



KEEP YOUR SPIRIT STRONG

Stakeholder kit



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Department of Health

KEEP YOUR SPIRIT STRONG

DEAR COLLEAGUES, FRIENDS AND COMMUNITY,

This year, many of us have faced significant challenges including being separated from family and friends, facing financial uncertainty or job losses and have not been able to conduct ceremonies in the ways we are used to. This has inevitably had a pronounced impact on our mental health.

Prior to COVID-19, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people already faced health and mental health disadvantages and challenges in relation to mental health care. We also know that globally, Indigenous peoples are often disproportionately impacted by pandemics.

To further raise the awareness around mental health and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' social and emotional wellbeing, the Australian Government Department of Health has developed a suite of resources. This project stands under a name **"Keep Your Spirit Strong"** to recognise and acknowledge the holistic view of health that encompasses Country, family, kinship networks, spirituality and many other domains of life.

For your convenience, a stakeholder kit has been developed incorporating useful resources and information about mental health. We hope you can share the kit and its resources with your networks and contribute in promoting important messaging around mental health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Also, as part of the broader national campaign, I encourage you to visit www.headtohealth.gov.au, a digital mental health gateway where you can find a range of resources, and/or reach out to health workers in your local area. Head to Health was developed through extensive consultation and engagement with mental health professionals, service providers, people with lived experience of mental illness including carers, and the general public. There is a section dedicated to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at health.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders that includes guidance on how to maintain good mental health and find support.

Most importantly, I also encourage you to start conversations with your friends, families and communities and support them to **keep their spirit strong**.

Thank you for supporting this important project.

Kind regards,



Dr Ruth Vine
Deputy Chief Medical Officer for Mental Health
Department of Health



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WHAT IS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

A range of resources have been developed by the Department of Health to support a new national mental health awareness project “Keep Your Spirit Strong”. The resources in this kit are anchored around **keeping spirit strong** and the social and emotional wellbeing of communities.

As many of you know, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, social and emotional wellbeing is a term that speaks to the interconnectedness between our social, emotional, spiritual and cultural wellbeing. Drawing on this worldview and bringing these ways of seeing and knowing into mental health, is critical to understanding how to **keep our spirit strong**.

The resources in the kit cover a range of issues including supporting people to identify when they are not feeling well and when to seek help; how to better understand mental health; encouraging families and people in the community to share how they are feeling; and connecting with each other. The aim is to normalise and de-stigmatise conversations about mental health and encourage individuals to ask for help when they need it; and to navigate and connect with services relevant to their needs. Importantly, it also focusses on acknowledging the impacts of COVID-19 and other challenging events.

In addition to linking to some of the social content, the kit shares a number of case studies and stories that demonstrate culturally-led ways of working and how an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander worldview and understanding of mental health shapes and delivers effective care.

The case studies represent unique and community driven approaches in a range of communities across Australia.

WHAT YOU CAN DO TO HELP

Sharing stories and empowering those who need support to seek it, is one of the most important actions we can take to **keep our spirit strong**. There are lots of ways you can use this stakeholder kit and continue to support communities. You can:

- > share the social media content developed. The content can be downloaded at health.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders.
- > promote the case studies within your networks, staffing groups and communities as good practice examples that showcase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led approaches to mental health and social and emotional wellbeing.
- > share examples from your own communities and families about what **keeps your spirit strong**. Share them on social media and use the hashtag **#keepyourspiritstrong**



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CAMPAIGN KEY MESSAGES

- > Acknowledging 2020 has been a tough year for our mob and life is currently more challenging than normal
- > Mob's connection to Country, culture and community has been damaged but there are ways to reconnect and keep your spirit strong
- > We need to continue working on removing stigma and shame from mental health issues and normalise seeking help when you need it
- > It is essential to prioritise social and emotional wellbeing and encourage people to look after themselves and others
- > There are practical and accessible ways to manage physical and emotional health that alleviates the burden of stress such as regular exercise, healthy eating, connecting with Country, keeping in contact with family and community, and engaging with cultural materials
- > It is also important to keep our spirit strong by sharing our thoughts and feelings with others and checking in with each other
- > There is strength in our identity and spirit, so it is important to practise behaviours that honour these
- > Visit www.headtohealth.gov.au for information, advice, and free or low-cost phone

