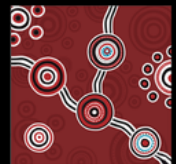




SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GATHERING 6

CIRCLES OF WISDOM

Held in Walyalup (Fremantle) on Wadjuk Noongar Country | 3-5 March 2026



Pictured: Noongar Elder, Dr Roma Winmar AM
at the SEWBG-6 Welcome to Country





Pictured: Noongar Elder, Dr Richard Walley OAM opening SEWBG-6 with a Welcome to Country

Acknowledgement



On behalf of the Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Gathering Organising Committee and Network, we acknowledge and respect Wadjuk Noongar Elders and Traditional Custodians whose lands we gathered on in Walyalup (Fremantle), where the sixth SEWB Gathering was held.

We also pay our respects to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Elders, past and present, and to the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters across the unceded lands now known as Australia.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are the first peoples of Australia and are the enduring custodians of the oldest continuous culture. We recognise the strengths, creativity, and resilience of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities, and we celebrate the rich ways of being, knowing, and doing across Australia.

Finally, we acknowledge our allies, who walk with us towards social justice, in a movement of the Australian people for a better future, truth-telling, and a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Welcome to Country

The SEWB Gathering Committee and network extend our gratitude to Wadjuk Noongar Elder, Dr Richard Walley OAM and his son Alton Walley who opened the SEWBG with a Welcome to Country.

Uncle Richard set the tone of the Gathering by inviting good spirit to be with us, guiding those speaking and those listening so the message is passed on. He shared that the group standing together represented collective consciousness and that is what culture is held in.

He shared that Walyalup is significant because it is where colonisation started for Noongar peoples. In the park where we stood there was a statue of a man responsible for massacres.

Uncle Richard acknowledged Aboriginal peoples who still live and pass on the knowledges and ways, and also acknowledged the allies standing beside as we continue to move in a great cycle. He closed by singing a song in language and sharing a beautiful smoking ceremony with sandalwood.



A I P A



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



NACCHO
National Aboriginal Community
Controlled Health Organisation
Aboriginal health in Aboriginal hands
www.naccho.org.au



**Transforming Indigenous
Mental Health and Wellbeing**
www.TIMHWB.org.au

Glossary



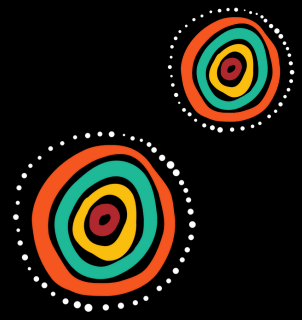
Key term	Meaning
ACCO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisation
ACCHO/ACCHS	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation/Service
AIPA	Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association
CBPATSISP	Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention
DoH	Department of Health and Aged Care
GDPSA	Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing
SEWB Framework	National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and SEWB 2017-2023
SEWBG	Social and Emotional Wellbeing Gathering
SEWB PP	SEWB Policy Partnership
TIMHWB	Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing
UWA	University of Western Australia



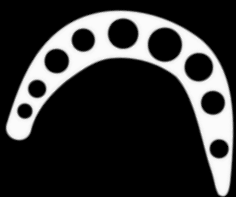
Pictured: SEWB Gathering 6 Visual Summary Artist, Ronda Clarke (Nyikina). See the final artwork and story on p. 32.



Contents



Acknowledgement	2
Contents	4
Executive Summary	5
SEWBG Host Profiles	6
Background	7
SEWBG Recommendations	8
Day 1. Speaker Presentations & Group Insight Workshops	10
Day 2. Speaker Presentations & Group Insight Workshops	15
Day 0. Workshops Day	21
SEWBG-5 Feedback	26
SEWBG-5 Attendees	28
Thank you	30



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Executive Summary



Over three days, from March 3-5 2026, SEWB network members from across Australia attended the sixth SEWBG to discuss SEWB for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. SEWBG-6 was held in Walyalup (Fremantle) on Wadjuk Noongar Country, Western Australia.

SEWB Gatherings are co-hosted by the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, and Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing, and are funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

The aim of the SEWB Gatherings is to bring together SEWB network members to showcase best practice services and programs from across the country and to discuss the future of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB policy, practice, and research. The network includes SEWB and mental health representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and Aboriginal community controlled organisations (ACCOs) and health organisations (ACCHOs), academics, practitioners, policy-makers, and front-line workers.

The strength of the SEWB movement has been made evident by the continued growth of the SEWB network and support for continued SEWB Gatherings, as well as the Government's explicit commitment through the National Agreement on Closing the Gap to working alongside Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in an era of collective change.

The theme for SEWBG-6 was Circles of Wisdom, as the committee returned to Walyalup and asked the SEWB Network to consider if the cycle was complete or if the SEWB Gatherings should continue.

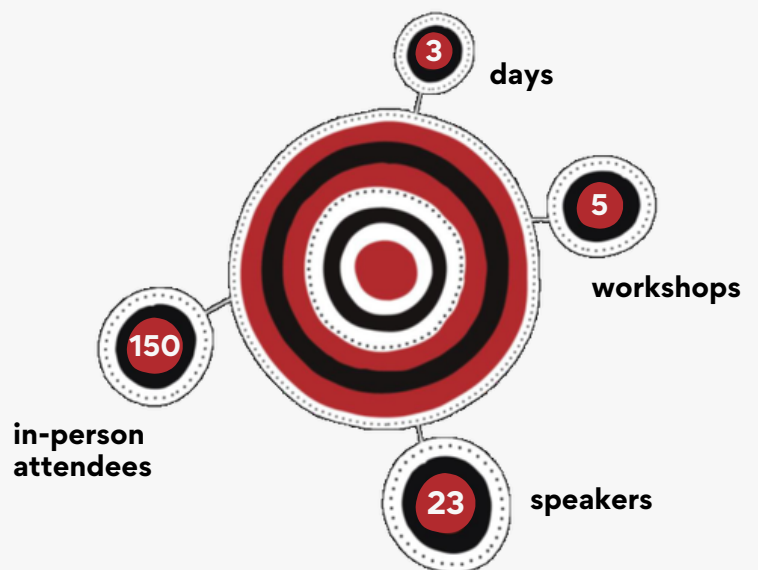
Day 1 and 2 presentations returned to topics explored and previous Gatherings. Three concurrent workshops were held prior to the SEWBG to explore the unique and diverse needs of Stolen Generations, men, and women.

The Gatherings have been a space for us to come together as a community, share our stories and experiences, and explore ways to enhance the SEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through connection, kindness, and caring. The Gatherings have also offered the opportunity to engage in meaningful discussions, listen, learn, and celebrate our rich cultural heritage.

Following the expert presentations on each day, small group insight workshops are held. These workshops gave SEWB network members the opportunity to listen and learn from others, to share their thoughts and experiences, reflect on work that has been done, and discuss what there is still to do. Together in this way, we strengthen our collective efforts to promote mental health and wellbeing within our communities. The reflections from network members during the workshops across the three days provided engaging points for discussion and inform subsequent Gatherings.

