wright (Curtin University)

Issues

- Prior to COVID-19, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples already faced health and mental health disadvantages and inadequate and inequitable access to mental health care.
- Globally, Indigenous peoples are disproportionately impacted by pandemics. The Australian Government's COVID-19 mental health response must address the existing social inequities that make Indigenous peoples more vulnerable to and heavily impacted by pandemics.
- Suicide rates among Aboriginal and Torres Strait people are double those of other Australians. An increase in suicide rates is now predicted. The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and health response on mental health will be devastating if not managed appropriately.

- In response to COVID-19, the Government has provided extra investment in mental health support. Yet, despite known risks, funding has been largely directed to mainstream services that will not meet the specific needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities alone.
- Culturally safe, trauma-informed, lived-experience solutions that respond to the health and wellbeing needs and diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities have been established, but are chronically under-resourced.
- The national pandemic response for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities must be a priority and led, developed, and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations, communities, and peoples.

Recommendation 1: Self-determination

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations must be supported to lead the COVID-19 pandemic recovery responses for their communities and peoples

Recommendation 2: Health and Mental Health Workforce

Invest in local, place-based workforce solutions which meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Recommendation 3: Social and Cultural Determinants of Health

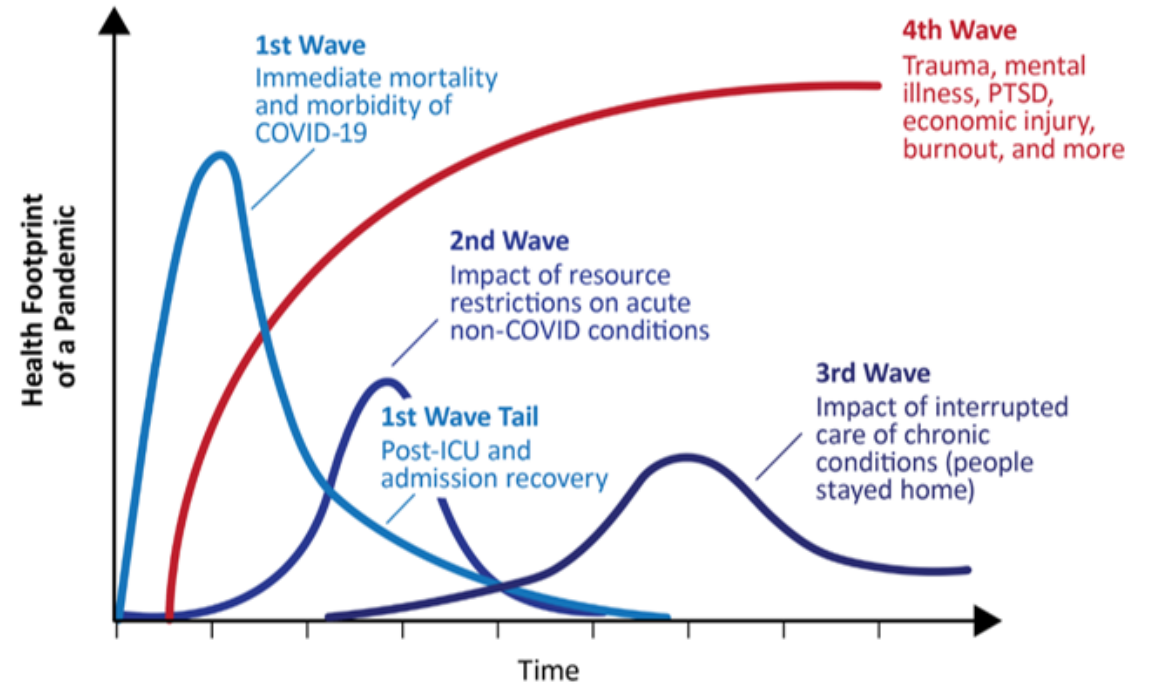
Ensure culturally safe mental health services by implementing the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023³³ and Implementation Plan³⁴

Recommendation 4: Digital and Tele-health

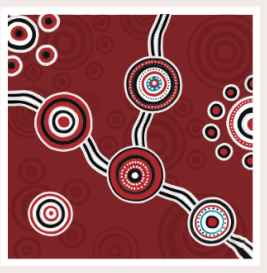
Provision of appropriate and accessible Internet access and tele-health solutions

Recommendation 5: Evaluation

Implement a comprehensive national evaluation program across all communities that enables Indigenous data sovereignty



- 1. Self-determination** – Support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders and organisations to lead the pandemic mental health responses for their peoples and communities. This calls for direct funding to Indigenous organisations to fund Indigenous-led actions which will best meet the needs of Indigenous peoples, families and communities.
- 2. Health and Mental Health Workforce** – Improve the accessibility of culturally safe care that meets the needs of families and communities. It is critical to support and appropriately utilise the existing local workforce, and to create and grow a longer-term, place-based, multidisciplinary Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) workforce.
- 3. Social and Cultural Determinants** - Implement the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023 to enable culturally safe and sustainable approaches to improved mental health. Social determinants of health must be addressed and SEWB programs that are designed, delivered and culturally informed by Indigenous peoples must be supported.
- 4. Digital and Telehealth** - Provide accessible and affordable Internet access and ensure digital and tele-health services to Indigenous communities are culturally safe and trauma-informed. An Indigenous-led helpline to be made available immediately.
- 5. Evaluation** – Implement a comprehensive quantitative and qualitative national research and evaluation program that covers urban, regional, and remote communities, promotes accountability of funding models, and enables Indigenous data sovereignty.