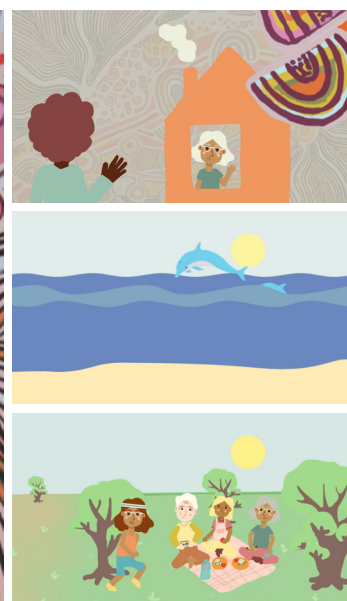
COMMUNICATIONS ASSETS

- > Video animations
- > Social media content
- > Case studies
- > Images



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VIDEO ANIMATION

The hero animation video is the signature piece in the suite of resources, raising awareness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander social and emotional wellbeing. It is a story-led animation which acknowledges how difficult this and previous years have been for many communities, provides tips and ideas on how to keep spirit strong and reminds us all that support is out there. It also invites people to talk to their local health worker or visit www.headtohealth.gov.au if they need support.

This animation video is designed to be viewed and shared through social media, eDMs, websites and other platforms, to support people to keep their spirit strong.

MORE INFORMATION: health.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders or at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3NCXgMk7KA8>



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HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES THAT YOU CAN USE ACROSS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS

COPY:

- > It is not easy to support others when they are struggling to keep their spirit strong. Checking in and having a yarn can make a difference. Making sure everyone is okay makes your mob even stronger. Find out more at www.headtohealth.gov.au
[#keepyourspiritstrong](https://www.facebook.com/keepyourspiritstrong)



- > Stressed? Worried? Sad? With so much going on around us, it's sometimes hard to recognise how we're feeling and how to explain it to someone. Keep your spirit strong by reflecting on your own emotions and sharing them with others. Find out more at www.headtohealth.gov.au
[#keepyourspiritstrong](https://www.facebook.com/keepyourspiritstrong)



- > There is so much strength in identity and your spirit... Your community can support you to keep your spirit strong. Yarning, going to Country, connecting with your mob, music and arts...this can all help you feel better. If you need help to keep your spirit strong, talk to your local health worker or visit www.headtohealth.gov.au
[#keepyourspiritstrong](https://www.facebook.com/keepyourspiritstrong)



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HERE ARE SOME EXAMPLES THAT YOU CAN USE ACROSS YOUR SOCIAL MEDIA NETWORKS *(continued)*

COPY:

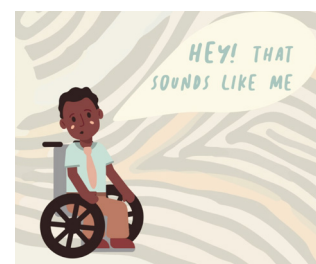
- > It's been hard for our mob. Your spirit may not be as strong. Your mob may need your help. Accept this year has been difficult and seek help if you need it. Find out more at www.headtohealth.gov.au **#keepyourspiritstrong**



- > Sometimes it's hard to identify why we might be feeling the way we are. It's OK to reach out for help. Learn more about keeping spirit strong at www.headtohealth.gov.au **#keepyourspiritstrong**



- > There are a lot of big words used to describe how we might be feeling. When we understand these words better, they can help us explain how we are feeling to those around us. Support is out there. Find out more at www.headtohealth.gov.au **#keepyourspiritstrong**



EXAMPLE IMAGES: *(all images are available on the website at health.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders)*



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Keeping spirit strong through a holistic approach

CASE STUDY: WAMINDA

Imagine receiving a care package from your local Aboriginal community controlled health care provider with basic care needs such as food, toiletries, mask, hand sanitiser and craft activities for your children. Your Elders are receiving their medical needs, toiletries and tailored care hampers along with ready to eat healthy meals. Everyone is being reminded to practice self-care by staying positive and active and are nurturing their bodies through eating fresh local wholesome food. That was Waminda's response to lockdown earlier this year in order to ensure good health, wellbeing and the safety of their mob.

Guided by a holistic vision linking culture, education, health and well-being, this organisation aims to see their community thriving through culturally driven holistic care. During the lockdown period office spaces were turned into production/collection sites, gathering and delivery basic care needs and care packages to community members across the coast.

Waminda walks alongside Aboriginal families across the New South Wales South Coast Region; the organisation has strong cultural governance and is guided by a Board of Management of seven local Aboriginal women representatives of the communities in which it operates. Waminda's internal Cultural Committee and 'Model of Care' ensures that the organisation is responsive and accountable to community needs and remains culturally guided.