The themes and findings from the presentations and workshops are summarised in this report.

Snapshot



A I P A



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



NACCHO
National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
Aboriginal Health in Aboriginal Hands
www.naccho.org.au



Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing
www.TIMHWP.org.au

Pictured: SEWBG-6 Hosts & Elders after the Welcome to Country



Host Profiles



The Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA)

The national body representing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Psychologists in Australia.

www.indigenoupsychology.com.au



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia (GDPSA)

The national leadership body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing, mental health, and suicide prevention.

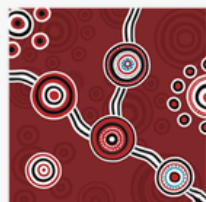
www.gyaadhuwi.org.au



The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

The national leadership body for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health in Australia.

www.naccho.org.au



Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (TIMHWB)

An innovative Aboriginal-led program that aims to empower ACCHOs to deliver SEWB services and bring cultural ways and healing into health and mental health systems.

www.timhwb.org.au



Background



SEWBG-6 was held across 3-5 March 2026 on Noongar Country in Western Australia. The purpose of SEWBG-6 was to further SEWBG aims and recommendations and to bring the SEWB network together to share insights and developments on SEWB, locally and nationally.

- The 1st SEWBG was held 30-31 March 2021 on Noongar Country (Perth), Western Australia (WA). This Gathering commenced the SEWB network and SEWBG recommendations which have developed with each subsequent Gathering.
- The 2nd SEWBG was held 26-28 October 2021 on Noongar Country in (Fremantle), WA.
- The 3rd SEWBG was held 6-8 September 2022 on Ngannawal/Ngambri Country (Canberra), Australian Capital Territory (ACT).
- The 4th SEWBG was held 31 July to 2 August 2023 on Larrakia Country (Darwin), Northern Territory (NT).
- The 5th SEWBG was held 15-17 October 2024 on Kurna Country (Adelaide) South Australia (SA).

In alignment with preceding SEWBGs, SEWBG-6 aimed to strengthen understandings of individual, community, and national SEWB. Following the theme of Circles of Wisdom, SEWBG-6 had a special focus on returning to past themes and reflecting on where we have been and where we are going. The discussions from SEWB Gatherings inform the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health and Wellbeing*. Day 0 offered three specialised workshops.

SEWB describes the holistic conceptualisation of health held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that encompasses one's connections to body, mind, family, community, culture, Country, and spirituality. In addition to these seven domains of holistic health, SEWB recognises the critical influence of social, political, historical, cultural, and environmental determinants of health, and the diverse expressions and experiences of SEWB across different cultural groups, across the lifespan, and different lived experiences. SEWB advocates for practices of healing

and resistance grounded in community development, cultural reclamation, and self-determination. The SEWB model pictured below was developed by the Australian Indigenous Psychologist's Association (AIPA), in consultations with communities across the nation, and was adopted in the *SEWB Framework 2017-2023*.

The national SEWB network continues to grow stronger and work collaboratively, strengthening the partnership between and processes of Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations, Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, policy makers, health and mental health clinicians and practitioners, and mainstream health organisations. This work aims to support Outcome 14 in the *National Agreement on Closing the Gap*: that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of SEWB.

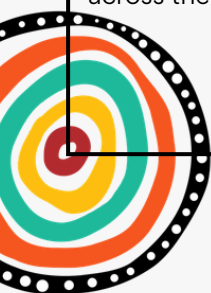
The work of the Gatherings and its Network members aims to develop, translate and disseminate the evidence base on SEWB and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide prevention and further the collective understanding of best practice in SEWB.



SEWBG Recommendations



Recommendations from SEWBG-1	SEWBG-6 Status
<p>Recommendation 1: To have regular SEWB Gatherings for the SEWB network. SEWBG hosts: AIPA, GDPSA, NACCHO, and TIMHWP, are responsible for organising SEWB Gatherings.</p>	<p>SEWBG-1, SEWBG-2, SEWBG-3, SEWBG-4, SEWBG-5 and SEWBG-6 are complete. All attendees from the SEWBGs compose the SEWB Network. The SEWBG Network was asked to reflect on the Gatherings as they came full circle and returned to Walyalup. There was strong support for the SEWB Gatherings to continue.</p>
<p>Recommendation 2: GDPSA to refresh and implement the <i>National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023</i>.</p>	<p>Through the <i>National Agreement on Closing the Gap</i>, the Coalition of Peaks nominated GDPSA to co-Chair the SEWB Policy Partnership. The SEWB Policy Partnership (SEWB PP) working group formed in 2022 and is now working on the refresh and implement the <i>SEWB Framework</i>.</p>
<p>Recommendation 3: Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet to establish and maintain the SEWB Clearing House.</p>	<p>Delegates from Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet are invited to attend each SEWB Gathering and are tasked with updating the SEWB Clearing House accordingly. In 2024, we welcomed the new Director, Prof. Bep Uink.</p>
<p>Recommendation 4: An Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB Measurement Consortium will be established by TIMHWP to further the measurement of SEWB. This Consortium will be hosted by the Australian Institute of Health and Wellbeing (AIHW).</p>	<p>The Measurement Consortium was established by TIMHWP in 2021, Chaired by Professor Gail Garvey, with secretarial support from AIHW. In 2025 AIHW published a web report on The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing measures project. This project is a collaboration between the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB Measurement Consortium and the First Nations Health and Welfare Group of AIHW.</p>
<p>Recommendation 5: A healing symposium to lead advocacy for healing (strong spirit) models and centres across the country.</p>	<p>The Healing Foundation established a national community of practice in 2022 and have moved from strength to strength since then. Major works include the Make Healing Happen 2023 report, and 2025 report, Are you waiting for us to die?: The unfinished business of Bringing them home. Stolen Generations survivors were strongly represented at SEWBG-6 by the Healing Foundation who hosted a dedicated workshop on Day 0.</p>







Day 1

Day 1 opened with a Welcome to Country and smoking ceremony by Wadjuk Noongar Elder, Uncle Richard Walley OAM. SEWBG-6 was facilitated by Michael Mitchell and Judith Lovegrove.

Speaker Presentations

Day 1 commenced with opening addresses from the SEWBG-5 hosts, p. 11.

Everyone in the room then had an opportunity to introduce themselves and participated in a group reflection on the past SEWB Gatherings, p. 12.

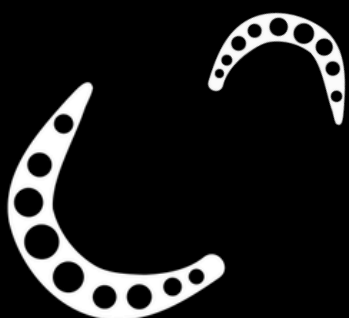
Next, Workshop summaries were presented to the group (Day 0 workshops, p. 21-25).

