

Understanding Stress and Staying Strong in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health and Human Services' Workforce

Robert Dann and Anna Dawson



We would like to acknowledge the Kurna people as the custodians of the lands and waters of the Adelaide region, on which we meet today. We pay respect to Elders both past and present.

We acknowledge and respect the Kurna peoples' cultural, spiritual, physical and emotional connection with their land, waters and community.



the
Lowitja
Institute



WARDLIPARINGGA

CHIEF INVESTIGATORS



GOVERNANCE

**National representation of
senior Aboriginal leaders
across sectors &
NATSIHWA Board members**

RESEARCH TEAM

**Robert Dann
Anna Dawson
Gabbie Zizzo
Gokhan Ayturk**

METHOD



STUDY 1 - SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

Objective: to identify tools used with First Nations workforce

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce (n=4)
- First Nations workforce in Canada (n=2)
- Native American workforce in the United States (n=2)
- Māori workforce in New Zealand (n= 1)
- There are few **culturally tailored and strength-based tools** used to assess stress and staying strong in First Nations' workforce in health and human services

Mental health

Work-related challenges

Positive cultural practices

Social Support

Resilience, resources & coping

Constructs		Williams	Ellis	Roché	Fahy	Wilson	Wood	Stewart and Gardner	Braveheart-Jordan	Handwerker
Stress		•								•
Strain / Individual strain		•						•		
Emotionally drained / exhaustion / fatigue		•		•						
'Used up'		•								
Depression		•								•
Mental health risk				•						
Post-traumatic stress					•					
Trauma symptoms					•					
Loss and grief						•			•	
Demands / workload / workplace conflicts								•		
Working too hard		•								
Family work imbalances				•						
Out of hours work		•								
Client abuse or threat / client pressure		•		•						
Role Adequacy			•							
Workplace Pressure			•							
Turnover intention / turnover				•			•			
Job satisfaction				•						
Physical work environment				•						
Commitment to workplace						•				
Job related strain								•		
Racism		•		•						
Positive cultural practices				•						
Formal support (at work)			•							
Co-worker support				•						
Feeling supported							•			
Feeling appreciated							•			
Resilience					•					
Resources and coping strategies								•		
							•			

STUDY 2 - YARNING WITH WORKFORCE

Yarning centred around:

What are the challenges you've experienced in your working life and what have you done to overcome those challenges and stay strong?

