

The Life Promotion Project: An Indigenous¹ Community Response to Suicides in Mackay

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FAST FACTS

- The phenomenon of suicide clusters features as an important difference between Indigenous and non-Indigenous suicide.
- The highest Indigenous suicide rates are amongst Indigenous young people.
- Indigenous research paradigms are paramount in facilitating change in Indigenous communities.
- Strategies to prevent Indigenous suicide need to be tailored to the specific needs of the community.
- Survivors of suicide need services that will ensure the cycle of grief is broken and prevent further suicides.
- Services need to work together to create a system that allows for the treatment of all facets of Indigenous wellbeing.
- Greater emphasis on promoting cultural history and tradition is needed to enhance Indigenous identity and resilience.

This research was conducted to better understand how suicide is perceived within Mackay's Indigenous community and how this affects prevention, intervention and postvention strategies.

1. The local experience of Indigenous suicide.

A cluster of attempted and completed suicides had been reported in Mackay when this research was conducted. The completed suicides of Indigenous young people was consistent with Indigenous suicide statistics that indicate rates are highest among Indigenous people aged 15-24 years.

2. Why Mackay's Indigenous community's experience with suicide is important.

Identifying the social and cultural risk factors alongside protective factors from the perspective of local community members works toward:

- emancipating Indigenous communities (by engaging an Indigenist research paradigm)
- enabling Indigenous people to contribute to health policy and practices that impact on their lives
- facilitating community-directed solution-focused strategies, and
- creating important partnerships.

¹ Spelling 'Indigenous' with a capital 'I' is motivated by the need to respect the cultural reference inherent in the capitalised form, rather than subscribe to an act of precedence in accordance with 'common' usage.

3. What this research tells us about the Mackay Indigenous community's experiences with suicide.

Mackay's Indigenous community needed to engage strategies to prevent suicide that were tailored to meet the specific needs of the community. These strategies needed to be community based, broad and flexible in scope. Youth, especially young men, were perceived to be especially vulnerable. Survivors of suicide² needed specific services to ensure they received the appropriate care to break the cycle of grief and prevent further suicides. Mental health and holistic health care providers needed to strengthen their relationships in order to create a system that allowed for all facets of Indigenous wellbeing to be treated in a more appropriate and relevant way. Furthermore, greater emphasis and support of promoting cultural history and tradition would enhance Indigenous identity and resilience amongst the wider community.

² Those who have lost a loved one.



IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY & PRACTICE

- Listen & Ask Questions – develop your understanding of the experiences of community members by engaging with them in community.
- Grassroots Champions – work with these community leaders as they initiate and structure community-led responses that meet community-identified needs.
- Opportunities for Communities – consider how you can facilitate opportunities for the community to initiate, develop and deliver initiatives that the community want.

4. Strategies for working with Indigenous communities to tackle suicide.

Listen & Ask Questions

Develop a deeper understanding of the lives of Indigenous Australians by allowing yourself to engage with the community a little more. Often by the time community information gets to the upper echelons it has been filtered and the impact of the experience at a grassroots level has been lost. It is a privilege to have the opportunity to listen to lived experiences and it affords you confidence in making more informed decisions.

- What do these events mean to the community?
- What does the community want me to know?
- How can I facilitate a response that is directed by the community?

Unless you actively listen to what the community wants and needs you are wasting time.

Grassroots Champions

Identify and recruit Grassroots Champions - those community leaders who:

- lead by example
- focus on opportunities for action
- are relatable and inspire others
- willingly empower the next person
- drive community initiatives.

Grassroots Champions are able to initiate and structure community-led responses because they are driven by what the community need.

Opportunities for Communities

Providing communities with opportunities to initiate, develop and deliver interventions that are going to suicide-proof their young people will require flexibility. Consider:

- how ready the community is to engage with your organisation



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- that community solution-focussed initiatives need to be holistic in their approach to improved health and wellbeing
- how to facilitate opportunities for the community to lead responses to suicides
- how you can enhance Indigenous identity and resilience through supporting and emphasizing cultural history and tradition.

* This summary paper was written by Leda Barnett, and is based on research into Mackay's Indigenous Community's response to suicide.

READ FURTHER:

The Life Promotion Project

www.grapevinegroup.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Rotary_funded_Life_Promotion_Report_for_Community.pdf

Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practices

Edition 1 (2010)

https://research.acer.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/key-resources/promotion-resources?lid=17709&httpsredir=1&article=1024&context=indigenous_education

Edition 2 (2014)

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