Then, there was a panel discussion on 'Translation from Research to Policy to Practice in SEWB' p.13.

Group Insight Workshop

The issues raised by the panellists were then discussed in small groups. This collaborative approach is designed to harness the collective expertise of the SEWB network, ensuring that diverse perspectives contribute to our understanding and practical applications of the updated *SEWB Framework*.

Key insights from the Day 1 group insight workshop can be found on p. 14.





Opening Addresses



SEWBG-6 Host Organisations

Prof. Pat Dudgeon AM (Bardi)
Chief Investigator, TIMHWB.

Prof. Helen Milroy AM (Palkyu)
Chair, GDPSA.

Dr. Monica Barolits-McCabe (Kungarakan)
Executive Director, NACCHO.

Tony Kiessler (Central Arrernte)
Chief Executive Officer, AIPA.

Helen welcomed everyone, noting the diversity in the room and acknowledging the traditional owners for keeping Country in pristine condition. She reflected on the GDPSA's visual identity, created by Aunty Roma, as a powerful symbol representing conversation, practical solutions, resilience, and collective capacity. Helen highlighted that Elders carry wisdom across generations and reminded us that GDPSA, as the peak body for SEWB and suicide prevention, continues to share knowledge and advocate for change, especially in challenging times marked by fear and racism.

Pat reflected on the strong roots of the SEWB movement, describing it as healthy, healing, and flourishing. She recalled self-funding the first Gathering during COVID-19 and partnering with

GDPSA, NACCHO, and AIPA. Pat celebrated the diversity of people participating, the integration of Indigenous ways of being, knowing, and doing, and acknowledged the new challenges following the referendum, including the work of the Warriorship Project to support mob in standing strong in culture and against racism.

Monica reflected on the Gatherings' impact, noting the Gatherings inform NACCHO programs, including Culture Care Connect, and encouraged attendees to connect with the NACCHO team. She also acknowledged the inaugural Youth Forum and the important statement from youth at the Forum.

Tony expressed pride that AIPA has partnered in all six Gatherings, highlighting their growth in recent years, including the new 3% Plus program, and the first AIPA conference, which sold out. He noted AIPA's role in delivering the wellbeing space at the Gathering and championing SEWB in psychology.

Helen closed by reminding attendees that the knowledge shared here directly informs policy and practice, encouraging everyone to contribute over the course of the Gathering.

Group Reflection



The reflective workshop asked the SEWB Network to reflect on where we have been and where we are going with the SEWB Gatherings.

The reflections highlighted how far the SEWB Gatherings have come, advancing shared understandings of SEWB across sectors and spaces and reinforcing the need to continue nurturing it and addressing gaps, together. Participants reflected that this is not a conference, but a Gathering. It is a safe space grounded in shared passions, where community comes together to connect, learn from each other, and celebrate what is working across the country.

The Gathering was described as a place that showcases many ways of healing, that introduces the SEWB framework to newcomers and allies, and helps others understand how community works and how SEWB connects to culture and self-determination. It also creates important opportunities for organisations to connect, addressing silos and strengthening collaboration.

Participants emphasised the importance of moving policy into practice and knowledge into action, with healing and yarning circles, alongside workforce and professional development, seen as central to both personal and professional growth.

There was strong reflection on the importance of guidance from leaders and Elders that the SEWB Gatherings have enabled. The Network reinforces the need to continue doing things in culturally grounded ways, reclaiming space from dominant systems. Participants emphasised a shared purpose, that staying connected and working together is essential, and called for continued support and funding to address service gaps. The need to transform siloed Western systems, embed truth-telling and knowledge sharing, and sustain healing spaces was highlighted as critical to ensuring culture, strength, and collective wellbeing continue into the future.

Network members repeated the shared purpose and desire to stay together, “this is our insurance.”



Pictured: SEWB Network members during the workshops



Pictured: Panelist for the Day 1 discussion

Day 1. Panel Discussion



Translation from Research to Policy to Practice in SEWB

Danielle Dyall (Minjungbal)
NACCHO.

Jessica Pocock
Danila Dilba Health Service.

Tegan Scheffe (Bidjara/Kamilaroi)
TIMHWB.

Rachel Radcliffe (Yamatji/Martu)
Aboriginal Health Council of WA.

Chair - Rachel Fishlock (Yuin) GDPSA.

Q1 - What is the relationship between research, policy, and practice?

Panelists described research, policy, and practice as deeply interconnected, though not always aligned. Research generates the evidence that guides action, while policy shapes how this is translated into funding and support for services. Misalignment often occurs due to short funding cycles and system constraints. Organisations play a critical bridging role, advocating for what is happening in practice to be reflected in research, policy, and funding, reinforcing Indigenous ways of working as central to effective outcomes.

Q2 - How do we better integrate the siloes in SEWB?

Panelists emphasised that integration comes down to relationships. Building strong connections across community, organisations, research, and policy

enables trust, honest communication, and two-way advocacy. Spaces like the SEWB Gatherings are essential for strengthening these relationships and breaking down siloes. Embedding SEWB into everyday practice was described as inherently relational, with a need to integrate SEWB approaches more broadly across mainstream systems to shift ways of working.

Q3 - What do we need to ensure accountability so funding reaches the ground?

There was strong agreement that SEWB work is long-term and relational, and not suited to short funding cycles. Participants highlighted the need for collective responsibility in communication, action, and addressing gaps, alongside continued advocacy to ensure funding reflects community needs. Existing frameworks provide a foundation for accountability, but there is a need to move beyond language and training toward truly holistic, culturally grounded practice that translates into real outcomes.

Q4 - How do we better capture and reflect SEWB in data, policy, and practice?

Panelists reflected that current systems often fail to capture the depth and impact of SEWB work. There is a need to develop approaches to data and measurement that reflect Indigenous models and ways of working. Research and policy may move faster than community readiness, yet must remain grounded in and responsive to community. Strengthening SEWB training and ensuring alignment is key to progress.

Group Discussion



The discussion highlighted a persistent disconnect between research, policy, and practice, particularly in how evidence is defined and applied. Current data systems were described as limited, often focused on short-term and clinical outcomes, while overlooking community knowledge, lived experience, and the broader, long-term realities of SEWB. Participants emphasised the need to recognise Indigenous ways of knowing and doing as valid evidence, and to develop more holistic, culturally grounded approaches to data that can better inform policy and decision-making.

There was a shared view that while there is willingness across policy and organisational settings to improve SEWB outcomes, there is often a lack of clear guidance and accountability to translate this into practice. Participants stressed that meaningful change must extend beyond counselling to address the social determinants of health, requiring coordinated, system-wide action grounded in what communities know works.