CONSULTATIONS

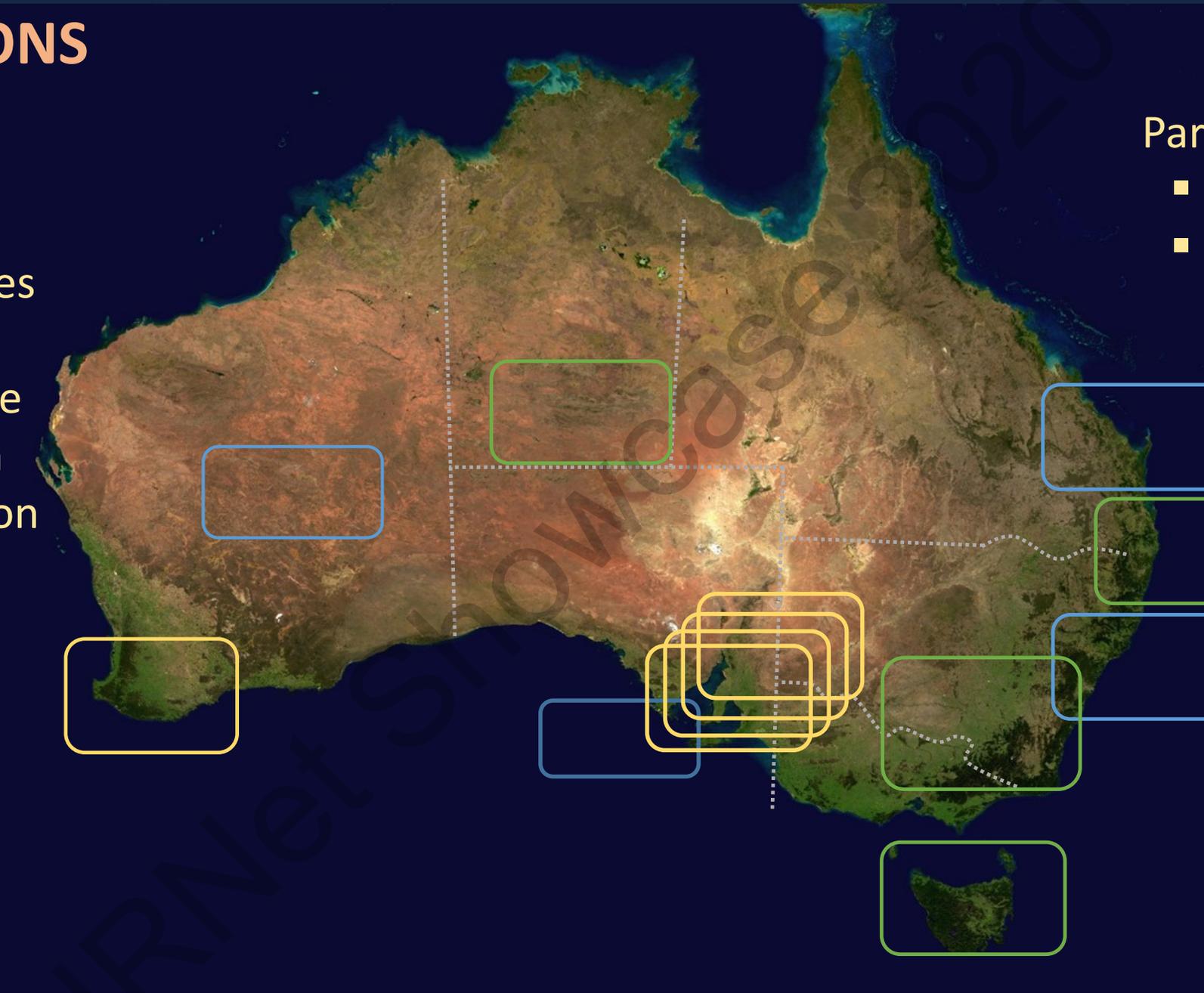
Sectors

- health
- human services
- corrections
- juvenile justice
- mental health
- child protection

Participants (n=110)

- 84 interviews
- 3 yarning circles (n=26 participants)

- NATSIHWA
- ACCHO
- Government sites



WHAT BRINGS US DOWN: CHALLENGES

FAMILY

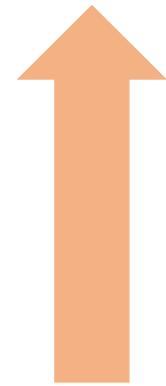
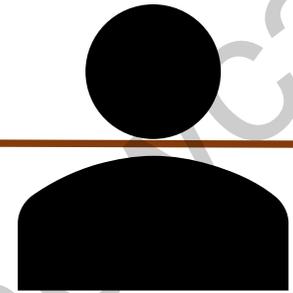
Family and cultural obligations
Financial pressures

PERSONAL

Grief and loss and trauma
Drugs and alcohol
Health challenges including mental health and disability
Stress and burnout

SOCIETY

Racism
Deficit Narrative
Impacts of colonisation – social exclusion, disadvantage
Power dynamics
Cultural incompetence / ignorance



FAMILY

Coming from a strong family
Connections and networks
Support from family and colleagues

PERSONAL

Cultural identity, knowledge and participation
Lived experience
Self-care – e.g., being on Country, exercise, meditation
Work ethic
Communication, speaking up, being transparent and accountable
Working for our mob
Self-awareness, recognizing triggers and burnout
Feeling encouraged and motivated by the 'wins'
Activism, advocacy and self-determination
Relationship building and maintenance

