



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



THIRRILI

MEDIA RELEASE

New data show urgent action on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide is needed

Release Date: 30 September 2025

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (Gayaa Dhuwi) and Thirrili are calling for immediate investment in and implementation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, culturally informed reforms to address the alarming suicide rates revealed in [latest data on suicide and self-harm monitoring](#) data released by the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW).

In 2023, suicide accounted for 5.2% of all deaths among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, a stark contrast to 1.7% for non-Indigenous Australians. The age standardised suicide rate for our people was 30.8 per 100,000.

The release also reveals that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men are dying by suicide at 2.9 times the rate of non-Indigenous men, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women at 2.6 times that of non-Indigenous women.

This crisis is most acute among young people. Suicide was the cause of one in five deaths for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people aged 0-24 (20.7%), with young women and girls aged 15-19 experiencing hospitalisation rates for intentional self-harm more than 10 times the national average (885 per 100,000).

Because Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations are younger on average, leaders warn the impact on families and communities is devastating.

“This is a generational crisis that is robbing us of our future leaders, parents, and knowledge holders,” says Ms Rachel Fishlock, CEO of Gayaa Dhuwi.

“Our young people carry the future of our communities, and because our population is younger, every life lost has a ripple effect felt across entire communities.”

“Suicide is not inevitable. Strong cultural identity, connection to community, and self-determination save lives. Governments continue to underfund Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions that we know work. Our communities must thrive, not just survive.

Professor Helen Milroy AM, Chair of Gayaa Dhuwi, said current systems continue to fail Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

“We need to stop treating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide as just a health issue. It is a social and cultural issue, and the solutions must be led by our communities. Culture is not symbolic, it is protective. When our young people are connected to culture, to Elders, and to their communities, they thrive.”



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The [Gayaa Dhuwi \(Proud Spirit\) Framework and Implementation Plan \(2025-2035\)](#), provides a clear blueprint for reforming the mental health system to ensure it is culturally safe and effective.

Ms Tanja Hirvonen, Interim CEO of Thirrili, said immediate action is needed. “Every suicide reverberates through entire families, communities, and generations. The numbers released tell a story of devastating losses that we cannot afford to accept as normal.”

“Reform means resourcing our strengths, not rewording old commitments. We call for comprehensive investment from all governments, with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance at the forefront.”

The AIHW data follow the recent [interim report](#) from the Productivity Commission on the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement, which found the agreement is ‘not fit for purpose’, validating community concerns about systemic failures and a persistent gap between committing to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led solutions and delivering on them.

Gayaa Dhuwi and Thirrili are resolute that change without leadership from our communities is not change, it’s more of the same. We urge all Australian governments to work in genuine partnership with us to implement these critical, life-saving reforms.

Gayaa Dhuwi reminds the public and media outlets of the importance of responsible and culturally respectful reporting when it comes to issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This includes adhering to the [Good Yarn Guidelines](#) and ensuring that crisis support services are promoted effectively.

24/7 crisis helpline services available to the community include:

- **13 YARN (139276)** – a dedicated support line for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- **Brother to Brother crisis line (1800 435 799)** – providing support for men
- **Kids Helpline (1800 55 1800)** – for young people in need of support

For further information, and resources, or to access support services, please visit www.gayaadhuwi.org.au.

About Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia is the national peak body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention. As a community-controlled organisation, it is governed and controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts and peak bodies, working to promote collective excellence in mental healthcare.



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About Thirrili

Thirrili is a proud Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing. Its vision is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities are thriving and flourishing for future generations to be free from the traumatic impacts of suicide.

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