Thank you...

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Resources

Websites/Twitter Accounts

CBPATSIISP

<https://twitter.com/cbpatsisp>

<https://www.cbpatsisp.com.au/>

Australian Indigenous Psychology Education Project

<http://www.indigenouspsyched.org.au/>

Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing

<https://timhwb.org.au/>

Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association

<https://twitter.com/AipaAust>

<http://www.indigenouspsychology.com.au/>



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology Resources

Suicide Fact Sheets

<https://www.cbpatisp.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/03/Fact-Sheet-3.pdf>

Solutions That Work: The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP)

<https://www.atsispep.sis.uwa.edu.au/>

Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practices.
Free to download.

<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/working-together-aboriginal-and-wellbeing-2014.pdf>

The National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing.

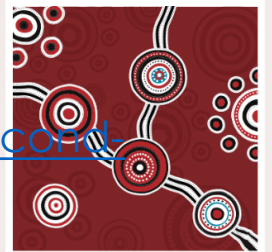
https://www.niaa.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/mhsewb-framework_0.pdf

SEWB Tools

<https://www.cbpatisp.com.au/our-research/screening-assessment-tools/sewb-assessment-tools/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing. Gee et al.

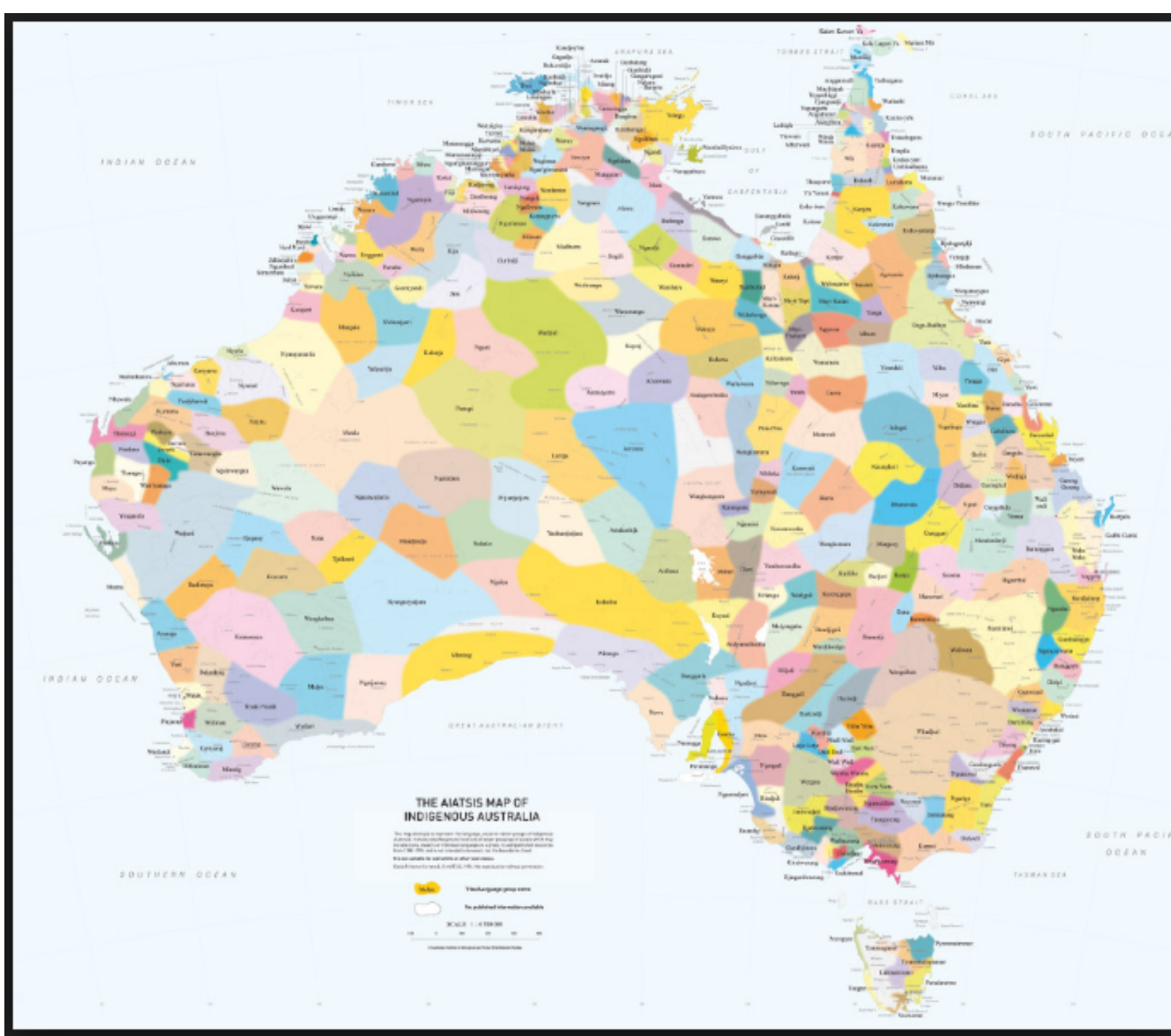
<https://www.telethonkids.org.au/globalassets/media/documents/aboriginal-health/working-together-second-edition/wt-part-1-chapt-4-final.pdf>