SOCIETY

Policies that drive good practices – RAPs

WHAT LIFTS US UP: ENABLERS OF STAYING STRONG

Racism
Tokenism
Lack of cultural safety
Restrictive non-Aboriginal ways of working
Complex clients and demanding work
Working in isolation
Lack of training, development and career pathways
Bullying and lateral violence
Being undervalued
Lack of support or guidance
Job insecurity and funding restrictions
Higher value on qualifications than lived experience
Community expectations
Community politics

Cultural respect and safety
Support for Aboriginal ways of working
Consulting and collaborating with Aboriginal communities
Connecting and networking with Aboriginal colleagues
Forums or gatherings of Aboriginal workforce
Formal training and development opportunities
Career pathways
Work, life and cultural balance
Flexibility for family and study
Mentoring and supervision
Community events and cultural celebrations
Guidance from Elders

ISOLATION

WORK

COMMUNITY

DISRESPECT

WORK

COMMUNITY

CONNECTION

RESPECT

STUDY 3 - EXPERT ROUNDTABLES

- 50 participants across two Roundtable discussions
- High level investment from workforce across government, ACCHO and NGOs at all levels
- Participants were asked to identify strategies to support workforce in response to case study stories

RICHARD

Richard works for government in a regional setting. His work is demanding and he feels like there are big expectations on him both from his community and his manager. He tries to set up boundaries between work and home, but is often contacted after hours by clients. Richard's father is a survivor of the Stolen Generation and there wasn't a strong connection to culture growing up. At work, Richard is often asked his opinion in relation to Aboriginal affairs like the relevance of The Apology and the experiences of Eddie Betts and Adam Goodes, which weighs heavily on him. He is passionate about his role in improving health outcomes for his mob and in strengthening the cultural knowledge and the identity of his kids.

CASE STUDY: RICHARD



- WORKS FOR GOV IN REGIONAL SETTING
- OFTEN CONTACTED AFTER HOURS BY CLIENTS
- NO STRONG CONNECTION TO CULTURE GROWING UP
- BEING ASKED HIS OPINION ON ABORIGINAL AFFAIRS WEIGHS HEAVILY ON HIM

HOME IS HOME

NO WORK STUFF



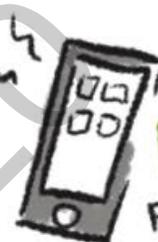
HAVE THESE CONVERSATIONS AT HOME TOO

YOU NEED TO PROTECT YOURSELF



ESPECIALLY FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

BOUNDARIES: BREAK AWAY FROM THE ADDICTION



CLARIFY EXPECTATIONS



IS THIS PART OF MY WORK?

DON'T FEEL PRESSURE TO ANSWER QUESTIONS ABOUT ABORIGINAL ISSUES.



YOU ARE LIVING YOUR LIFE!

PEOPLE NEED TO EDUCATE THEMSELVES

RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN



POINT PEOPLE TO RESOURCES

LINKUP CONNECTING TO CULTURE

GIVE OURSELVES PERMISSION FOR SELF-CARE



TOP PRIORITIES for STRATEGIES TO SUPPORT WORKFORCE

- BE STRONG IN OUR IDENTITY**
- EDUCATION**
 ABORIGINAL SCHOOLS
 TEACH CULTURE
 GET BACK TO OUR BLACKNESS
- RESILIENCE & WELL-BEING**
- CREATE OUR OWN STRUCTURES**
- THRIVE, NOT SURVIVE**
- COME TOGETHER IF YOU HAVE SKIN IN THE GAME**
- CULTURAL SAFETY AS CODE OF CONDUCT**
- BUILD ABORIGINAL CAPACITY**
- MENTORS, ESP. FOR YOUNG PEOPLE**
- HARD CONVERSATIONS**
- WORK ON EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS FROM SYSTEMS LEVEL**
- CULTURAL FITNESS**
 WE DON'T GO TO THE GYM JUST ONCE! WE GO CONTINUOUSLY
- SHOW - CEO - PATHWAYS**
- UPSKILLING**
- MENTORS - Biannual meet-up**
- A SEAT AT DECISION-MAKING TABLE**
- EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS #**
 granny's groups unions
- JOB DESCRIPTIONS**
 HOW ARE CULTURAL COMPETENCIES BEING MEASURED?
- USE BEST WORKFORCE MODELS**
- 2-WAY ACCOUNTABILITY**

