

MHCC Reconciliation Action Plan 2014-2016

working together for mental health

Final Report

December 2016



RAP endorsed by:





Mental Health Coordinating Council

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Introduction

Reconciliation Action Plans (RAPs) turn good intentions into actions. They're about creating relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and other Australians. As part of MHCC's Strategic Plan for 2012-2015 we set out to undertake a Reconciliation Action Plan. At the beginning of our journey Reconciliation Australia provided MHCC with a tailored workshop, which guided the organisation through the process of developing actions to achieve enhanced respect, relationships and opportunities with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people within the workplace and broader community.

By the end of the workshop, we had drafted the makings of the RAP including:

- A defined vision for reconciliation shared by the whole organisation
- A defined understanding of our business and what we could offer toward reconciliation
- An overview of our RAP including why we were keen to progress it, and who would be involved
- Actions to address the following three objectives: Relationships; Respect; and Opportunities

MHCC chose to complete an **Innovate RAP** which is designed for organisations that have developed relationships with their Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander stakeholders and are ready to develop or implement programs/ activities for cultural learning, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment and supplier diversity. The Innovate RAP gave us the ability to develop and test new and innovative approaches, and embed the RAP in our organisation. In this report we share with members our reflections and learnings from the journey, and utilise our experience to embed our RAP and the organisation's policies and procedures, and assist members likewise in the future.

Prior to the RAP commencing MHCC undertook a number of initiatives with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. These

initiatives continue or were completed during the term of the RAP. These initiatives included:

- *No NGO left behind*, infrastructure grants focused on providing funding to organisations offering specific services for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Establishment of an Aboriginal Reference Group to provide guidance on ensuring training materials are culturally appropriate
- Aboriginal Careers in Mental Health Traineeship program
- Customisation of the training for the Advanced Diploma in Management (Leadership in Action) specifically for Aboriginal Managers. The participants of the Aboriginal-specific Leadership in Action training in 2011 awarded MHCC with a "Just too deadly" award for this training.
- MHCC also received the 'Education, Training or Workforce Development Award' at TheMHS Conference 2015. The award reflects the significant personal and organisational commitment of all the project partners and participants, including the 10 community managed organisations that hosted trainees, the 46 trainees who participated, the partnership between MHCC and DEC (Department Education & Communities) as well as staff, trainers, mentors and funders.



- Customisation of the training for the Certificate IV in Mental Health specifically for Aboriginal students
- Relationship with Aboriginal Employment Services (AES)

The following initiatives commences during the term of the RAP:

- An agreement between MHCC and Aboriginal Indigenous Health *InfoNet*. The purpose of this agreement is to facilitate and promote cooperation and collaboration between the two organisations as a part of their commitments to closing the gap in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health outcomes.



- Over the period of the RAP, MHCC has engaged in consultations and/or endorsed a number of submissions that highlight the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the context of mental health and related service access, e.g., most recently December 2016, consultation and submission: [Foundations for Change Homelessness in NSW: Discussion Paper](#).
- Additionally MHCC offers a number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific training courses and programs to educate the mental health sector on how best to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and their communities:
 - “Trauma Informed Approaches to Aboriginal Wellbeing”
 - “Working with Aboriginal people”
 - “ Cultural Safety in Supervision” : Workshops for managers and supervisors of Aboriginal workers
 - Certificate IV in Mental Health - For Aboriginal Workers

- MHCC LD produced a YarnUp newsletter between 2013/14 that supported students engaged in the ACMHI training.

MHCC currently have 21 FTE internal staff and a pool of 40 casual and contract trainers of which 2 identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people. There were some periods during 2014-2016 when MHCC had 4 staff members identifying as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander people.

MHCC's vision for reconciliation

In deciding to undertake a RAP, our vision was to develop an organisational culture that is inclusive and welcoming of Aboriginal and Torres Islander Peoples. Also we aim to promote cultural safety and diversity in all its activities *through building relationships, showing respect and creating sustainable opportunities for Aboriginal and/or Torres Islander Peoples and consumers with lived experience alike.*

MHCC's RAP

In undertaking a RAP MHCC committed to playing an influential role in “Closing the Gap” between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, not just in terms of life expectancy, but also in terms of mental health and access to mental health and psychosocial support services and programs.