Black Summer Fires: Lost, Resilience and Regrowth

Stewart Sutherland:
ANU





I acknowledge the Wirradjuri Nation as the traditional owners of this unseeded land that I am presenting from.

We belong to the 250 Nations that are the traditional owners of Australia.



- Indigenous people globally form their identity around the Land.

In most stories of the Dreaming, the Ancestor Spirits came to the earth in human form and as they moved through the land, they created the animals, plants, rocks and other forms of the land that we know today. They also created the relationships between groups and individuals to the land, the animals and other people.

The relationship between land, animals, people and the seasons

We are part of the Dreaming.
We have been in the Dreaming
for a long time before we are
born on this earth and we will
return to this vast landscape at
the end of our days. It provides
for us during our time on earth,
a place to heal, to restore
purpose and hope, and to
continue our destiny.

(Milroy, HREOC, 1997)



- “Our story is in the land ... it is written in those sacred places ... My children will look after those places. That's the law.”
- Bill Neidjie , Kakadu Elder.



Solastalgia

- Most would understand that nostalgia is homesickness experienced by individuals when separated from a loved home
- To combat environmentally induced distress, Solastalgia was introduced
- Solastalgia is the distress that is produced by environmental change impacting on people while they are directly connected to their home environment.

- Albrecht, G., Sartore, G.-M., Connor, L., Higginbotham, N., Freeman, S., Kelly, B., Stain, H., Tonna, A., & Pollard, G. (2007). Solastalgia: The distress caused by environmental change. *Australasian Psychiatry: Bulletin of Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists*, 15 Suppl 1, S95-98. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10398560701701288>



Catching up

"I think sometimes we need to take a step back and just remember we have no greater right to be here than any other animal."

Sir David Attenborough [#WorldAnimalDay](#)



The fire



Mogo Local Aboriginal Land Council



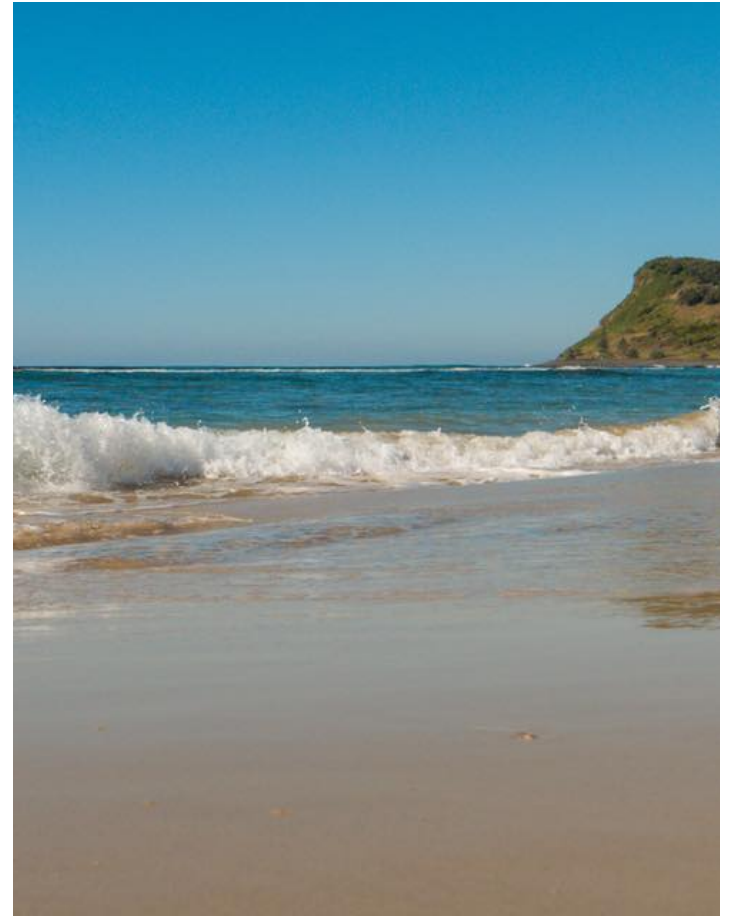
- <https://www.bbc.com/news/in-pictures-50971879>





The project

- The Mogo community were severely impacted by the recent bushfires.
- Almost 500 homes were destroyed in Eurobodalla Shire Council, where **Mogo** is located, 271,000 hectares — or 79 per cent of the Shire — was **burned**.