The organisation offers a wide range of strength-based programs targeting a whole of life and whole of family approach to health and wellbeing care. Waminda emphasises a strong community approach to holistic care and connecting country and culture with a key focus on identity, connection, healing and keeping spirit strong.



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CASE STUDY: WAMINDA *(continued)*

The Baalang Healing framework is the groundwork for all of Waminda's services. This framework was developed in response to the social and emotional wellbeing, spiritual, cultural and physical health needs of our community.

"Waminda services have been designed and are led by Aboriginal women under the guidance of Elders. Their voices are powerful in the design of our healing processes, practices and there is a commitment to pass on cultural knowledge, identity and healing for generations to come," said Kristine Falzon, Waminda's executive manager.

The health professionals working across programs include Aboriginal health practitioners, therapists, healing counsellors, case managers, cultural mentors and after-hours support staff. Self-determination is a key focus for Waminda, as participants are encouraged to recognise and value themselves as their own healers. Throughout programs, the team at Waminda have also created resources for the community specific to their needs, including free after hours care, support lines, and additional support to increase accessibility to assistance.

Waminda has been operating on the South Coast for over 36 years. Over the past 14 years, the organisation has grown from roughly 10 employees to currently over 120. Waminda prides itself on its staff wellbeing framework, understanding that our staff cannot provide effective services to the broader community without prioritising self-care themselves. This investment is why the organisation has such a high retention rate for staff, especially considering that most of our staff are local Koori women holding family, community and cultural responsibility outside their employment.

Waminda's vision is that Women and their Aboriginal families are widely admired and proud of their achievements in their own communities and the broader Shoalhaven.

"Waminda aims to provide a culturally safe service, offering women and their Aboriginal families an opportunity to belong and receive quality holistic, health and well-being support across the life span," said Kristine Falzon.

"We've not only had positive response from community members receiving support throughout this challenging time, but we've also had the opportunity to build on and strengthen community networks to enhance timely referral pathways for communities to access other support services ongoing". With the majority of Waminda staff being local Koori women, they understand the importance of walking/working alongside grassroots community providing timely, flexible and responsive holistic care and support to address community needs.

The shorter, web version of this case study can be shared in eDMs and on websites. For the web version of this case study, please visit health.gov.au/coronavirus-covid-19-social-and-emotional-wellbeing-resources-for-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islanders.



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The healing power of horses

CASE STUDY: **YAWARDANI JAN-GA**

Using the innate healing power of horses, Yawardani Jan-ga helps young Aboriginal people to build awareness and become more confident. The program relies on the wisdom of these magnificent animals who support people with their calming and accepting nature by providing non-verbal insights by mirroring participants vibrations and behaviours.

Yawardani Jan-ga or the 'Helping Horses' program based in Broome is an innovative equine assisted learning program that was previously piloted in the mid-west region of Western Australia. Led by Professor Juli Coffin, head of Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal Young People at the Telethon Kids Institute, the program has taken years of research to try and fill a gap by providing an evidence-based approach to the long-term healing of young Aboriginal people.

The horses utilised throughout the program have helped kids and youth in the Kimberley region to develop valuable insights and life skills and manage obstacles in a non-judgemental, safe and exciting environment that is naturally appealing to young people. From the training that is carried out to the program itself, Yawardani Jan-ga revolves around coordinated care, ensuring a 'wrap-around' style service is offered. With around 200 'active' kids, the program supports positive relationship building through awareness, positive self-thought and self-regulation – all things that equine-assisted learning can teach.

"The non-inclusive conversation around young Aboriginal people's wellbeing and particularly suicide, made me want to take action. There's always lots of talk but no action towards building programs and facilitating and maintaining support. I wanted to do something practical," said Professor Coffin.



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CASE STUDY: YAWARDANI JAN-GA *(continued)*

“When training to run equine-assisted learning, I found it wasn’t very Aboriginal friendly. The training process was very clinical and although I have a background in psychology and teaching, I believed it was not tailored appropriately to Aboriginal ways of working in the social and emotional wellbeing space. This program delivers support from the perspective of the Aboriginal world view, and run by Aboriginal people for Aboriginal people.”

In 2019, Professor Coffin and a colleague had the Yawardai Jan-ga curriculum was endorsed by the founder Meggin Kirby, from Equine Institute Australia to rewrite the training manual which was then put into action with this year’s group of local Aboriginal trainees. The training was delivered successfully, with the inclusion of language and a framework which was culturally-sensitive. Sixteen local Aboriginal people were taken through the training process and now deliver the program alongside Professor Coffin as ‘Equine Assisted Learning Practitioners’.

