

Why do we need a trauma informed approach for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients?

The *Queensland Health Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Strategy 2016- 2021*, reports that mental illness is the biggest contributor to the burden of disease for Indigenous Queenslanders.

Current statistics demonstrate unacceptably high rates of involuntary treatment, hospitalisation, and seclusion for Indigenous Australians in Queensland. There is a body of evidence, including the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023*, which reflect the need for a trauma informed care approach.

As a health service we need to take a different, and specific, approach to work toward eliminating the gap in mental health outcomes for Indigenous Queenslanders.

Indigenous Queenslander statistics (2011)

30% more likely to be hospitalised for mental illness

3 times more likely to be hospitalised due to substance misuse

More likely to enter MH treatment via ED, court, or prison – higher ITO rates

If hospitalised in a mental health unit – **50%** more likely to be secluded

Core values for a trauma informed service

Developed using staff surveys and consultations in order to determine the most relevant values for Metro South Addictions and Mental Health Services.

Respect

Safety

Recognition and
Acknowledgement of
the Impact of Trauma

Flexibility

Empowerment

Inclusiveness
(Family & Community)

Equity

The Way Forward, an initiative of Addiction and Mental Health Services, Metro South Health, Ph: 3156 9800.

Trauma-Informed Care and Practice for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people

We would like to acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of the Turrbal, Jagera, Yuggera, Yugumbah and Bundjalung lands on which this document has been developed. We pay our respects to the Elders past, present and future.

We care about you

What is trauma informed care & practice?

Trauma informed care and practice (TICP) recognises and acknowledges trauma and its prevalence in mental health presentations and is sensitive to its dynamics in all aspects of service delivery. There is recognition of the neurological, biological, psychological and social impacts of trauma, and services foster an organisational culture that is personal, holistic, creative and therapeutic.

TICP creates a system that understands the impact of trauma on an individual's development and their capacity to cope. The strengths of the individual are recognised, and trauma survivors are empowered to take back control of their lives. A sense of physical, emotional, psychological and spiritual safety within the organisation is created for both the service providers and their clients. Service providers are encouraged to move from the role of caretakers to collaborators in their work with clients¹

Often, when people first present to mental health services they are in crisis, and the intensity of their symptoms can be overwhelming. It is easy to get lost in the intensity of the event and lose sight of the predisposing and precipitating factors relating to the event. We treat the symptoms and lose sight of the person and their experiences and stories. TICP reminds us to look at where the person has come from and to ask first and foremost,

“What has happened to you?”

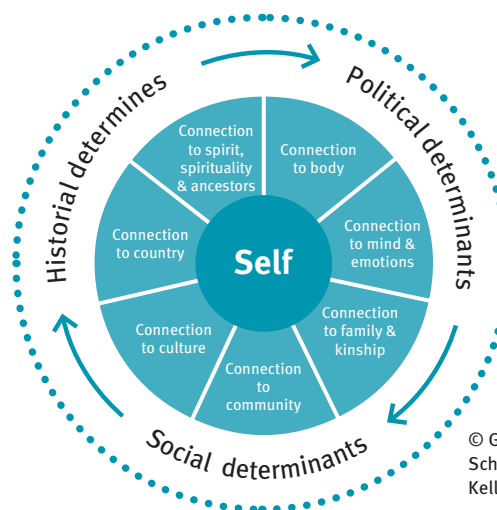
¹<http://www.mhcc.org.au/sector-development/recovery-and-practice-approaches/trauma-informed-care-and-practice.aspx>

For the Organisation to be Trauma Informed, we must:

- realise the impact of trauma;
- recognise the signs and symptoms of trauma at all levels (including consumers, families, carers, and staff); and,
- resist re-traumatisation of anyone involved with the service.

The National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017 – 2023 identified the holistic concept of social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) as the foundation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders physical and mental health. The seven key factors of SEWB are: connection to body, connection to mind and emotions, connection to family and kinship, connection to community, connection to culture, connection to country, and connection to spirit, spirituality, and ancestors. These factors are interrelated and stem from the 'self', while also being heavily influenced by external determinants such as political, historical, and social. (Refer to Figure 1 below).

Figure 1. Model of Social and Emotional Wellbeing



© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly 2013

Types of trauma

Trauma

Trauma is a very severe shock or very upsetting experience, which may cause psychological damage.

Transgenerational trauma

Trauma that is transferred from the original generation of survivors across subsequent generations.

Complex trauma

The experience of multiple traumas including singular events and more predominantly periods of invasive and prolonged abuse, neglect and dysfunction. This includes histories of transgenerational trauma.

Intergenerational trauma

The transmission of historical trauma between generations, which can be passed on through parenting practices, behavioural problems, violence, harmful substance use and mental health issues.