Results

- Some Sad findings;
- high rates of poor mental health
- Anger and resentment
- suicide
- some evidence of physical health being affected by the fires
- Poor understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander needs in evacuation centres



- Great finding
- Resilience:
- The Aboriginal Community set up a community hall where people could come and get supplies and talk
- Eldership.
- Stewardship
- Family

Thank you

Dr Stewart Sutherland

Chair, Indigenous Health, ANU Medical School
stewart.sutherland@anu.edu.au



Mental Health Impact of Climate Change on Indigenous Communities Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Experiences

Alan Rosen

Brain & Mind Centre, University of Sydney

Illawarra Institute of Mental Health, University of Wollongong, NSW

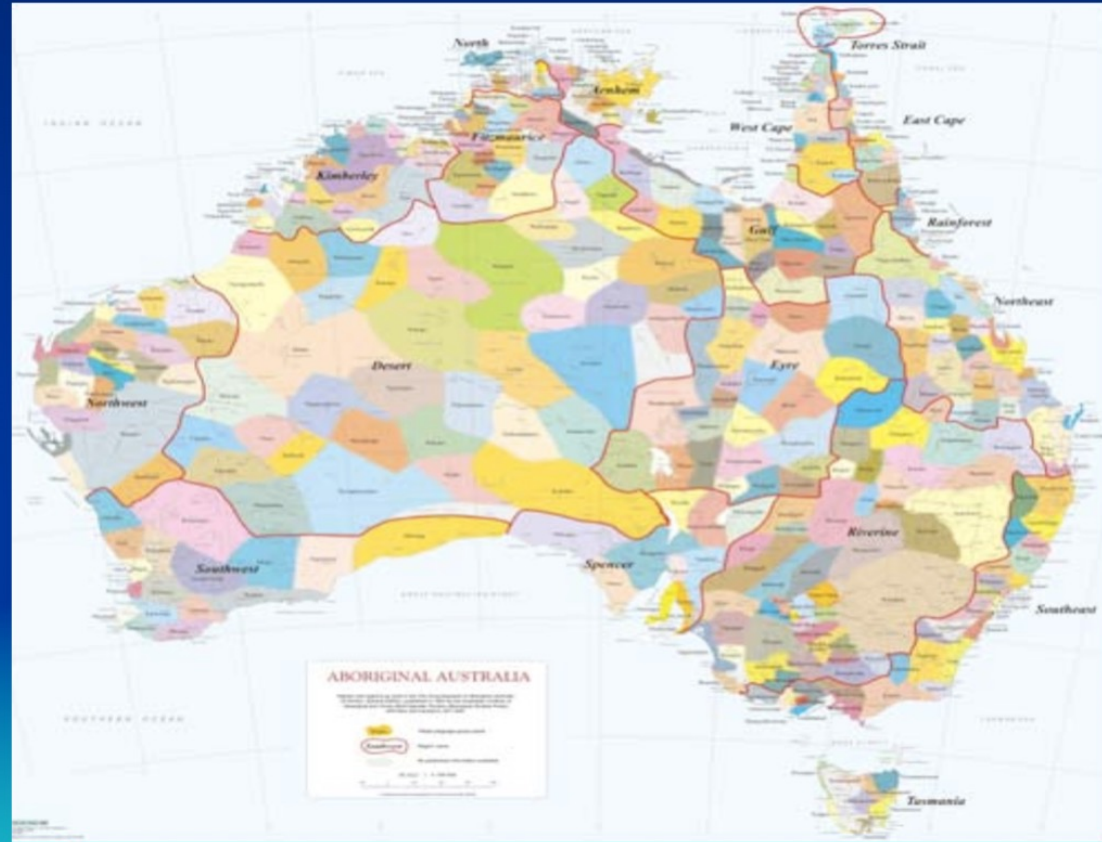
Far West NSW LHD Community Mental Health Service

Themhs Conference February 2021



Acknowledgement of Country

- I acknowledge the Aboriginal peoples and custodians of the lands and waters of the Wangal people of the Eora nation, from where I speak, and the Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander and Maori peoples of all the lands, mountains & waters where we meet today, & their elders, past and present.

