

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being 2004–2009* contains nine guiding principles that further emphasise the holistic and whole-of-life view of health held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Framework was endorsed by the Commonwealth and State/Territory governments and represented agreement among a wide range of stakeholders on the broad strategies that needed to be pursued.

The nine principles enunciated in the Framework guided the development of *Working Together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing Principles and Practice*. The nine principles are:

-  Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land is central to wellbeing. Crucially, it must be understood that while the harmony of these interrelations is disrupted, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ill health will persist.
-  Self-determination is central to the provision of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.
-  Culturally valid understandings must shape the provision of services and must guide assessment, care and management of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health problems generally and mental health problems in particular.
-  It must be recognised that the experiences of trauma and loss, present since European invasion, are a direct outcome of the disruption to cultural wellbeing. Trauma and loss of this magnitude continue to have intergenerational effects.
-  The human rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples must be recognised and respected. Failure to respect these human rights constitutes continuous disruption to mental health (as against mental ill health). Human rights relevant to mental illness must be specifically addressed.
-  Racism, stigma, environmental adversity and social disadvantage constitute ongoing stressors and have negative impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' mental health and wellbeing.
-  The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognised as well as the broader concepts of family and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and sharing.
-  There is no single Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander culture or group, but numerous groupings, languages, kinships and tribes, as well as ways of living. Furthermore, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples may currently live in urban, rural or remote settings, in urbanised, traditional or other lifestyles, and frequently move between these ways of living.
-  It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment (*National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being 2004–2009, page 6*)