Researchers and practitioners were identified as critical “translators” between community

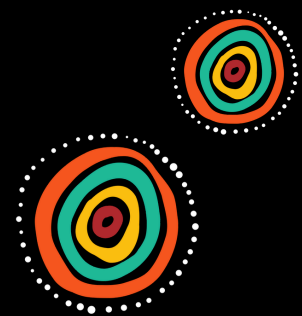
knowledge and government systems, with a role in documenting what works and aligning it with policy expectations through strong evaluation and reporting. At the same time, participants emphasised the importance of genuine partnership with communities, including co-design, co-authorship, and shared ownership of knowledge, to ensure community voices remain central.

Strengthening SEWB also requires investment in workforce capability, with a need to build understanding among both new and existing staff, and to embed SEWB principles within organisational practice. Participants highlighted the importance of clinical governance, appropriate training, and supporting community-led program design.

Finally, the discussion reinforced that research must be conducted under Aboriginal governance, grounded in truth-telling and deep listening. Building trust takes time and sustained engagement, and ethical, impactful research depends on strong relationships and collaboration with community.



Pictured: SEWB Network members during the small group workshops



Day 2

SEWBG-6 was facilitated by Michael Mitchell and Judith Lovegrove.

Speaker Presentations

Day 2 commenced with reflections from Day 1 followed by a panel discussion on 'SEWB in the current landscape and context,' chaired by Prof. Pat Dudgeon, p. 16.

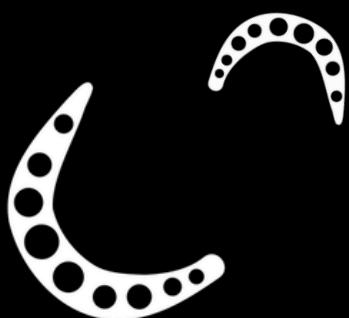
After morning tea, there were two sessions. One focused on the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre, p. 17, and the other focused on Cultural Safety, p. 18.

Then, there was another panel discussion on 'SEWB across the lifespan,' p. 19.

Group Insight Workshop

The facilitators held space for the SEWB Network to engage in reflective activities and discussions at the opening and close of Day 2. It was uncertain at the outset of SEWBG-6 if the Gatherings would continue and the SEWBG Committee wanted the Network to reflect on where they have been and where they were going and what kind of action was needed next.

Key insights from the Day 2 reflective workshop can be found on p. 20.





Day 2. Panel Discussion

SEWB in the current landscape and context

Rachel Fishlock (Yuin)
GDPSA.

Dr Monica Barolits-McCabe (Kungarakan)
NACCHO.

Tony Kiessler (Central Arrernte)
AIPA.

Chair - Prof. Pat Dudgeon AM (Bardi), TIMHWPB.

The panelists reflected on the historical journey of SEWB, highlighting the progression of key policies and the promise of high-level frameworks to create meaningful change. It was noted that their impact depends on how effectively they reach communities, where real change occurs. The National Agreement, shaped by strong leadership under Pat Turner, was described as a significant turning point that is beginning to shift the system, though change will take time it is happening now.

It was emphasised that SEWB cannot be addressed by services alone, but requires systems change. Through the Culture Care Connect (CCC) case study, the panel highlighted the importance of Aboriginal-led delivery and community decision-making grounded in cultural authority.

While this demonstrates what works, challenges remain - particularly short funding cycles, with a call for longer-term agreements. It was reinforced that leadership and solutions already exist, and the key question is whether systems are prepared to support them long term.

Workforce discussions highlighted growing demand for SEWB services alongside a shortage of Aboriginal professionals. Panelists emphasised the need to strengthen the Aboriginal workforce and ensure non-Indigenous practitioners are equipped with cultural competency and a solid understanding of SEWB. Workforce wellbeing was also raised, including the need to address racism within organisations and create safe and supportive pathways into the workforce. In considering future policy directions, panelists noted the need to better align existing frameworks under a shared purpose and embed SEWB approaches across both Aboriginal and mainstream services.

Final reflections emphasised the importance of accountability at government levels, alongside a sense of cautious optimism about ongoing reform. The discussion closed with a call for stronger cultural governance and safety within SEWB policy, and a reminder of the strength of the collective.

Session: Lived Experience



Lived Experience

Eliza Kitchener (Wiradjuri/Dharawal)
Shannon Cowdrey-Fong (Yawuru/Bunuba)
Monwell Levi (Torres Strait Islander Moa Island)
Indigenous Lived Experience Center.

The first session showcased the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre's newest resource - *Priorities in Suicide Prevention: A First Nations Lived Experience Collective Statement*, and the development of this paper that was born from the lived experiences group. The team shared about the intentionality of their branding and messaging which is about the power of lived experience and how to do First Nations lived experience advocacy safely, alongside education with the broader sector.

The team shared about the events they have hosted and how they were designed using best practice: 1) with wellbeing front of mind, 2) staying respectful of each individuals energy when gathering information, and 3) sharing ownership and authorship. The team shared that it is important to talk about how to do it well and to show others that it is possible by doing it themselves.

The team discussed the ten priorities identified by the group. These were:

1. Invest in Culture and First Nations Structures of Care
2. Promote Healthy Relationships, Love & Safety
3. Support People to Address our Individual and Collective pasts
4. Use and Honour Existing First Nations Knowledge and Evidence
5. Deliver Intersectional, Culturally Responsive Services
6. Hold Services Accountable for Genuine Care and Community Trust
7. Build and Sustain a Supported Peer Workforce
8. Remove Red Tape and Build Systems that Move with Our People
9. Treat Social Justice as Suicide Prevention
10. Restore Hope by Returning Ownership of Stories

The full report can be found at:
<https://ialec.com.au/free-resources>



Pictured: Lived Experience session speakers

Session: Cultural Safety



Cultural Safety

Professor Helen Milroy AM (Palyku)
TIMHWPB.

Professor Milroy reflected that true cultural safety requires the integration of social and emotional wellbeing approaches, reminding us that while SEWB never sleeps, services often do. She questioned whether systems are truly listening to ongoing calls to rethink funding cycles, or whether current approaches continue to limit progress. The absence of cultural governance in mainstream services was highlighted as a critical gap, with limited accountability and insufficient system responsibility.

Findings from Helen's teams recently published systematic review reinforced that cultural safety must be enacted in practice, requiring multiple interconnected elements to be present at once that are all equally valuable. This is something not yet achieved within current systems.

Trustworthiness was identified as a missing and often unexamined component in clinical environments, where it is assumed rather than actively built in culturally meaningful ways.

Creating safety for staff was also emphasised, including the ability to work relationally and outside rigid clinical structures. There needs to be support for Aboriginal people to work the way they want to work.

Helen asked the room, what is trust? She then described trust as two way, reciprocal. She asked, how can we trust others if no one trusts us? This raised important questions about whether systems and funders trust communities enough to support self-determined service delivery, and whether there is space for repair yet.

Tools such as safe yarning approaches (see cards via QR code below) were highlighted as important for engagement, alongside the need for clinicians to fully understand family and historical contexts. Without this, meaningful assessment and care are limited. She noted that fear and discomfort, particularly around issues such as the Stolen Generations, continue to create gaps in practice.

