

CO-DESIGNING AN ETHICAL DECISION MAKING FRAMEWORK TO IMPROVE ABORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING

An Aboriginal-led project (2021-2022)

1 Background

Aboriginal Communities have long been calling for strengths-based, Community-led solutions to improve their social and emotional wellbeing. The COVID-19 crisis provides an opportunity to re-think how decisions impacting on Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia are made. There is an urgent need to build relationships that foster trust and acknowledge the past to ensure ethical decision making informs responses to mental health and wellbeing inequities.

2 Project aim

Co-design an ethical decision making framework—directed and held by the wisdom of Elders—to ensure culturally secure responses to improve mental health and wellbeing. Aboriginal young people will also be engaged in the co-design process with Elders, as will senior WA Government staff.



3 How the project will work

Participatory action research underpins the work, which means co-researchers will have a say about what happens across all aspects of the project. The *Steady Walking Talking Framework* (image overleaf) sets out the conditions for engaging and building and sustaining meaningful relationships between Elders, young people and non-Aboriginal participants who will be involved in co-designing the ethical decision making framework (and its evaluation). These conditions for co-design have been successful in shifting how non-Aboriginal mental health and drug and alcohol service engage with Communities and has supported non-Aboriginal service staff to deepen their understanding of Aboriginal worldviews.

The project runs for **two years** and it is estimated that there would be **regular meetings** with the project team, Elders and young people including **co-design workshops**. Elders and young people will be remunerated for their time.

This project has ethics approval from WA Aboriginal Health Ethics Committee (HREC1035). If you have any worries or concerns about this project or if you don't feel respected or kept informed. Call the Ethics Officer on (08) 9277 1631 or email them: ethics@ahcwa.org

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4 Project leads



Michael Wright is a Yuat Nyoongar man from the Moora and New Norcia area of WA. He has worked in a hospital as a social worker and as a manager of an Aboriginal mental health service. Michael leads several research projects which engage Elders and Community members to improve the cultural security of mainstream mental health services.



Pat Dudgeon was born in Darwin and is from the Bardi people of the Kimberley in WA. She was the first Aboriginal psychologist in Australia. She is currently the Director of the UWA Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention and leads another large research project on Indigenous



Helen Milroy is a descendant of the Palyku people of the Pilbara region but was born and educated in Perth. Currently Helen is the Stan Perron Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Perth Children's Hospital and UWA; a Commissioner with the National Mental Health Commission; Honorary Researcher at the Telethon Kids Institute; Chair of Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit; board member of Beyond Blue and Commissioner with the Australian Football League. Previously Helen was Co-chair of the Million Minds Research Advisory Group and a Commissioner for the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (2013-2017).



Sandra Eades is a Nyoongar woman from Mount Barker in WA. Sandra is the Dean of Curtin University's Medical School; she is a general medical practitioner, and was the first Aboriginal medical doctor to be awarded a PhD. Sandra is an experienced researcher in Aboriginal health including child and adolescent health.