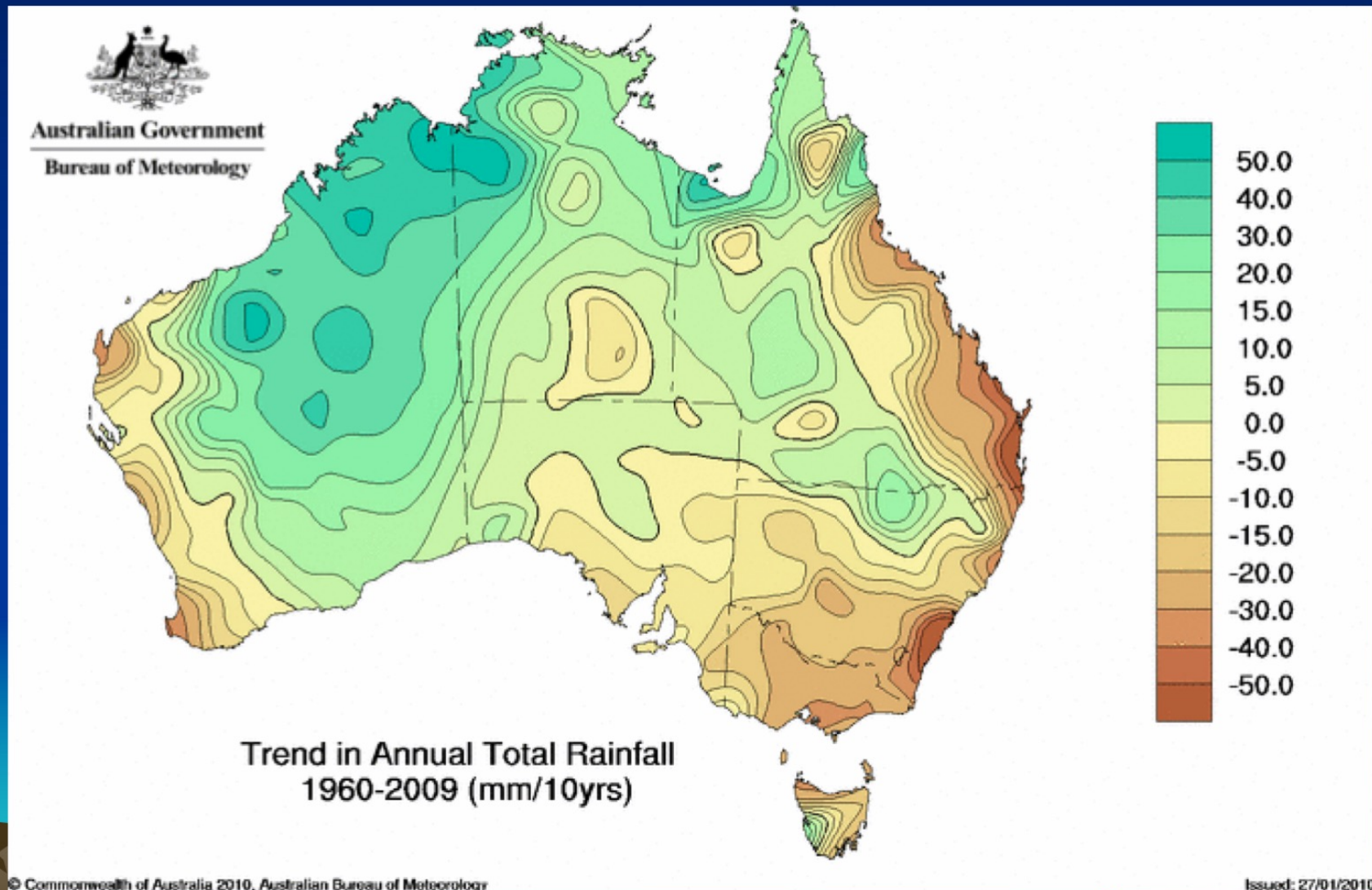


Australian Climate Change Related Disasters

- Prolonged Droughts: Rivers, Lakes & Fish-kills
- Loss of Wildlife Totems & Fresh Food Sourcing
- Extreme Bushfires
- Cyclones, Storms,
Hail, Floods
- COVID19 Pandemic



Australia's Rainfall



Far West NSW Aboriginal Majority Community Road Bridge after the Drought Broke



Upstream Siphoning, Drought & Climate Change

Impacts on the Mental Health of Australian Aboriginal Communities

Rigby CW, Rosen A, Berry HL, Hart CR, 2011.



Effect of Drought & Climate Change on Aboriginal Communities



“If the river dries up,
so will we. And
where will we meet?”

More frequent,
long-lasting
and severe
weather events

“If the river and land is sick,
we’re sick.” (Bonnie
Johnson)



Skewing of Population Profile

- People of working age move to regional centres
- Imbalanced population of more older & more younger people
- Grandparents left behind to care for the young
- Aboriginal population already younger due to decreased life expectancy



Worsening Social Determinants: Loss of Livelihood & Participation

- Decreased employment – loss of full time paid work & seasonal work
- No entitlement to pastoralist compensation (Exceptional Circumstances payments) schemes
- Poverty--Decreased ability to provide food for family-
- no birthday or Xmas gifts
- No fuel: Decreased ability to contribute & participate in community & cultural activities: football + “sorry” business



Loss & Grief & Violence

- **As the loss & degradation of the country deepens, the trans-generational loss of identity, self-esteem, respect & sense of loss, grief & guilt increases.**
 - **Increase in self harm, intentional injury, suicide, drug & alcohol abuse, domestic violence, other unlawful acts**
 - **Loss of totems, fresh food sources**
 - **Social ties between clans damaged** (over territory boundaries)
 - **Traditional Male Roles threatened** (loss of custodian access)
 - **“poison cousins” - mistrusting, malicious gossip, turning against each other**
- 

