



Gayaa Dhuwi
(Proud Spirit)
Australia



THIRRILI

MEDIA RELEASE

Strong Men, Strong Mob: Changing the Story on Suicide **Casey Bird and Associate Professor Clinton Schultz** **16 October 2026**

Thirrili and Gayaa Dhuwi are calling for governments to turn national suicide prevention commitments into sustained investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led responses that strengthen men's and boys' social and emotional wellbeing.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and boys hold important roles in our families and communities. They are fathers, sons, brothers, uncles, grandfathers, partners, friends, Elders, cultural knowledge holders, leaders and mentors. Their knowledge, strength and connection must continue to support families and communities for generations to come.

Yet we continue to lose far too many of our men and boys to suicide.

In 2024, 306 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people died by suicide. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experienced suicide at almost three times the rate of non-Indigenous Australians. Around four in five of those who we lost were men. This loss is also affecting children. Seventy Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 5-17 died by suicide between 2020 and 2024.

Thirrili sees this directly through its work alongside families and communities following suicide and traumatic loss. Many of the families we walk alongside have experienced multiple losses, with impacts extending well beyond the individual.

"The systems around our men and boys are not delivering the level of change communities have been seeking and asking for, and we already have much of the policy architecture needed to guide this work," said Casey Bird (Wulgurukaba/Juru), Thirrili Chief Operating Officer.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy 2025–2035 centres Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, self-determination, culture, lived experience, community-controlled responses and place-based approaches. It contributes to the National Agreement on Closing the Gap, where Outcome 14 calls for high levels of social and emotional wellbeing and a significant and sustained reduction in suicide towards zero.

"Yet the latest Closing the Gap reporting shows Target 14 is worsening. Behind every number is a person. Behind every number is a family and community living with the

impact of that loss,” said Karl Briscoe (Kuku Yalanji), Thirrili Board Director and Co-Chair of the National CTG Campaign.

The Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Framework and Implementation Plan 2025–2035 provides a pathway to embed cultural strength, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership, and accountability across mental health and suicide prevention systems. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Systems Approach to Suicide Prevention provides a practical framework for translating these national commitments into coordinated, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led and place-based action.

Associate Professor Clinton Schultz (Gamilaraay), psychologist and Board Director of Gayaa Dhuwi, said “The challenge is no longer knowing the policy direction. It is turning these commitments into action that is genuinely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led, adequately resourced, locally responsive and accountable for outcomes.”

“Reducing suicide cannot sit solely with the men and boys experiencing distress, nor with families and communities expected to respond after something has gone wrong. It requires governments, health and mental health systems, Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations, suicide prevention services and communities to work together,” shares Clinton.

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, social and emotional wellbeing has long been understood holistically. Culture, Country, family, kinship, community, spirituality, identity and connection are interconnected with health and wellbeing. This matters.

Responses must recognise the strengths men and boys hold, their roles and the cultural and community connections that support wellbeing. Men and boys also need spaces to talk about what is happening in their lives without judgement and to seek support in ways that make sense to them.

Thirrili Deputy Chair Greg Pratt (Noonucal) said “When our men and boys are strong and connected, that strength flows through families, communities and future generations. We know what to do. What matters now is implementation, investment and accountability.”

Our men and boys matter. Their voices matter. And their lives matter.

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