An informal survey conducted by MHCC in 2010 of its membership estimated the percentage of Aboriginal service users at 11% and the Aboriginal workforce in the sector to be 4.88%. The workforce number is representative of a diverse range of roles including non-specific mental health roles. This clearly identifies a need for increased numbers of Aboriginal mental health workers, as well as increased capacity to support Aboriginal consumers.

Since MHCC staff and member organisations vary greatly in their exposure to and understanding of Aboriginal peoples and cultures, our RAP primarily focused on our organisational culture, policies and procedures, as well as on staff knowledge. It sought to ensure that we are an organisation that is culturally safe and welcoming for Aboriginal peoples.

MHCC acknowledges that in our role as the peak body for mental health Community Managed Organisations (CMOs) in NSW, we are in a position to facilitate information sharing between MHCC and other CMOs concerning best practice in working with and learning from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and organisations.

By sharing our experience of undertaking a RAP we hope to increase our ability to influence our members and external stakeholders to learn from our experience and make use of the resources we provide.

Going through the process of implementing a RAP gave us the opportunity to formally record the activities undertaken and implemented. This enabled us to reflect on and explore future improvements, actions and plans that we can draw on to further contribute to promoting and embracing reconciliation. These include *supporting Constitutional Recognition, and helping MHCC staff and sector workers to better understand why there is a divide between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people.*

MHCC began formal development of its RAP on 26 June 2014 with a RAP Planning Day facilitated by Reconciliation Australia (RA). All MHCC Staff and Board members were encouraged to attend. The day was an opportunity to come together and collectively discuss and brainstorm the development of our inaugural RAP.

Note: **Reconciliation Australia** was established in 2001 and is the lead body on reconciliation in the nation. They are an independent not-for-profit organisation which promotes and facilitates reconciliation by building relationships, respect and trust between the wider Australian community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The RAP MHCC embarked upon has been developed by the RAP Working Group. All staff were consulted as to the contents of the RAP which was then discussed with the Aboriginal Reference Group who provided comment which was then incorporated. A Terms of Reference was also developed (see Appendix 3, p.22) supported by input from MHCC's Aboriginal Expert Advisory Group, to whom were then extended an invitation to participate on the RAP Advisory Working Group.

RAP Advisory Group

- *Janelle Clarke, Aboriginal Services Unit, Legal Aid NSW*
- *Mandy Young, A/CEO Aboriginal Housing FACS*
- *Donna Ingram, Wiradjuri Woman, Elder and Cultural Representative of the Metropolitan Local Aboriginal Land Council in Redfern,*
- *Denyse Rose, ACIMH Graduate*
- *Matthew McGann, ACIMH Graduate, Schizophrenia Fellowship*
- *Gillian Bonser, Paradigm Consulting*
- *Luke Butcher, Mission Australia (MHCC Board representative)*

Reporting on the RAP

The objectives that we set out to accomplish fell under three primary objectives for action: **Relationships; Respect; and Opportunities.**

The RAP Working Group are pleased to report that nearly all the actions and activities initially identified were completed. Some actions remain ongoing and we anticipate will form part of cultural norms in MHCC.

Some additional actions and activities were conducted that emerged as the plan progressed.

Reflections

RAP Working & Advisory Groups

"The RAP WG were very lucky to have some real champions in the group with knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander protocols willing to share their knowledge and experience with us all."

"The process enabled us to reflect on our day-to-day attitudes and practices and reflect on whether we were 'walking the walk' as well as 'taking the talk'."

“Members of the WG arranged some really fun activities that offered us an opportunity to engage differently with each other as colleagues, and interact more creatively in our work environment.”

“The RAP Working Group strongly advocated that the whole organisation undertake a professional development course, which was facilitated by RA. We are now better able to look at what we do, how we do it, and critically reflect particularly on how we communicate with each other and people from culturally diverse backgrounds.”

“The RAP process gave me insight into my own preconceptions and beliefs and reflect both politically and culturally where Australia really is in its development to progress closing the gap and improving health and life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.”

