



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



THE UNIVERSITY OF  
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## **New guidelines to improve assessments for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presenting to hospital with self-harm and suicidal thoughts**

The Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies), commissioned by the Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) have developed evidenced-based the *Guidelines for best practice psychosocial assessment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presenting to hospital with self-harm and suicidal thoughts* (the *Guidelines*) to improve the quality of care and outcomes for people presenting with suicidal thoughts and behaviours.

A history of self-harm is one of the strongest known risk factors for suicide and represents an important opportunity to engage with people in a preventive intervention.

As Professor Pat Dudgeon, Director of CBPATSISP notes:

“There is now growing evidence that the legacy of colonisation has contributed to the disproportionate rates of suicide and suicidal behaviours and other disadvantages experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The effects of colonisation are evident in the structural barriers and lack of access to culturally responsive hospitals and family support services that underscore the urgent need for these guidelines as part of a broader suicide prevention strategy.”

The *Guidelines* contain 227 evidence-based recommendations that have been endorsed by an expert panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous professionals and those with lived experience using the Delphi method for establishing an expert consensus on best practice. Aboriginal clinical psychologist, Tanja Hirvonen reports,

“Assessing risk of suicide is a complex task in any setting, but particularly in the hospital setting, as it can be a very discomfoting time for people. There is a pressing need to respond adequately and carefully during this time.”

The *Guidelines* provide the principled basis for culturally appropriate health care. To better achieve cultural responsiveness in practice and improve the quality of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people presenting to hospital with self-harm and suicidal thoughts, the *guidelines* contains recommendations for appropriately and effectively interacting with and engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in ways that are empowering and de-stigmatising.

Tanja Hirvonen states,

“It was highlighted that the type of assessment tool that is used is significant, but just as critical is to ensure that the right information is gathered, and people are appropriately supported during a very critical time in their lives, within a culturally safe model of practice and care.”



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Recommendations in the guidelines for evaluating risks, strengths and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have a strong grounding in the concept of social and emotional wellbeing to ensure that assessments inform the most appropriate and effective options for care in the hospital and recovery in the community.

A number of recommendations have also been included to help clinicians respond in developmentally and culturally appropriate ways to self-harm and suicidal thoughts amongst young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Professor Pat Dudgeon concluded:

“These new Guidelines have potential to make a genuine difference for Aboriginal people at risk of suicide or self-harm who present at emergency departments. CBPATSISP is committed to disseminating these guidelines widely and we will advocate to ensure that relevant agencies, such as the Australian Indigenous Psychology Association, are supported to develop cultural competence training and engage hospitals in embedding these guidelines into practice at a national level.”

The guidelines can be found online from [CBPATSISP](#) and [Menzies](#) websites.

END

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##### **About CBPATSISP:**

The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) aims to reduce the causes, prevalence and impact of suicide on Indigenous individuals, families and communities. A focus on at risk groups, by identifying, translating and promoting the adoption of best practice in Indigenous specific suicide prevention activity, including that which is found in emerging national and international research.



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#### About Menzies:

Menzies School of Health Research is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving Indigenous, global and tropical health. Menzies has a history of over 30 years of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, joining with partners across the Asia-Pacific as well as Indigenous communities across northern and central Australia. Menzies collaborates to create new knowledge, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter

For information on the appropriate reporting of mental illness and suicide [www.mindframe.org.au](http://www.mindframe.org.au)

If you or someone you know needs **help or support**, you can contact your local Aboriginal Community-Controlled Organisation or call Lifeline 13 11 14, Beyondblue 1300 22 46 36, Kids Helpline 1800 551 800, Mensline 1300 78 99 78, Q Life 1800 18 45 27, Open Arms Veterans & Families Counselling 1800 01 10 46 or The National Indigenous Critical Response Service 1800 80 58 01.