



Wesley LifeForce Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Training

Introduction

Wesley LifeForce has been delivering community suicide prevention programs to communities in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote Australia since 1995. In that time more than 30,000 community members have completed the training.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander program was developed by Indigenous consultancy The Seedling Group in consultation with focus groups of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Halls Creek in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Katherine in the Northern Territory and Thursday Island in the Torres Strait. Initially each group was taken through the standard Wesley LifeForce suicide prevention training program. Their feedback was sought on what changes would be needed to ensure the program was culturally respectful and relevant for their communities. Once these changes had been made The Seedling Group went back to each community to ensure that they had understood and met the communities' requirements.

The program has been designed to be adaptable to individual communities rather than 'one size fits all'. The basis of the program is respectful knowledge sharing rather than facilitator-led presentations. Discussion are held as yarning circles with community members. The focus is on collective healing and knowledge exchange which is both culturally appropriate and responsive to the individual or collective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants attending the workshop. The aim of the program is to enhance community capacity and engagement, to help increase community strength and resilience.

One of the common elements identified in a list of success factors for what works in Indigenous community-led suicide prevention in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) report is 'Operating in partnership/in a cultural framework'. The report cites the Wesley LifeForce program as an example of this:

'The Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Training for Indigenous Community Workers (National) is an adaptation of an existing mainstream suicide prevention program led by experienced Aboriginal community consultants using culturally responsive and reciprocal learning processes.'

Page 24, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project Report – (ATSISPEP) (2016)



Action area 1 in The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy is 'Building strengths and capacity in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities'. Outcome 1.3 within this action area relates directly to the Wesley LifeForce Suicide Prevention Program:

'There is access to community-based programs to improve suicide awareness among 'gatekeepers' and 'natural helpers' in communities affected by self-harm and suicide. Gatekeepers are service providers and officials who influence access of clients and community members to care; natural helpers are members of families or communities who are in a position to recognise difficulties in individuals and to assist them to seek help.'

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Train the Trainer program

This program is aimed specifically at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community mental health workers. The objective is for them to become empowered to help strengthen the resilience of their communities through the delivery of suicide prevention training. Because many potential workshop participants will have been personally impacted by suicide in their families and communities, it is essential that the trainers have prior experience in mental health, counselling or a similar field in order to provide appropriate support to participants if needed.

It is also essential that Train the Trainer participants have access to regular, at least monthly, and ad-hoc clinical supervision. It is anticipated that most trainees will be employed by Aboriginal Controlled Community Health Organisations and will have access to this supervision.

The program has four stages.

- Participation in a general community suicide prevention workshop.
- Two-day Train the Trainer program facilitated by a Wesley LifeForce trainer.
- One day Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Train the Trainer facilitated by a trainer from The Seedling Group.
- Successful co-facilitation of two Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workshops supervised by a Wesley LifeForce Trainer.

Stages one to three will be delivered over 4 days in centralised meeting venues in metropolitan and regional locations. Co-facilitated training will be based in local community settings.

Once trainers are accredited, they are able to facilitate the workshops for their communities. Workshop materials are co-ordinated by Wesley LifeForce and we provide ongoing administrative support. We also collect data pre- and post-workshop for ongoing evaluation, which allows us to monitor the success of the training and ensure continuous improvement.