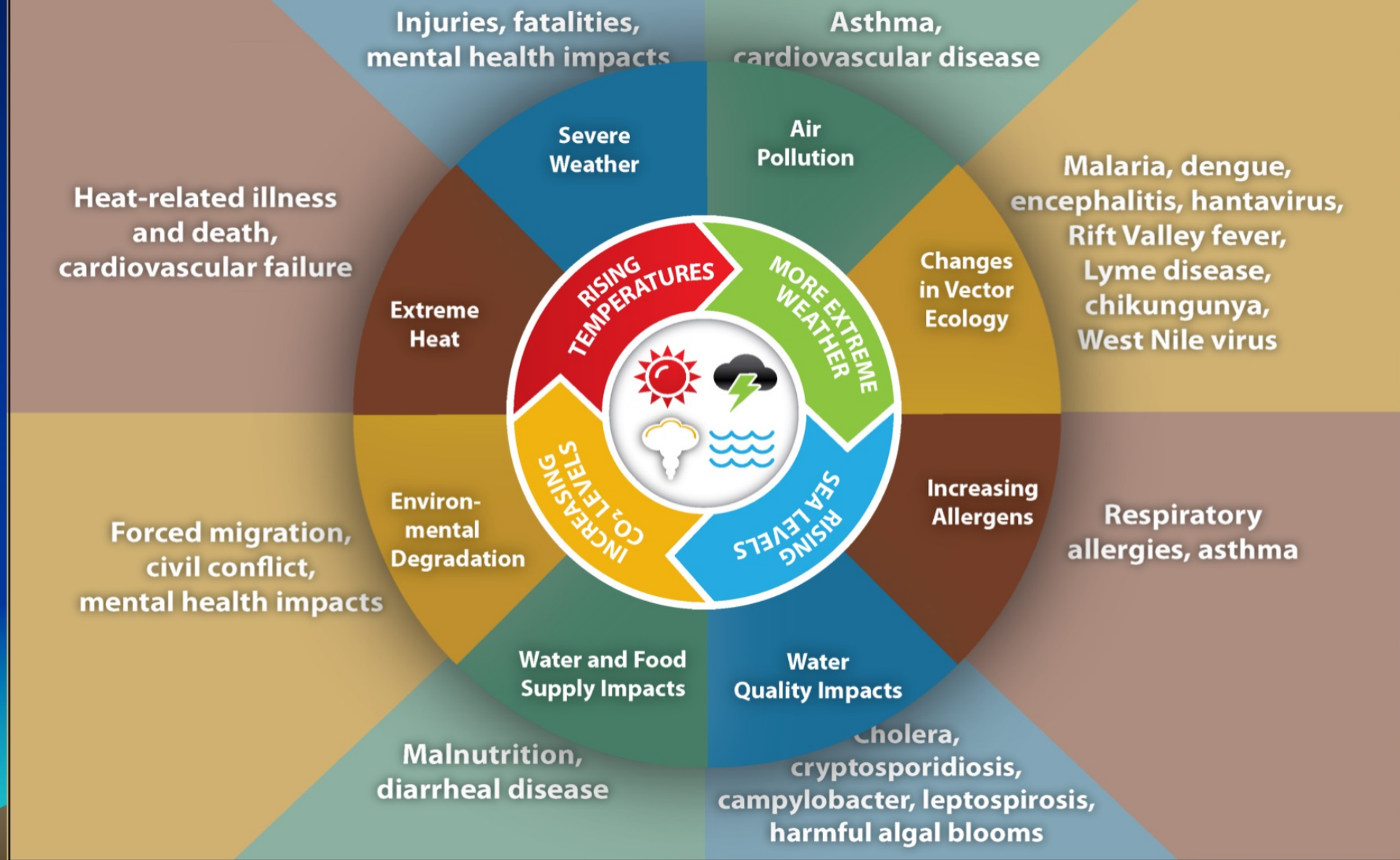
Globally anticipated risks and existential threats of Climate Change to all indigenous communities

- Research indicates that rural and remote indigenous communities will be the first mass climate refugees. “Without action to stop climate change, people will be forced to leave their country and leave behind much of what makes them Aboriginal” due to:
- hotter temperatures, poorly built and unstable homes vulnerable to heat, longer and drier droughts.
- Their communities, in drought & fire-prone townships & settlements, have been running out of water.
- Exacerbating Pre-existing Chronic Diseases: elders particularly vulnerable.
- Poverty severely limits their options, aggravated by government inaction & ideological climate change denialism.

