September 2025

Knowledge Sharing Sheet

Postvention is Prevention

THIRRILI

Thirrili is a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Controlled Organisation. As the national provider of postvention support and assistance for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities, we share this knowledge to support future generations.

In this knowledge-sharing sheet, Thirrili provides postvention information from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. This resource builds on and replaces Thirrili's earlier postvention resource dated March 2025. This updated knowledge-sharing sheet incorporates community voices to enhance services that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities regarding suicide.

What Is Postvention?

As defined by Postvention Australia (2017), postvention involves activities related to helping and supporting people bereaved after suicide.

Postvention is support that sits alongside suicide prevention, intervention, and aftercare. Postvention involves support provided to individuals, families, and communities who are bereaved by suicide.

Whilst some families and communities impacted by suicide may require clinical and psychological support, it is well established that non-clinical postvention support also plays a crucial role in both individual and collective healing.

Community-based support, grounded in relationships, is often where healing can begin. This type of support can have a profoundly positive influence on long-term outcomes for those affected.

This culturally safe, community-based and relational support is what Thirrili provides.

Postvention support is a vital aspect of suicide prevention.

Postvention support provides compassionate care to individuals, families, and communities after losing a loved one to suicide. The grief after such a loss often raises many unanswered questions. This can include feelings of anger, guilt, and confusion.

All losses are painful, and when the cause of death is suicide, the grief runs even deeper (Silburn et al., 2014). The wish that we could have done more, what we might have missed, and why we didn't know at the time-these feelings blend with the profound sadness of often not understanding why or having an explanation, yet still feeling lost.

Postvention support not only helps reduce the risk of further suicides but also promotes improved social and emotional wellbeing. It is essential to receive postvention care in a timely manner, that is dependent on the family or community needs. However, it's equally important that the care is culturally safe, compassionate, and supportive, and that it respects the grieving and healing process.

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The way in which postvention care is provided is just as important as the support itself.

When services work closely with individuals, families, and communities, services need to meet families where they are, rather than expecting them to adapt to their systems. A deep understanding of the needs of families and communities can assist in tailoring postvention care accordingly.

Ensuring that services have a workforce that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being and doing, are grounded in community, are value aligned, and have lived experience (Dudgeon, et al., 2018) can be key to ensuring postvention services are safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.

Postvention care must be approached in a genuine trauma-informed way (Tujague & Ryan, 2021). For instance, the systems within the services, including referral points to access support, should not add to the pain that a family or community is already experiencing.

There needs to be respect and acknowledgement for cultural protocols such as sorry business, community grief and family-centric decision making. For instance, services imposing their care on their timeline and not considering the family's needs is not respectful and can often be harmful.

Postvention service provision is dependent on needs.

Postvention support will include any of the following:

- Practical support: Being present with the family during funeral arrangements and helping to connect them with other essential services.
- Home visits: In-person compassion and support after the loss of a loved one.
- Care planning: Developing a tailored care plan that links families with community resources and services.
- Wellbeing programs: Promoting social and emotional wellbeing and supporting these connections.
- Liaison services: Supporting families to link with coroners, courts, and police departments.
- Advocacy: Assisting families in accessing necessary support for superannuation, insurance, or Centrelink matters.
- Household Support: Assisting with household tasks.
- Counselling information: Providing guidance on available counselling and mental health services.
- Yarning: Sitting with families as they share their stories, offering compassion during a time of need.

We need to remain flexible, responsive, and committed to meeting the distinct needs of the families and communities they serve.

References

Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention & Postvention Australia (2017) *Postvention Australia Guidelines: A resource for organisations and individuals providing services to people bereaved by suicide.* Brisbane: Australian Institute for Suicide Research and Prevention.

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Working with families and communities after a significant loss.
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