

LivingWorks I-ASIST wins National award for impact

Friday 10 September 2021 –

Associate Professor Maree Toombs has received a LIFE Impact Award for her work in developing the world's first suicide intervention skills training program for Indigenous Australians.

His Excellency Governor-General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC presented the Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) award to [Dr Toombs](#), a proud Euralie and Kooma woman and University of Queensland (UQ) Associate Dean of Indigenous Engagement with the Faculty of Medicine.

In partnership with LivingWorks Australia (LWA), Maree and Research Fellow and project manager Dr Nasir, and UQ team, co-designed **LivingWorks I-ASIST** (Indigenous Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) program for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities

“I-ASIST provides employment for Indigenous trainers, either through organisations or as sole traders, to deliver suicide first aid skills to their local communities and provide capacity and sustainability for evidence-based training”, Dr Toombs said.

“It’s been a seven-year journey of consultations and co-design, and I thank community members, my UQ team and LWA for their heartfelt input into creating this evidence-based program.

“We need people who are embedded within their communities as trusted connectors to be trained deliver this program, especially in Indigenous communities.

“I-ASIST trains friends and family and other outreach services to identify people early who are at risk of suicide and use their skills to address the situation immediately.

“I’m proud that I-ASIST contributes to fulfilling key recommendations for building capacity in our Indigenous communities, as outlined in the recent Productivity Commission Report, the Final Advice to the Prime Minister by Suicide Prevention Advisor Christine Morgan, and the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health Report,” Dr Toombs said.

Suicide Prevention Australia CEO Nieves Murray said: “The Impact category of the LiFE Awards recognises an individual or organisation that demonstrates impact in the prevention of suicidal behaviours, utilising strategically developed initiatives that offer scalability.

“We are delighted to award this category to Maree for her important work within Indigenous communities which resulted in peer-reviewed publications on the impact of those activities. Congratulations, Maree,” she said.

In Congratulating Dr Toombs, LWA CEO Shayne Connell said they met in early 2017 when they attended an ASIST Train the Trainer program, which led to their partnership to co-design I-ASIST.

“Maree’s leadership on this program covered everything from early community consultation and yarning to asking community for their priorities, developing field trials, evaluation, and the social enterprise model of I-ASIST”, Mr Connell said.

When suicide prevention was overwhelmingly identified by Indigenous communities across Queensland, Maree investigated how to build capacity to intervene when people were thinking of suicide.

“In the first wave of 250 people trained in I-ASIST, more than 140 suicide interventions were made in communities, undoubtingly saving lives,” Mr Connell said.



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“Since then, more than 1,800 Indigenous people across Queensland and more than 4,000 across Australia have completed the two-day program with published data showing that hundreds of suicide intervention conversations have been held by those trained.

“This award is testament to Maree’s hard work in leading this amazing program and we look forward to Government support to share I-ASIST with Indigenous communities across Australia,” he said.

Dr Toombs said there is now an imperative to not only fulfill parts of the Productivity Report and other recommendations, but also deliver on the vision of an at-scale social enterprise model for suicide intervention.

“I-ASIST provides necessary social benefits and outcomes, while generating income for Indigenous trainers who deliver suicide intervention skills training in their communities,” she said.

“The program also provides ownership and sustainability for Indigenous trainers beyond our research project”.

Suicide rates for Indigenous communities are currently twice that of non-Indigenous communities, with young people particularly at risk.

UQ and LWA are also working with Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia (GDPSA) and the **Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP)** as well as Indigenous suicide prevention social enterprise Healing Works.

I-ASIST will be officially launched by The Hon Ken Wyatt, Minister for Indigenous Australians, in November 2021.

Further information visit: www.livingworks.com.au

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Please also add help seeking info to stories (suggested)

1. Lifeline 13 11 14 www.lifeline.org.au
2. Beyondblue 1300 22 4636 www.beyondblue.org.au

LivingWorks Australia has been providing training in suicide intervention across the country since the early 1990s, being part of the first National Suicide Prevention Strategy and plan with our world-leading ASIST two-day training program. LivingWorks has grown to more than 700 trainers across the country with a headquarters in NSW and offices in every state and territory. LivingWorks Australia has a footprint within the following settings: workplaces, education, clinical and allied health, Defense, veterans, veterinarians, First Responders, and community.

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