



Australia's National
Institute for Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander
Health Research

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New paper highlights critical role of Indigenous knowledges and methodologies

The Lowitja Institute today published a discussion paper that articulates how and why Indigenous knowledges and research methodologies need to be urgently recognised as critical components of transformative research in order to improve social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Lowitja Institute CEO Dr Janine Mohamed said the paper demonstrates how decolonising research will build self-determination in communities and strengthen Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychology.

“As the paper notes: ‘This is an urgent and crucial project, given Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are seeking individual, family, and collective solutions to psychological distress and high suicide rates, which are the legacy of complex forms of trauma and dispossession inflicted by a genocidal settler culture’,” Dr Mohamed said.

“The paper provides a roadmap for governments, policy makers, researchers and people working in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychology and mental health and wellbeing to address past failings in policy and practice,” she said.

Aboriginal Participatory Action Research: an Indigenous research methodology strengthening decolonisation and social and emotional wellbeing was published by the Lowitja Institute as part of its respected Discussion Papers series.

The paper has been authored by leading Aboriginal psychologist Professor Pat Dudgeon, a Bardi woman who heads the Perth-based Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSIISP), with Dr Abigail Bray, Associate Professor Dawn Darlaston-Jones and Associate Professor Roz Walker.

It is being released today, 10 September, to mark World Suicide Prevention Day (WSPD).

Professor Dudgeon said the paper demonstrates how using Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR) in Indigenous research contexts can overcome the devastating and disempowering impacts of oppressive colonial practices evident in research and psychology to promote Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing.

“Currently, despite the evidence of the adverse impacts of social, historical, political, economic and structural determinants on Indigenous social and emotional wellbeing,

psychology and mental health practitioners and programs tend to focus on individuals without regard to how the social and political determinants and contextual factors affect their lives,” she said.

“Many mainstream practitioners and policy makers fail to understand or acknowledge how the existing political, social and economic power structures control and constrain the fulfilment of the personal, collective and relational needs of many Indigenous individuals, families and communities,” Professor Dudgeon said.

“Understanding the issues and complexities involved in recognising and embracing decolonisation as a strategy in research and practice, is crucial for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers, practitioners and policymakers,” she said.

The paper notes that the development of national policy frameworks in mental health, such as an Indigenous suicide prevention plan and implementing the national Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing Framework, that acknowledge the importance of traditional and contemporary Indigenous knowledges and experiences for improving wellbeing.

“Critically, our paper provides evidence to confirm that the effective implementation of these policies requires a commitment to decolonisation,” Professor Dudgeon said.

“This mean governments and service providers need to adopt new approaches that include the integration of Indigenous Research Methodologies, the implementation of the SEWB paradigm and the formal recognition of Indigenous psychology.”

The paper also argues for the recognition of these distinctive Indigenous methodologies and disciplinary paradigms within the academy and wider institutions in order for Indigenous people to be self-determining and flourishing communities within Australia.

The Lowitja Institute Discussion Paper series was launched in 2010 to encourage the dissemination of critical analysis and literature reviews of key issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research, work in progress, and research methodologies.

For media queries and/or to arrange an interview with Dr Mohamed or Professor Dudgeon, please contact Marie McInerney on 0418 273 698.

Read the paper here: <https://www.lowitja.org.au/page/services/resources/Cultural-and-social-determinants/mental-health/aboriginal-participatory-action-research-an-indigenous-research-methodology-strengthening-decolonisation-and-social-and-emotional-wellbeing>

ABOUT THE LOWITJA INSTITUTE

The Lowitja Institute is Australia's national institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research, named in honour of its Patron, Dr Lowitja O'Donoghue AC CBE DSG. It is an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation working for the health and wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples through high impact quality research, knowledge exchange, and by supporting a new generation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers.

<http://www.lowitja.org.au>