DEVELOPING RESOURCES

Drawing on findings from Study 2 consultations and Study 3
Expert Roundtable Discussions

IRNet Showcase 2020

VALUING AND STRENGTHENING

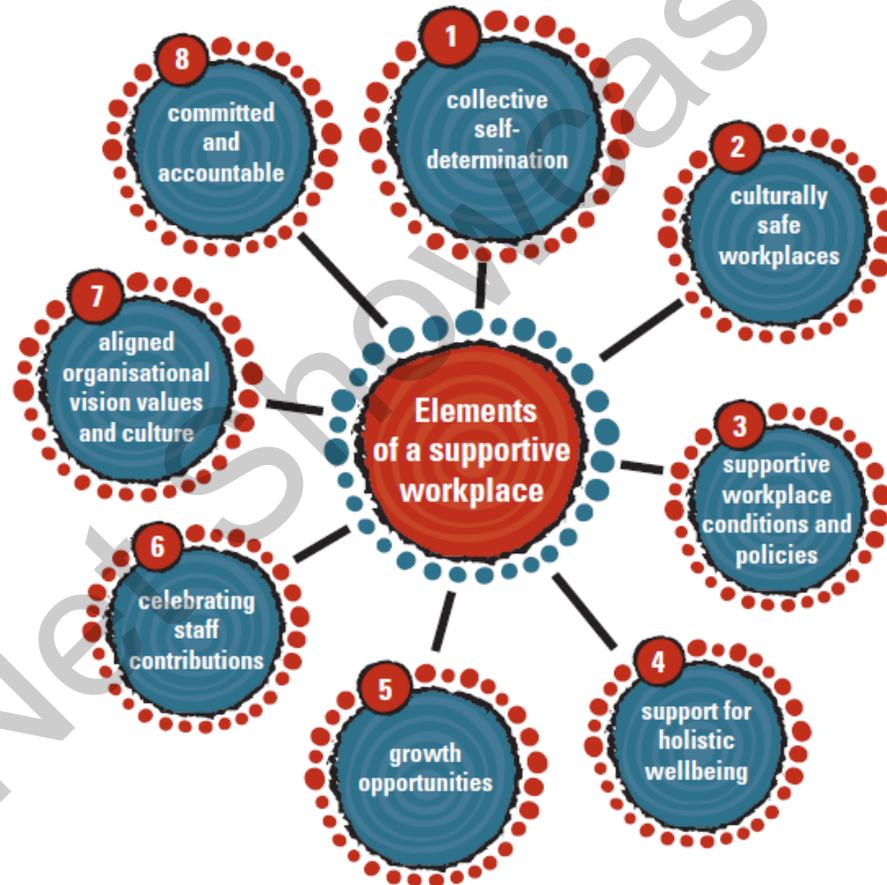
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce



A good environment
FOR ORGANISATIONS

BUILDING A SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE

Ways of building and maintaining supportive workplace environments that strengthen and value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.



4

SUPPORT FOR HOLISTIC WELLBEING (cont.)

Here are some of the ways your organisation can support the holistic wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce:

CULTURAL WELLBEING

Respect and value the cultural knowledge and community connections of your staff.

Have Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of working into workplace practices.

Cultural mentoring providing a space to discuss with

SOCIAL WELLBEING

Support attendance at external networking events.



PHYSICAL WELLBEING

Understand the impact of workplace stress on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff who may be managing complex and/or chronic health conditions.

Support the physical wellbeing of staff, such as through onsite gyms, subsidised gym membership, walking groups.



Protect the physical safety of your workforce (eg. through policies to ensure home visits are undertaken in teams).

LOCAL & REGIONAL MEETINGS
PRIVATE SAFE SPACES FOR SHARING WITH OUR CULTURAL FAMILIES

Establish virtual support networks when face-to-face isn't possible.



EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS
granny groups unions

SHARING OUR WAYS OF STAYING STRONG

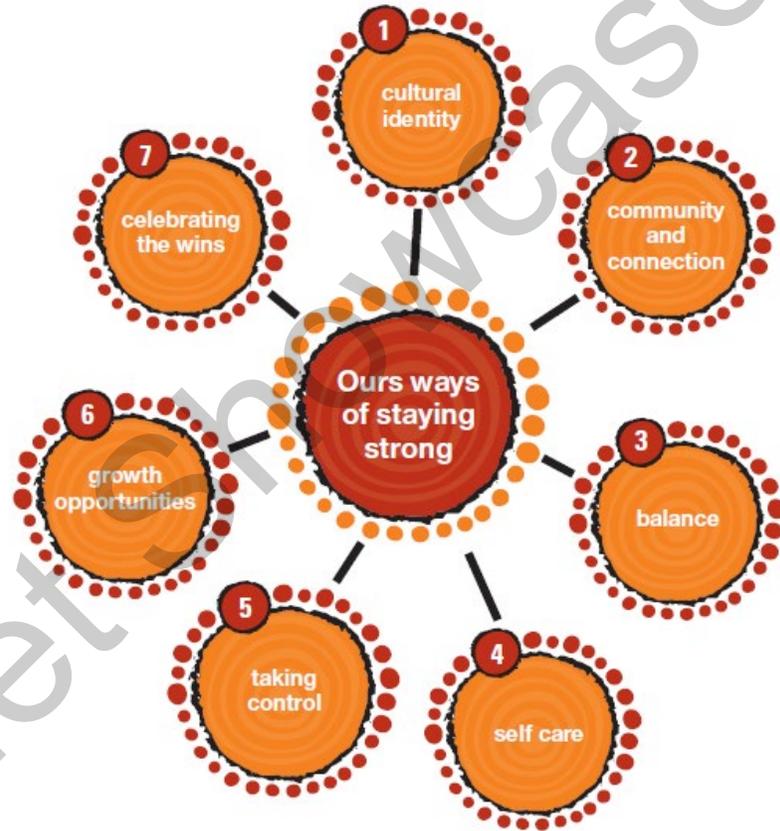
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Workforce



A GUIDE TO HEALTH

WAYS OF STAYING STRONG

Overview of ways for staying strong in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.



5 TAKING CONTROL

Taking control helps us to stay strong. Taking control means 'our choice, our way' and ensures Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of being, doing and knowing are incorporated into organisational practices.

Taking control includes backing yourself across a range of actions:

OWNING YOUR JOB ROLE, RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES

Taking control includes being clear about your job role and your employer's expectations (eg: scope of practice), your rights and responsibilities, and your agreement or workplace agreement. Consider joining a Union.

Clear professional and personal boundaries can occur when you are clear about what is beyond your role (note: this helps achieve your role and strong elements of self-care).

CO-DESIGN YOUR ROLE WITH YOUR LINE MANAGER



SEEKING TO CO-DESIGN YOUR ROLE INCLUDING CLARIFYING EXPECTATIONS

If your role isn't clear, you can seek to co-design your job description with your manager. Once this is agreed upon, everyone can be clear about the expectations of your role.

PARTICIPATING IN ADVOCACY EFFORTS FOR COMMUNITY AND WORKFORCE

Workforce involved in advocacy activities promote the strengths of our culture and community and strive to improve policies and programs for our mob. Some advocacy work also relates to improving conditions for us as a workforce.



FOR YOUR PROGRESS

Available on the AHCSA website:

<https://ahcsa.org.au/research-overview/research-overview/>

Special thanks to the workforce who participated, and to our
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Robert Dann: dann.robert@sa.gov.au

Anna Dawson: anna.dawson@sahmri.com

Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia

Address 220 Franklin St, Adelaide SA 5000

Phone (08) 8273 7200

<https://ahcsa.org.au>



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