



WORKING IN PARTNERSHIP WITH ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUNG PEOPLE, THEIR FAMILIES AND COMMUNITIES

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE YOUTH MENTAL HEALTH SECTOR

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people's rate of engagement with youth mental health services is very low. This is of grave concern given the high rates of mental health distress. Whilst services have good intentions, they are unsure how to improve the accessibility and responsiveness of their organisations.

Building Bridges: Co-designing Engagement with Aboriginal Youth was an Aboriginal-led three-year project funded by Healthway. The project brought together Nyoongar Elders, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people, policy and advocacy organisations, and youth mental health services in Perth, WA. Engagement, based on meaningful relationships, was critical as it established trust to co-design new ways of working with Aboriginal youth. The following recommendations developed as part of the project are informed by Nyoongar culture for the project was on Nyoongar *boodja* (country). In implementing the recommendations local cultural protocols and practices need to be observed when engaging Aboriginal communities in any co-design. The culturally secure engagement framework provides instructions and guidance on the recommendations and is described overleaf.



Recommendations:

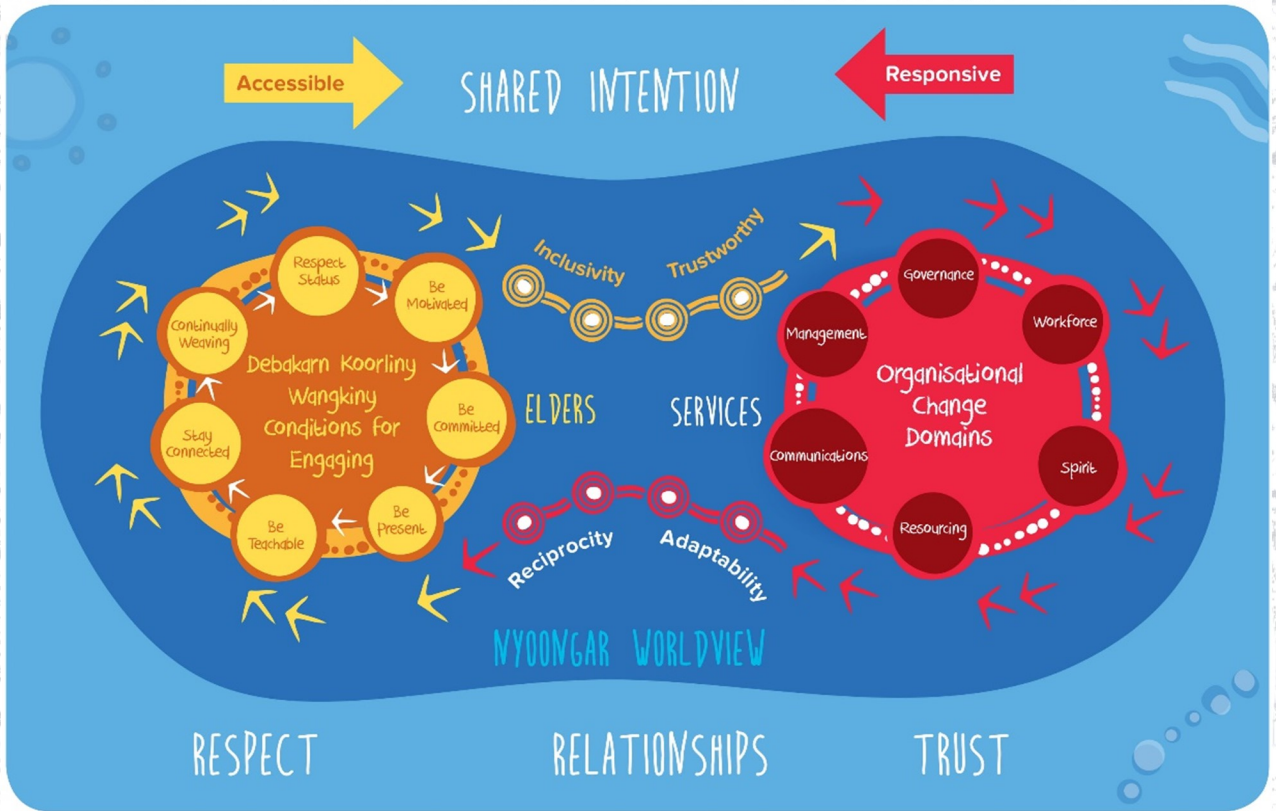
- Youth mental health services develop **sustainable, trusting and meaningful relationships** with the Nyoongar community by working with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to **negotiate priorities**.
- The **Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart (Sick Head-Good Head) Engagement Framework** be used to inform the engagement and co-design process.
- The Mental Health Commission and peak bodies work with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to **identify and implement strategies to reduce racism** within the youth mental health sector and, specifically, in youth mental health services.
- The youth mental health sector review their **cultural training**, both content and process, in consultation with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to **improve the confidence, capability and competence of all staff** to work in genuine partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Youth mental health services **review workforce recruitment strategies**, including the recruitment of senior leaders, in partnership with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people.
- Youth mental health services and peak bodies **improve cross-sector collaboration and coordination** to ensure sector-wide change and the provision of accessible and responsive mental health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people. This includes the development of co-designed cultural security measures for benchmarking and quality assurance purposes.
- Youth mental health services **prioritise community engagement**, trust building and sustained relationships with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to identify and implement strategies to enable services ensure their relevance by increasing their **visibility in the community**; thereby, ensuring greater access to and use of services.
- Youth mental health services engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander **young people at the centre of co-design processes** to ensure culturally and age appropriate services. This requires a staff member accepted by the community and Aboriginal participants to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people to engage in co-design, build their confidence and capacity, and educate staff in how to work with young people as equal partners in co-design.
- Youth mental health services **commit adequate resources** to enable meaningful partnership with the Nyoongar community. Engaging in **sustaining practices** includes: senior management and key service staff meeting with Nyoongar Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people on a regular basis, remunerating community members appropriately for their time and expertise, and resourcing community engagement.

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IMPLEMENTING THE RECOMMENDATIONS: CREATING THE CONDITIONS FOR CO-DESIGN

The **Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart (Sick Head-Good Head) Engagement Framework** (below) sets out a **culturally secure process to build trusting relationships to effect organisational change**. It is held by Aboriginal ways of working and the cultural leadership of Nyoongar Elders who are recognised as the traditional custodians of culture and leaders of their communities. A key component of the Framework is *burdiya to burdiya* (boss to boss): a partnership between senior organisational leaders and Nyoongar Elders who work together to co-design culturally secure work practices. As emerging leaders and experts in their lived experience, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are also engaged as co-design partners.



Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework developed in the formative Looking Forward Project (2015): Wright, M, O'Connell, M, Jones, T, Walley, R and Roarty, L (2015). Looking Forward Aboriginal Mental Health Project: Final Report. December 2015. Telethon Kids Institute, Subiaco, Western Australia.

Respect, relationships and trust are essential and must be sustained. This requires non-Aboriginal staff to slow down and understand how colonisation has resulted in a reluctance to use mainstream services. Through the engagement process (left-hand side of the Framework), non-Aboriginal staff recognise the limitations of current services and open themselves to new ways of working informed by an Aboriginal worldview. Two processes support **relationship-building in preparation for co-design** and introduce non-Aboriginal people to **cultural ways of relating and sharing knowledge**:

Storying:

facilitates Elders, young people and service leaders to share their life stories. Through deep experiential learning and reflection non-Aboriginal staff build connection and recognise profoundly different worldviews and lived experiences.

Going on Country

with Elders and young people: enables non-Aboriginal staff to deepen their understanding of culture, kinship and spirit.

