Medical Xpress

Report identifies need for change in Indigenous suicide prevention

November 10 2016, by David Stacey

A new report led by The University of Western Australia calls on the Federal Government to support a radical overhaul of suicide prevention programs including an Indigenous community-led national prevention plan.

The report's lead author Professor Pat Dudgeon from UWA's School of Indigenous Studies, said the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (ATSISPEP) had evaluated 88 suicide prevention programs Australia-wide to identify the successful ones. The report was launched today in Canberra by Senator Pat Dodson.

"Nearly one in three young Australians (aged between five and 17 years) who takes their own life is Indigenous and this report was about finding out which programs were working to help us improve our response to suicide prevention," Professor Dudgeon said.

"We also developed an evaluation tool to ensure vital factors were employed in suicide prevention programs and to measure the level of success of these programs. This gives the funding bodies an understanding of what works and the people running the programs some certainty in long-term funding."

The report made 17 recommendations for government and those working in Indigenous suicide prevention, including funding to divert Indigenous young people from the criminal justice system through sport and other activities or access to quality education and employment.

It also recommended prevention programs should focus on healing and strengthening social and emotional wellbeing and cultural renewal as well as developing specific programs to meet the needs of those who had experienced child sexual abuse.

Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services should remain the preferred providers to mental health care within their communities and Indigenous young people should be supported and trained to work in suicide prevention among their peer group.

Professor Dudgeon said the project team had run a pilot critical response project in WA, working with Indigenous families affected by suicide trauma to map long-term support needs, galvanise more effective care coordination and report where needs were not being met in communities with limited or no services.

"The ATSISPEP report has also helped us to raise awareness of the pressing issues that can lead to suicide," she said.

Professor Dudgeon, from the Bardi people of the Kimberley region in Western Australia, has made a significant contribution to promoting and enhancing the mental health and human rights of Indigenous Australians as Australia's first Aboriginal psychologist.

She is a National Mental Health Commissioner and director of the National Empowerment Project, an Indigenous suicide prevention project working with 11 Aboriginal communities around Australia.

More information: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project Report: www.atsispep.sis.uwa.edu.au/__ … Report-Final-Web.pdf

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