

Alarming increase in Indigenous suicide rates demands new ways of working

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A prominent researcher in Indigenous health from The University of Western Australia has called for a new approach to suicide prevention programs, following figures released by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) that show a 21 per cent increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide rates over the past decade.

Professor Pat Dudgeon from UWA Poche Centre for Indigenous Health and School of Indigenous Studies said the figures which uncover a concerning 24 per cent increase in male Indigenous suicides and a 17 per cent increase in female Indigenous suicides were unacceptable.

"We need more funding for programs to help decrease rates of Indigenous suicide," Professor Dudgeon said. "But more than ever, we need to work differently—hand in hand with our communities, to address the root causes of suicide.

"Programs need to be culturally sensitive to turn the situation around, but we need the backing of Australian governments, funding to meet our additional needs, and new ways of working led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities."

With [suicide](#) the second cause of [death](#) among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men, and the fifth leading cause of death in the Indigenous population overall, Professor Dudgeon said there was a serious need for an overhaul of the current system.

"Suicide accounts for one in 20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander deaths, compared to about one in 50 non-Indigenous deaths," she said.

"Our communities must be empowered and funded to support the cultural, emotional and social wellbeing of our young people to help them develop their own solutions."

Professor Tom Calma AO, Chancellor of the University of Canberra and Co-Chair of Reconciliation Australia said the ABS report which aggregates five years of data to identify broad trends not only confirmed the suspected rise was real, it was much worse than imagined.

"This alarming picture underscores the need to build on existing action

and fund new activity to stop further rises and turn the situation around," he said.

"Changes in the way government programs and services are funded need to be made, and when something works, let's back it."

Provided by University of Western Australia

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