“We shared some really lovely activities especially during NAIDOC week. It was definitely a great team building experience.”

“I am very happy to have had the opportunity to participate on the RAP WG and I have enjoyed the opportunity to better understand the Advisory Group’s perspective on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander issues. I am keen to continue to raise my awareness about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures and contribute to reconciliation through action.”

Learnings

“We certainly learnt a lot about how much we didn’t know especially about communication and how we can better relate to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

“This was an opportunity to learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’ history and cultural practices. Most of us had only the most rudimentary knowledge.”

“The area of communication with regards to consultation, engagement and permissions was particularly illuminating for me.”

“The process of developing a Cultural Protocol document helped us understand some very different perceptions about what respect for copyright, cultural ownership and intellectual property rights means to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.”

“Walk the walk as well as talk the talk.”

“Utilised learnings from the ACIMH project and its alumni.”

In addition to the original RAP 2014-2016 a number of resources have been developed as a result of the RAP WG’s desire to further integrate policy into practice. These are included in the Appendices:

- DISCRIMINATION AND EQUAL OPPORTUNITY; Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Employment - policy document
- CULTURAL DIVERSITY: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples - policy document
- MHCC Cultural Awareness Implementation Plan 2016 -2020
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Protocols & Resources Document

Key organisations and Resources

Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet Provides a diversity of resources and information including publications about a range of programs, projects and research. Available at: <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/>

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Arts Board, Australia Council Ph: 9215 9000 Fax: 9215 9061 Toll Free: 1800 555 677 Email: mail@australiacouncil.gov.au
www.australiacouncil.gov.au

Mainstream organisations providing advice or information about copyright and the protection of intellectual property rights include:

- Arts Law Centre of Australia www.artslaw.com.au
- Copyright Council www.copyright.org.au
- World Intellectual Property Organisation www.wipo.int

The Aboriginal inclusion tool: A tool to improve Aboriginal Inclusion in AOD services - January 2017

The Aboriginal inclusion tool is a comprehensive resource that helps services to assess the inclusiveness of organisational practices in working with Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal community, and provides suggestions for improvements to organisational policy and processes. The Network of Alcohol and other Drug Agencies NADA acknowledges the high levels of marginalisation and disadvantage of Aboriginal people in our communities and propose that the use of this tool will help services work towards improved inclusion of Aboriginal people in relation to service access and retention, employment and supplier diversity.

The resource has been adapted from the KIAP Impact Measurement Tool (2013, Red Elephant Projects and Department of Justice Victoria) with the support of Felicity Ryan, Connecting Culture. A range of stakeholders and member services have also contributed to its review.

The Aboriginal Inclusion Tool - User Guide [PDF] should be read prior to and alongside the completion of the Aboriginal Inclusion Tool- Working document [MS Word].

http://www.nada.org.au/media/90837/aboriginal_inclusion_tool-user_guide_pdf.pdf

http://www.nada.org.au/media/90840/aboriginal_inclusion_tool-working_document.v1.docx

Creative Spirits. Get Aboriginal Culture; Find resources to support you

Available: <https://www.creativespirits.info/aboriginalculture/history/aboriginal-calendar#toc0>

Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, Authors: Dudgeon P Milroy Helen & Walker R 2014, *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice - 2nd edition,* (Australia)Government of Australia

First Australians Documentary Series

First Australians chronicles the birth of contemporary Australia from the perspective of its first people over seven episodes. Available:
<http://www.sbs.com.au/firstaustralians>

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PO Box 4773, Kingston ACT 2604
T 02 6273 9200 F 02 6273 9201 E enquiries@reconciliation.org.au
<https://www.reconciliation.org.au/resources/>

NSW Office Premier and Cabinet, Aboriginal Engagement Strategies, All documents summarised can be downloaded for use from http://www.hsnet.nsw.gov.au/group_home.aspx?grplD=803 or from the original website listed against each summary. HSNet is a NSW government website that is free to join.

NSW Organisations – Available: <http://www.healthinonet.ecu.edu.au/states-territories-home/nsw/organisations>

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