Everyone is encouraged to enter the program no matter where they have come from or what has happened to them in the past. Kids participating in the program aren’t asked to fill out ‘clinical’ personal forms or ‘tick boxes’ in regard to their circumstances. Instead, they agree to be videoed and photographed which are then resources that can assist to evaluate their progress. This highlights the experiential form of healing that the program promotes.

After 5 and then 10 sessions, Prof Coffin and the project delivery team liaise with each person’s referrers, which may include Headspace, Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service and Local Aboriginal Medical Service, and involve parents and carers in discussions about their progress and future requirements.

The program is an evidence-based official clinical trial which is important in ensuring that it isn’t looked past as a legitimate tool in helping young Aboriginal people heal and continue to heal.

“The community support and acceptance of Yawardani Jan-ga is fantastic. It’s amazing how many people have simply heard of it and then go and ask health practitioners for their children or grandchildren to be referred, or are interested in training to deliver the program. This community engagement proves that the program has the ability to make a genuine change in these participants’ lives,” said Prof Coffin.

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Building a strong tree for strong spirit

CASE STUDY: RED DUST HEALING

“Imagine the seed of a tree being planted – no matter what the type of tree, all trees begin this way, as a seed, under the ground, growing roots, keeping the tree grounded and allowing it to grow strong. Now imagine the roots as our support networks – our family, our friends, and our people. Then imagine us as the trunk of the tree, growing up because of our strong roots. Now we look at the branches and they represent all of our choices and all of our experiences.” This is how Wiradjuri man, Uncle Tom Powell, founder of Red Dust Healing, encourages people to visualise themselves and their lives so that they can find the way to heal.

Red Dust Healing is a cultural healing program that empowers Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to confront rejection, hurt and anger in their lives.

The program examines the intergenerational effects of colonisation on the mental, emotional, physical and spiritual well-being of the participants. Rejection encompasses neglect, abuse, grief, suicide, abandonment, domestic violence, and loss, and the program is centred on reinforcing to the participants that rejection is not their fault.

Red Dust Healing uses numerous models and tools to guide participants through the program, with the Tree model being one of the most prominent. Participants are instructed to look at what is absorbed through the root system of the tree as nutrients and that these nutrients can be both good and bad. The program highlights that bad nutrients can stem from roots, particularly rejection, and that rejection can have a significant impact on their trunk (themselves) and their branches (their choices).



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CASE STUDY: RED DUST HEALING *(continued)*

Uncle Tom also reinforces that rejection is not the fault of the participant and through understanding tools and strategies to deal with these bad nutrients, participants are empowered to make positive behavioural changes. “One of the most profound impacts of the program is when participants realise and understand that a lot of their choices and their rejection is not their fault. It is an extremely powerful moment and is the first step to not only fixing the relationship they have with themselves, but with those around them as well,” said Uncle Tom.

The importance of having strong relations with community and mob is well known as a key factor in maintaining ideal social and emotional wellbeing and is something that Red Dust is inherently aware. “More than anything, Red Dust is about restoring families and letting people know that they are worthy and loved. Through this, people regain their sense of dignity and integrity and their spirit starts to heal,” said Uncle Tom.

With the impact of COVID-19 being far and wide, Uncle Tom acknowledges that people and communities are feeling fragile and disconnected. To combat this, Uncle Tom encourages people to only worry about the things you can control, to remain true to yourself, and to learn tools that reinforce how you can best feed your roots with good nutrients.

A program participant has said that, “the main benefit (for Aboriginal people) is that their spirit heals, it actually does heal. It actually comes together again, if you can visualise that. All things are possible from that place. And you can move forward. So your spirit heals and it’s about integration. It doesn’t matter what anyone does to us, we are whole, we are spirit. Hold your head up high, know that you’re worth it, that you’re as valuable as anyone else and be proud of the colour of your skin. Be proud of it and your people are with you. And Red Dust Healing brings you back to that place.”

Red Dust Healing has achieved meaningful change to the mental health of its participants and throughout the program’s history, Uncle Tom has always stayed true to Red Dust’s motto: “When the dust is settled on our lives, all we get to keep and take with us is our dignity, our integrity and the love and respect we shared with people.”

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The artwork featured in this kit and throughout the resources was created by Barkindji, Malyangapa artist Jasmine Miikika Craciun. The artwork is representative of a healthy mind and spirit and shows that when our emotional needs are met and supported through connection to country, connection to mob or support from friends or specialists, this can create a strong and happy spirit.

CONTACT

If you need other file formats of the assets or require more information, please contact:

coronacomms@health.gov.au



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