[United Nations Report, 2010, US Government Health Sciences Reports on Climate Effects on Health 2016 + 2021]



Impact of Climate Change on Human Health



A Tribute: Indigenous COVID Survival have been Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander, Maori & Pacific Islander Achievements

- Some indigenous peoples have experienced among the highest COVID-19 infection and death rates in Brazil (Amazon Basin) & the USA (eg. Navajo Nation in New Mexico, Arizona, & Utah), culminating in catastrophic loss and grief.
- Aboriginal: 147 Covid19 cases, 6x lower than rest of Australia, few in hospital, ICU=0, Deaths=0 (NACCHO report 13 Dec 2020).
- NACCHO's coordinated local ACCHO's, who consulted all their Aboriginal communities, who developed & applied local safety and health strategies, restricted non-essential travel, and with government cooperation, excluded outsiders from visiting remote Indigenous communities wherever possible. These will work only if applied with cultural sensitivity, full Indigenous community consultation, communal and government collaboration.
- **“Australia's First Nations people have provided exceptional leadership in their response to COVID19.”** Talley N Stanley F et al, MJA-Lancet 1 Feb 2021

Solastalgia & Eco-Anxiety

- **Solastalgia:** the emotional pain, existential distress, loss, and grieving derived from rapid and severe changes in one's geophysical environment or familiar habitat. Studies now indicate its existence worldwide in communities suffering great environmental change & its contribution to CC's psychosocial impacts (Albrecht G et al, 2007).
- **Eco-anxiety:** a chronic fear of “ecological doom” for self, family, community, future generations, culture and our planet. (Usher K et al, 2019)
- **Disaster related Psychological Trauma:** especially re-kindling developmental or transgenerational trauma.

Solastalgia, Eco-Anxiety, Rekindled Psychol Trauma

- All may have been familiar to indigenous peoples since colonisation, so they may be more prepared & ready than wider societies to contend with them.
- Hopefully, these Climate Change related catastrophes provide our wider societies with a back-handed opportunity to catch up, so they can begin to understand, appreciate and respond to indigenous concerns more constructively.



A Time of Resilience & Opportunity

“We Aboriginal people have
survived great changes
over thousands of years”
“And we are still here”.
“This is not new to us.
We know how to get
through it”



Strengths of Optimal Indigenous Mental Health Practices:

- Coolbaroo-Magpie (WA) symbolizes: this & that.
- **Community Controlled & Self Determination.**
- **Services delivered by local familiar trusted indigenous/culturally safe service-providers.**
- Combining Technical Innovation with Traditional
- Wisdom & Practices: eg D Uniapon, Telehealth Early adopters, Customary land, fire & food-source management.
- Custodial duties- Buying up “Shit land” during Drought.
- Applying Western Evidence-Based practices in synergy & balance with traditional healing practices: Encouraging working **“two-ways”** (M Durie, NZ) **“two worlds”** (L Mehl-Madronna) + Djirruwang AMHW Program, seeking common ground between them.
- **Indigenous Leadership: Gayaa Dhuwi Australia & NACCHO**



Enhancing Local Control of Communal Agencies Decreases Indigenous Suicide & increases SEHWB

- **Indigenous Control of ALL Communal Agencies**
 - **Whole of community control, including education, housing, police, fire, welfare, corrections, etc.**
- (Chandler & Lalonde, 2012 -15)**

- sense of control
 - recognise ourselves by having similar people working for us → trust
 - based in centre of communities
 - collaboration & consulting with community re needs for & provision of service
- 