The discussion reinforced that building trust in safe and culturally grounded ways is essential, yet remains largely absent in mainstream services, underscoring the need for sustained change and accountability.



Safe Yarning Cards:



Day 2. Panel Discussion



SEWB Across the Lifespan

Thomas Quayle

NACCHO.

Dr Chontel Gibson (Kamilaroi)

Neuroscience Research Australia.

Obby Bedord (Miluwindy)

TIMHWB.

Chair - Dr. Monica Baroltis-McCabe (Kungarakan)

NACCHO.

Q1 – What are the key protectors of strong SEWB and biggest risks?

Panelists highlighted family, culture, and identity as central protective factors across the lifespan. For older people, maintaining independence, mobility, and opportunities to share and receive knowledge were critical, alongside navigating the ongoing impacts of the Stolen Generations, including mistrust of services and fear of judgement. For young people, strong cultural identity and connection to community were key, with recognition of intergenerational shame and the mixed impact of social media. Supporting both young people and their families was seen as essential to building strength across generations. Spirituality and connection to Country were also identified as important sources of wellbeing, particularly over time.

Q2 – In the context of recent events, how do we protect wellbeing?

Panelists reflected on the ongoing impact of racism and violence, and the emotional toll this places on communities. There was a strong call to empower young people and communities to respond with strength, while also creating space for healing. The importance of connection to culture, community, and Country as protective forces was reinforced, alongside the need for services to better support this work rather than relying on communities alone.

Q3 – How can we support longer-term programs and funding?

There was clear agreement that short-term funding undermines workforce stability and program impact. Participants emphasised the need for longer-term investment to support recruitment, retention, and the sustainability of effective programs, alongside stronger use of evidence to advocate for continued funding.

Q4 – What is the key message to carry forward?

Panelists emphasised that “listening is doing,” highlighting the need for active, accountable, and relational listening that leads to action. Across all groups, there was a shared message that the knowledge, strength, and solutions already exist within community and that these must be recognised and supported.



Pictured: Panelist for the Day 2 discussion

Group Reflection

The hosts asked the Network members present to each share one word that described their reflections on SEWBG-6.

The Gathering closed with reflections on what has been an intense but deeply positive and safe space, with many noting how energising it has been to come together. There was a shared sense of gratitude for the stories, passion, and commitment in the room, and recognition that the strength of the collective continues to grow.

Network members reflected that, while the work can be exhausting, it is also deeply fulfilling, and there is strong optimism that things will only continue to improve from here.

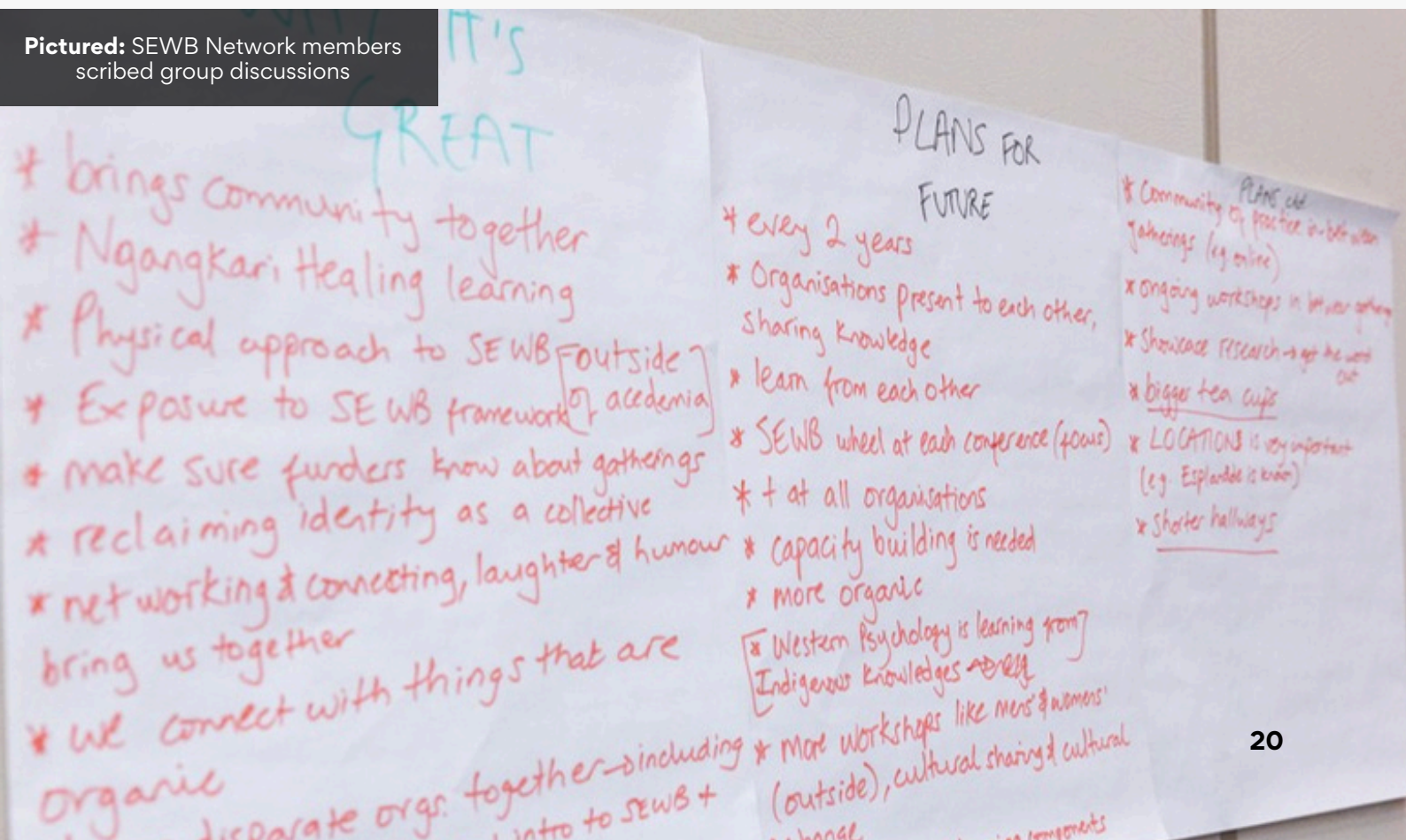
The group reflected on the importance of the work that has come before, noting how powerful it has been to see both the SEWB model and collective understanding of SEWB evolve over time. While acknowledging that it can feel daunting to consider how the next generation will carry forward the legacy of strong leaders, there was a clear emphasis on the enduring importance of Elders and Ancestors and the continuation of their knowledge and guidance still today.

