



EMBARGOED TO TUESDAY 21 MARCH 2017

HOW ALL AUSTRALIANS CAN HELP STEM ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER YOUTH SUICIDE: AFFIRM CULTURE, TACKLE RACISM

A new campaign to be launched today will urge Australians to help prevent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander youth suicide by finding ongoing ways to show their pride in our country's impressive first cultures.

The new campaign 'What's Missing?' will be launched today on the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination.

Self-harm and suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people has risen dramatically in the past 50 years, and our young people now experience one of the highest rates in the world.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people aged 15 to 24 are five times more likely to commit suicide than non-Indigenous young people.

Two landmark reports – one to the Federal Government last November and an Elders Report introduced by then Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda and Professor Pat Dudgeon – each [collected evidence on effective factors in Indigenous suicide prevention](#).

They found that affirming connections to culture and Country, and efforts to ensure equitable social determinants of health (housing, employment, etc.) and emotional wellbeing, play a crucial role in keeping young people safe from suicide and self-harm.

The new campaign asks Australians to show their shared pride in our inspiring first cultures to support young Aboriginal people not only to survive but to thrive.

“We know this is complex, but Aboriginal community-led activity across service sectors is critically important. Access to society’s opportunities and connections to culture underpin what’s needed to assist in the prevention of suicide among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people” said Belinda Duarte, CEO of Culture is Life and Wotjobaluk descendant of the Wimmera.

“So today we ask all Australians to deepen their own connections and national identity – and help create those safer conditions to prevent suicide – by showing our young people that you share their pride in the inspiring story of our country’s First Peoples, and commit to valuing it as a crucial part of this nation’s identity.”

“Think of the pride it gives young Māori kids to see New Zealanders of all races sharing their pride in Māori culture through the Haka or Māori songs and language. That’s the kind of uplifting and unifying tradition that I think Australia and Australians yearn to connect with. It’s our land’s ancestral lineage.”

“It makes such a difference for our young people to see that their own pride in who they are is shared and valued by Australians from all walks of life. That shared pride can help to draw us all closer to one another.”

The campaign begins today with a digital exhibition of images and quotes from diverse Australians that highlights the role of culture and tackling racism to prevent suicide, strengthen mutual understanding and value the complete identity of Australia.

Last month the latest Reconciliation Barometer found racism is on the rise in Australia. It reported that almost five in ten Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had experienced racism in the past six months, up from four in ten in 2014. Racism is never okay. Suicide is never okay.

To join the campaign online, use the hashtags #cultureislife #whatsmissing and tag us at @cultureislife www.cultureislife.org

If you need help or support, you can call Lifeline on 13 11 14 (24 hours-a-day) or contact your local Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation. If you have questions for the Australian Human Rights Commission contact the National Information line on: 1300 656 419 or 02 9284 9888.

Note to media: please include Lifeline number in all stories.

Interview: Culture is Life CEO, Belinda Duarte, is available for interview.

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Photo: Culture is Life CEO Belinda Duarte’s digital postcard from the campaign