



JOINT MEDIA RELEASE FROM THE ALIVE NATIONAL CENTRE FOR MENTAL HEALTH RESEARCH
TRANSLATION AND CHILDREN'S GROUND

For immediate release

\$10 million national initiative launched to drive community led mental health reform

A \$10 million national initiative to transform mental health and wellbeing systems has been launched in Mparntwe (Alice Springs), marking the conclusion of the ALIVE National Centre for Mental Health Research Translation Annual Symposium, co-hosted with Children's Ground.

Casting The Net for What Matters brings together more than 50 researchers and over 15 partner organisations across Australia to implement long term, community led approaches to mental health, suicide prevention and social and emotional wellbeing.

Funded through a Medical Research Future Fund Mental Health Grant (MRF2036872) from 2025 to 2030, the initiative focuses on system transformation through practical implementation. This includes advancing relational systems, culturally safe policy and holistic wellbeing frameworks as core components of reform.

The launch forms part of the 2026 symposium, *Holistic Futures*, which has brought together researchers, communities and service partners to define a new direction for mental health reform grounded in lived experience and cultural knowledge.

A central outcome of the 2026 symposium is a shared focus on advancing holistic approaches to mental health and wellbeing. The symposium reinforced that effective, community led models already exist, with First Nations organisations such as Children's Ground demonstrating integrated approaches across education, health and community development.

Casting The Net for What Matters and its sister project *Whose Care? Our Care*, also funded through the MRFF (MRF2032333), will strengthen the evidence for these models and support their integration into national systems. This includes enabling shared decision making, embedding First Nations led governance and advancing culturally safe and responsive approaches to social and emotional wellbeing.

The initiative is positioned within a critical national policy context. The Productivity Commission's 2025 review of the National Mental Health and Suicide Prevention Agreement found that current

arrangements are not effective and require new policy architecture. The review emphasises the need to ensure the voices of First Nations people are heard and acted upon, to embed social and emotional wellbeing principles, and to strengthen cultural safety across all services. It highlights the role of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled organisations and calls for co designed approaches that reflect community priorities. The review also highlighted the need for stronger evaluation and evidence sharing, identifying the ALIVE National Centre as well placed to contribute to a national evidence repository.

Outcomes from the symposium directly respond to these priorities by advancing First Nations led models of care and identifying pathways for their integration within national systems.

The launch of this initiative coincides with Close the Gap Day, marking a national commitment to achieving health equality for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Current reporting shows most Closing the Gap targets remain off track, including social and emotional wellbeing outcomes, where suicide rates continue to worsen.

There is urgent need to move beyond approaches that are designed without community authority, towards work that is informed by First Nations communities themselves and responsive to their priorities, knowledge and lived experience. This initiative centres that approach, strengthening social and emotional wellbeing through models led, shaped and governed by community.

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