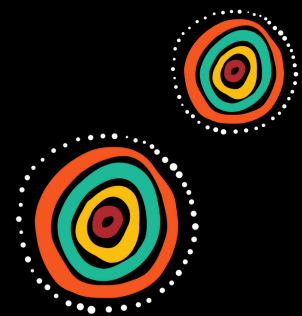
A personal story was shared of experiencing both institutional and individual racism, and the significant impact this had on the persons SEWB and all aspects of their life. They reflected that working with mob was deeply healing, as their worldview was validated and they were able to more fully connect with the domains of wellbeing. Understanding SEWB was described as transformative, bringing clarity, shifting perspective, and creating a sense of coherence where previously things had not made sense.

Thanks were extended to GDPSA and UWA staff, and to everyone who contributed their time, spirit, and knowledge. The importance of staying connected, continuing to walk together, and carrying forward the relationships built was emphasised. Participants spoke of the value of hearing stories, meeting new people, strengthening connections, and learning from the diversity of work across the country.

The Gathering closed with a sense of warmth and continuity. It was agreed that another SEWBG would be beneficial to all, and everyone was looking ahead to the next report and Gathering 7. The Gathering closed with a gentle reminder to tread lightly until meeting again.

Pictured: SEWB Network members scribed group discussions





Workshops Day

SEWBG-6 Day 0 was a workshops day. Workshops were held concurrently and facilitated separately.

Stolen Generations

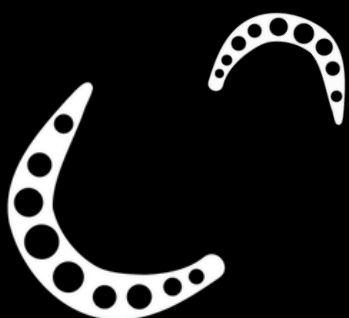
The Stolen Generation's workshop was facilitated by Leonie Williamson, Nicole Kilby and Tegan Scheffe from The Healing Foundation, p. 23.

Women's Yarning Circle

The Women's Yarning Circle and activities were facilitated by Aunty TJ and Aunty Alta, p. 24.

Men's SEWB

The Men's workshop was facilitated by Ted Wilkes and Michael Mitchell, and supported by Angus Loudon and Dr Rama Agung-Igusti, p. 25.



Pictured: Aunty TJ delivering a Welcome to Country for the Women's Workshop





Stolen Generations



Supporting the Stolen Generations: Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Survivors and Workforces

Leonie Williamson (Gubbi Gubbi/Butchulla)
Nicole Kilby (Wiradjuri/Ngemba)
Tegan Scheffe (Bidjara/Kamilaroi)
The Healing Foundation.

The workshop brought together Stolen Generations Organisations (SGOs), ACCHOs and partners to reflect on strengthening SEWB for survivors and their families. Grounded in care, truth-telling and lived experience, participants talked about how healing from forced removal is a lifelong process shaped by enduring grief, loss and resilience

The SGO workforce was recognised for its strength, connection to community, and lived experience. At the same time, there is a need for expanded trauma-informed training, alongside cultural governance and supervision to support staff wellbeing and prevent burnout. Smaller organisations face particular challenges, with staff often holding multiple roles and limited access to SEWB resources.

The SEWB Framework was strongly affirmed as a

holistic, culturally grounded model. While the model not always formally applied, its principles are embedded in practices.

Recommendations and conclusions from the workshop included:

- The SEWB model offers a strong, culturally grounded foundation, recognising the ongoing impacts of historical, social and political determinants.
- Trauma-informed training is needed to support holistic healing for survivors and workforce wellbeing.
- Clearer, more accessible training pathways and better promotion of existing opportunities are required.
- Workforce sustainability is a key challenge, requiring supervision, peer support, and strategies to reduce burnout and turnover.
- Greater sector connection through gatherings and communities of practice will strengthen capability and reduce isolation.
- SEWB training programs should be adapted to the specific contexts and resource constraints of SGOs. **23**

Women's Workshop



Women's Workshop

Aunty TJ (Noongar)
Aunty Alta (Noongar)

On day 0 of the Gathering (pre-gathering day), Aunty TJ and Aunty Alta ran a women's healing session in the park. The session was opened with introductions and a smoking ceremony using Banksia cones and eucalyptus.

The women began by meeting in a circle to paint each other's faces and build relationship and trust with the people sitting next to them.

The women then gathered to sit in another circle around smoking banksias and discussed healing and self-care. Participants spoke about what self-care was offered to them in the workplace and identified multiple avenues for self-care, such as clinical supervision, self-care days, connections with Elders, bush pharmacy, cultural supervision, team yarns and more. Aunty TJ spoke about the importance of self-care in the workplace when working in difficult spaces.

The group then identified if they had been impacted by the suicide of a loved one or colleague, with some sharing experiences of healing. Aunty Alta acknowledged that it can be very difficult to talk about the loss of a loved one by suicide and seek help when needed. The group then discussed SEWB and how individuals tend to their SEWB through their own rituals that connect them to culture and Country, with some sharing stories of what work for them to flourish.

All participants were given a white 'love stone' where they wrote down what they would like to release that doesn't serve them or weighs them down such as doubt, stress etc. These stones were wrapped in paperbark and eucalyptus.

The group then walked together to the beach where three women carried wreaths of eucalyptus and flowers to place in the ocean. Following this, all of the women stood with their feet in the water and threw their rocks into the ocean to release what was holding them back. The group thoroughly enjoyed the session and shared that they felt connected and light following the workshop.



Men's Workshop



Pictured: Men's Workshop participants SEWBG-6

Men's SEWB

Michael Mitchell (Yamatji)
Ted Wilkes (Noongar)
Dr Rama Agung-Igusti
Angus Loudon
TIMHWB.

The Men's Workshop highlighted that strong SEWB for Aboriginal men is grounded in culture, community, and relationships. Effective programs are locally embedded, flexible to community needs, and create safe, consistent spaces where men can come together to yarn, share experiences, and build trust. These spaces are critical for helping men understand trauma and intergenerational trauma, often for the first time, and to begin unpacking their experiences in culturally safe ways.

Connection to Country and culture emerged as central to strong SEWB. Activities such as fishing, hunting, and learning from Elders strengthen identity, pride, and a sense of purpose, while also supporting men to fulfil roles as providers and role models. Intergenerational mentoring was a key theme, with strong male leaders guiding younger men and creating pathways for growth, healing, and responsibility.

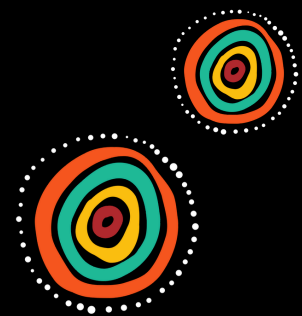
Participants emphasised that strong SEWB requires well-planned, community-led programs that are adequately resourced and accountable to community. This includes shifting funding and decision-making to Aboriginal organisations and measuring success through real community impact. However, significant barriers remain, including stigma around SEWB as 'women's work,' workforce shortages, burnout, and systemic challenges such as criminal record restrictions that can limit employment opportunities for young men.