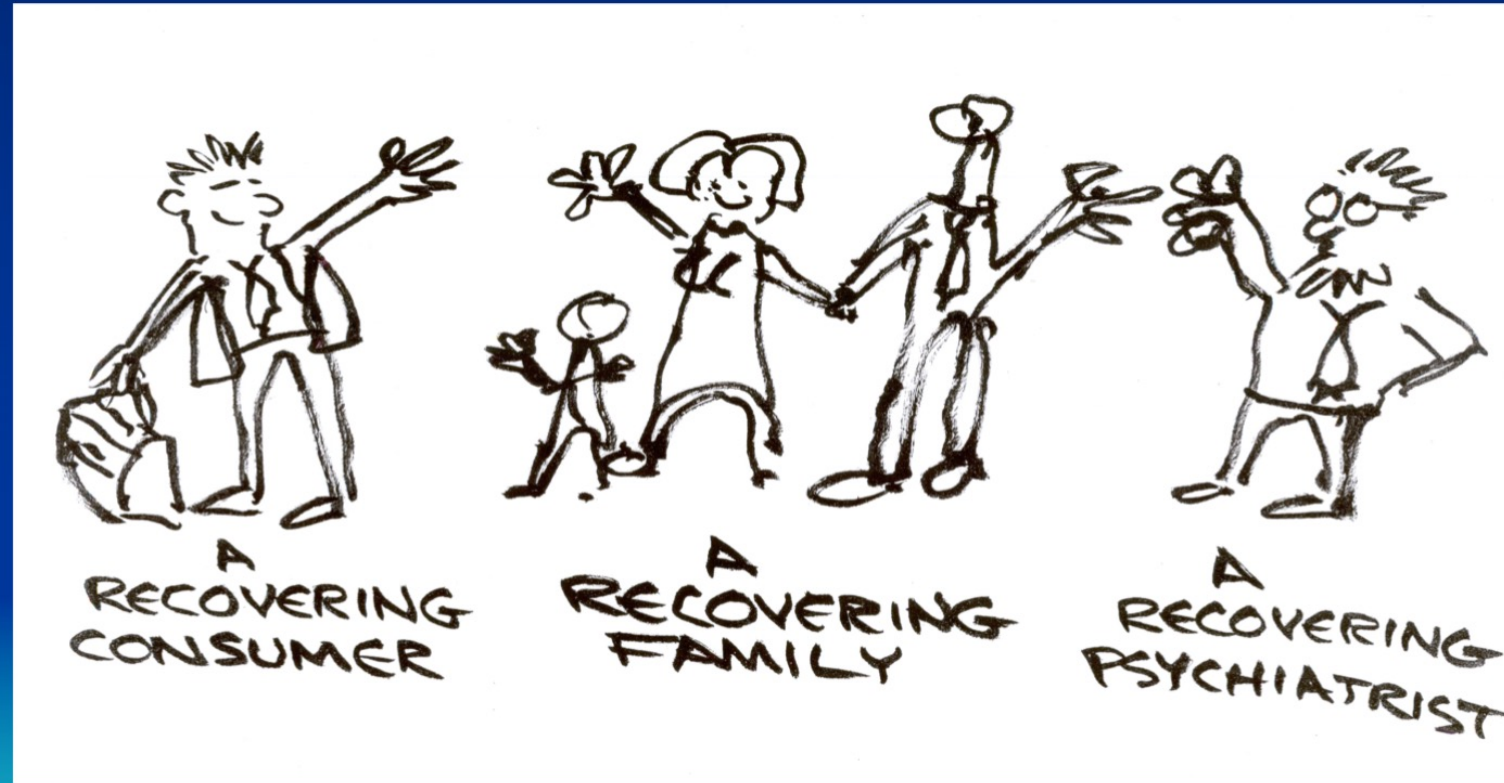
Local Jobs for Aboriginal Communities: contributing to better Wellbeing, Land, Fire & Water Management for all

- Community Controlled Health, Healing & Social Services: “Two-Ways”
- Indigenous employment in all other essential services.
- Alongside adequate resourcing of our most evidence-based methods of fire, water, and climate control, our governments could consult heed & employ Indigenous communities to apply fire, land, water, contagion & climate management methods, demonstrated to be sustainable and effective, possibly over 65,000 years – the longest established record of continuous Indigenous culture worldwide.



Alexander Solzhenitsyn observed: "On our crowded planet there are no longer any 'internal affairs.' "

Climate change is the ultimate form of globalization: What we each do about it affects all others' lives.



**We can be more effective if
we share more common ground**

References:

- Albrecht, G., Sartore, G-M., Connor, L., Higginbotham, N., Freeman, S., Kelly, B., Stain, H., Tonna, A., & Pollard, G. (2007). "Solastalgia: the distress caused by environmental change". *Australasian Psychiatry*. 15 (1): S95–S98. doi:10.1080/10398560701701288 (<https://doi.org/10.1080%2F10398560701701288>).
- Dudgeon P, Milroy H et al, Working Together: Aboriginal & TSI Mental Health & Wellbeing Principles & Practice, 2nd ed. 2014.. Free at <https://telethonkids.org.au/>
- Dudgeon P, Brideson T, 2015, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration -Mental Health Services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. National Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health <https://natsilmh.org.au/>
- Dudgeon, P., Derry, K. L. ... Wright, M. 2020, A National COVID-19 Pandemic Issues Paper on Mental Health and Wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing Grant, The University of Western Australia Poche Centre for Indigenous Health.
- Rigby CW, Rosen A, Berry HL, Hart CR, If the land is sick, we're sick: The impact of prolonged drought on the social & emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Communities in NSW, *Australian Journal of Rural Health* **19**, 249–254, 2011.
- Rosen A, Destigmatizing day-to-day practices: what developed countries can learn from developing countries, *World Psychiatry* 5:1, 21-24, Feb 2006
- Rosen A, Cautionary Tales from Australia (2): For Indigenous communities, climate crisis could prove calamitous, *Clinical Psychiatric News*, Washington DC, May 2020.
- Talley NJ, Stanley FJ, Lucas T, Horton RC, Health & climate change: Australia gets another failing grade in 2020 but shows signs of progress: *MJA_Lancet Countdown Report*, *MJA* 214 (2) 75-77, 1 Feb 2021.

Working Two-Ways = "Synergies between traditional cultural healing factors and evidence based clinical interventions can optimise healing & outcomes for severe & complex mental health disorders".

This includes:

- i) operationalising evidence based clinical interventions which can be usefully conceived as proxies for employing cultural or traditional healing factors**
- ii) applying traditional healing strategies, which are ordinary and destigmatizing, and could be readily understood and practically implemented by wider communities to improve communal wellbeing as well as contributing to better outcomes for people living with severe mental illnesses."**
- iii) a wellness, wellbeing and wholistic approach to dealing with mental illness**