Key priorities included strengthening cultural exchange, increasing opportunities to be on Country, embedding Elders and community champions in programs, and creating more safe spaces specifically for men. Participants also highlighted the need for improved pathways into SEWB work, including culturally appropriate recruitment and mentoring.

Overall, it was summarised that strong SEWB for men is holistic, bringing together culture, connection, leadership, and structural support to enable men to heal, grow, and support others. The group agreed to develop their workshop findings into a proposal for funding.

Pictured: SEWB Network members
from SEWBG-6 Day 1



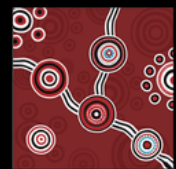
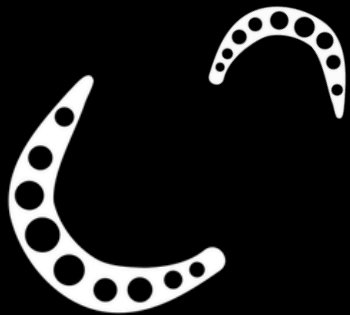


Thank you

We would like to acknowledge and thank everyone who contributed to the sixth SEWB Gathering, including:

- The SEWB Network and all who attended in person or online;
- NIAA for funding support to make this event possible;
- SEWBG-6 speakers and workshop facilitators;
- SEWBG-6 facilitators – Michael Mitchell and Judith Lovegrove;
- The SEWB Gathering Organising Committee –
TIMHWP staff: Pat Dudgeon, Helen Milroy, Rama Agung-Igusti, Eng Chua.
GDPSA staff: Rachel Fishlock, Juliet Dean, Kelli-Cooper-Durant, Tom Hodge, Juhleeya Bright, Lauren Brain, Odette Fuller.
NACCHO staff: Monica Barolits-McCabe, Danielle Dyll, Natane Bertosa.
AIPA staff: Tony Kiessler, Alyce Merritt.

SEWB Gatherings would not be possible without the commitment from partner organisations and their leaders who guide the committee through the event. We are especially grateful to Professor Pat Dudgeon AM and Professor Helen Milroy AM, whose leadership, tireless work in SEWB, strong national networks, and belief in and dedication to building a better future have made the SEWB Gatherings possible.



Pictured: Activity facilitated during the SEWBG-6 Women's Workshop





SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GATHERING 5 APPENDIX | SEWBG-6 VISUAL SUMMARY

Ronda Clarke (Nyikina)

Throughout the SEWBG-6 Gathering, Rhonda drew and took detailed notes of all the speakers presentations and the reflections shared by the Network. Over the next few weeks, she turned her notes and drawings into the artwork pictured right.

Rhonda describes: Designed around the Aboriginal symbol for SEWB, the painting reflects history, honours the present, and shapes the future, reinforcing that SEWB is everyone's responsibility. Under the theme Circles of Wisdom, the Gathering created space for connection, listening, sharing, and building partnerships. The Welcome to Country is represented through earth and sea colours, and symbolises healing, protection, and relationality at the heart of SEWB.

The Gecko occupies the centre of the painting as a powerful symbol of SEWB itself. Like the Gecko, wellbeing is ever-present, adaptive, and resilient, it moves across day and night, across challenges and change. Circles, dots, and coloured lines on and around the Gecko reflect connection, data, partnerships, and the many sectors engaged in supporting wellbeing, from health services to culturally safe community programs.

At the very top of the visual painting sits the Emu head, a powerful and deeply respected symbol within Aboriginal culture. The emu represents perseverance, resilience, protection, and guidance, qualities that are essential to the ongoing journey of SEWB. As an animal that can travel long distances without stopping, it reflects endurance and strength, reminding us of the sustained effort required to create meaningful change across systems, communities, and generations. Within the context of the SEWB Gathering, the Emu symbolises accountability, leadership, and collective responsibility. It represents the coming together of knowledge systems to guide decision-making and action: research, policy, lived experience, and cultural wisdom. It also reflects the importance of oversight and integrity in how services are designed and delivered, ensuring they are grounded in trust, respect, and strong cultural foundations.

The artwork invites us to reflect:
How do we genuinely bring together western and traditional knowledges in ways that are balanced, respectful, and led by community?
What does it truly mean to embed culture across all levels of service delivery as the foundation?



How do we ensure that systems remain accountable to the communities they serve, and that cultural authority is recognised and upheld? In what ways can we better support the roles of men, women, families, and communities so that everyone is seen, heard, and strengthened within culturally meaningful and safe SEWB frameworks?

Flowing from the Emu are white teardrops, symbolising future directions and the ongoing journey of change. These tears represent both reflection and hope, acknowledging the experiences, challenges, and truths that have been shared, while also pointing toward collective healing and transformation. They embody the idea of coming together as one, reinforcing unity, shared responsibility, and the importance of working in partnership.

Ultimately, these elements speak to a future where SEWB is everyone's business, where services are culturally safe and secure, where systems are responsive and accountable, and where Aboriginal ways of being, knowing, and doing are both respected and embedded at the heart of practice.



SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GATHERING 5

APPENDIX | SCHEDULE

Tuesday 3 March

WORKSHOPS DAY: OPTIONAL

TIME	ITEM	DETAILS/FACILITATOR
9:00am-9:30am	ARRIVAL	
9:30am-12:00pm	Workshop 1: Stolen Generations	SIRIUS ROOM Healing Foundation
12.30pm-1.15pm	LUNCH	
1:00pm-3:00pm	Workshop A: Women's Group Workshop B: Men's Group	SIRIUS ROOM Aunty TJ and Obby Bedford KING SOUND Michael Mitchell
3:00pm-3:30pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
3:30pm	WORKSHOPS DAY CLOSE	

Pictured: Activity facilitated during the SEWBG-6 Women's Workshop





SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GATHERING 5

APPENDIX | SCHEDULE

Wednesday 4 March

GATHERING DAY ONE

TIME	ITEM	DETAILS/FACILITATOR
8.30am-9.00am	Registrations and welcome coffee	Foyer
9.00am-9.30am	Welcome to Country	Dr Richard Walley and Alton Walley
9.30am-10.30am	Opening Addresses	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prof Pat Dudgeon AM TIMHWB • Prof Helen Milroy AM Gayaa Dhuwi • Monica Barolits-McCabe NACCHO • Tony Kiessler AIPA <p>Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell</p>
10.30am-11.00am	MORNING TEA	
11.00am-11.30am	Introductions	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
11.30am-12.00pm	Group discussion: Reflections of the previous SEWB Gatherings	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
12.00pm-12.30pm	Day 0 Workshop Summaries	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healing Foundation Stolen Generations • Obby Bedford Women's Workshop • Michael Mitchell Men's Workshop
12.30pm-1.30pm	LUNCH	
1.30pm-3.00pm	Panel Discussion: Translation from research to policy to practice	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rachel Radcliffe AHCWA • Tegan Scheffe UWA • ? ? • ? ? <p>Chaired by Rachel Fishlock GDPSA</p>
3.00pm-3.15pm	AFTERNOON TEA	
3.15pm-4.30pm	Group discussion: Translation from research to policy to practice	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
5.00pm	DAY ONE FINISHES	
6.30pm-10.00pm	WELCOME DINNER <u>Registration required</u>	ESPLANADE HOTEL



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SOCIAL & EMOTIONAL WELLBEING GATHERING 5

APPENDIX | SCHEDULE

Thursday 5 March

GATHERING DAY TWO

TIME	ITEM	DETAILS/FACILITATOR
8.30am-9.00am	Registrations and welcome coffee	Foyer
9.00am-9.15am	Reflections from Day 1	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
9.15am-9.45am	Panel Discussion: SEWB in the current landscape and context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rachel Fishlock GDPSA • Monica Barolits-McCabe NACCHO • Tony Keissler APIA Chaired by Pat Dudgeon AM
10.15am-10.45am	MORNING TEA	
9.45am-10.15am	Session: Lived Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Eliza Kitchener, Shannon Fong & Manuel Lewis Lived Experience Centre
10.45am-12.15pm	Session: Cultural Safety	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Helen Milroy TIMHWP
12.15pm-1.15pm	LUNCH	
1.15pm-1.45pm	Panel Discussion: SEWB Across the Lifespan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thomas ? NACCHO • Chontel Gibson NeuRA • Obby Bedford UWA • Kiaya Leonard NSW LinkUp Chaired by Monica Barolits-McCabe
1.45pm-3.15pm	Group discussion: SEWB Across the Lifespan	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
	WORKING AFTERNOON TEA	
3.15pm-4.00pm	Group reflection: Looking forward	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
4.30pm-4.45pm	Summary of the Gathering	Facilitated by Judith Lovegrove and Michael Mitchell
4.45pm-5.00pm	FINISH AND CLOSING REMARKS	Facilitators and organisers



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A group photo taken at SEWB Gathering 6: Circles of Wisdom in Walyalup. Picture: supplied.

Circles of Wisdom



Pat Dudgeon

Over five years have passed since our consortium held our first Social and Emotional Wellbeing Gathering in Boorloo/Perth – and this month we hosted our sixth gathering, Circles of Wisdom. It was wonderful to see how far we've come.

Circles of Wisdom was an energising and heartening event – representatives from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peak bodies and Aboriginal community-controlled organisations (ACCHOs), alongside academics, practitioners, policymakers, and front-line workers working in Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) and mental health came together as one. Over two days in Walyalup/Fremantle we yarned and listened – sharing about best-practice programs and services and the future of policy, practice and research in SEWB for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Our event featured presentations, panel discussions, and importantly, small group-sharing sessions and workshops.

At the commencement of day one, Noongar leader, Dr Richard Walley and his son, Alton Walley, delivered a Welcome to Country at Esplanade Park. This was a vital and meaningful start to our day. We were then hosted throughout by our deadly MCs, Yamatji man, Michael Mitchell and Ngarinjeri woman, Judith Lovegrove. As speakers and panellists, we were honoured to be joined on the stage by our consortium partners, Monica Barolite-McCabe from NACCHO,



Helen Milroy

Tony Kessler from the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA), and Rachel Fishlock from Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit), alongside many, many other talented and dedicated people working in this space.

It was so exciting to see the wonderful Ronda Clarke (an attendee and presenter way back at SEWB Gathering 1) in our midst, not just listening and yarning, but also drawing throughout the two-day event. Ronda was kind enough to agree to do a 'visual mapping' of our gathering – a process in which she uses her analytical and creative skills in symbiosis. She summarised key findings and learnings from the event in a beautiful painting which will be shared in our SEWB Gathering 6 report, in due course. Before our event kicked off officially, we had a day of workshops – one on Stolen Generations hosted by the Healing Foundation, a Women's Group hosted by Auntie Tjalaminu Mia, and a Men's Group hosted by Michael Mitchell. More on these to follow in future columns.

The SEWB Gatherings have come a long way since our initial meeting in 2021; from influencing national policy, to providing safe spaces for SEWB teams to come together and discuss what has been working and what hasn't. With these meetups, we provide an opportunity to celebrate the wins, big and small, and to facilitate discussions between ACCHOs and peak bodies.

At the event we honoured Auntie Roma Winmar for her beautiful artwork and story,



Gayaa Dhuwi by Auntie Roma Winmar, 2015.

created in 2015 to form the visual identity of Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia. The painting helped guide us during our first gathering in 2021, and it still stands today. "It is about people coming together to find ways of understanding and acknowledging problems and developing pathways and responses that lead to action that is practical, progressive, needs based, relevant to current situations, and that strengthens resilience and builds capacity in the collective: within the structure of the community."

The small group breakout sessions across the two-day event gave us all the chance to hear each other and to share. At this gathering, we wanted to come full circle and reflect back on where we started, where we've travelled, and where we are now. This was anticipated to be our last SEWB Gathering, so it was especially important to bring together all our learnings over the past five years and close the circle.

One of the loudest messages to come out of the group sessions was that the gatherings need to continue in some form or

another. We heard from attendees who felt the gatherings are still in their infancy and need to be nurtured to grow into something bigger and better. The group expressed a desire to build these gatherings until they reach more people who need it – to nurture them from infancy to childhood.

A big message from the group was that organisations around Australia, including funding bodies and policymakers, need to support their staff to better their understanding of SEWB. And, particularly, more education on SEWB is needed to help translate what workers see on the ground – up to policy makers. Additionally, the SEWB workforce needs more and better training, development pathways, and support. In short, we need to better the understanding of SEWB nation-wide and better support the SEWB workforce, who are under enormous pressures.

Another big issue was trust; this came up in group discussions and in presenting our cultural safety research. A shared understanding amongst the group was that research must be

conducted with Aboriginal governance, via truth-telling and through listening deeply to real stories. Research, when done with community, is an extended process – time is needed to build trust.

As the last gathering in this series, we are now considering how the strong connections, knowledge-sharing, and collaboration fostered through these events can continue. We aim to build on the momentum created and to continue to amplify the importance of SEWB for our people and communities. Gatherings give people strength and a shared sense of purpose. It's good for our SEWB to know there is a pathway forward.

SEWB Gatherings are co-hosted by Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing, the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia, and the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association.

Professor Pat Dudgeon AM is a Bardi woman from the Kimberley region of Western Australia. She is Australia's first Aboriginal psychologist, Director of the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATISIP) at the University of Western Australia and founding Chair of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA).

Professor Helen Milroy AM is a Palyku woman whose homelands are in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. She is Australia's first Indigenous doctor and child psychiatrist, the Stan Perron Professor of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry at the Perth Children's Hospital and University of Western Australia, and Honorary Research Fellow at the Kid's Research Institute. She is an artist and published author and illustrator of children's books and has been shortlisted for several children's literature awards.



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