

**MEDIA RELEASE**

**Minister for Indigenous Australians launches world-first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide intervention training program**

**Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP today officially launched the world's first Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicide intervention training program.**

Minister Wyatt said: "The fact that Indigenous people are dying by suicide at twice the rate of non-Indigenous Australians demonstrates that we need to use every tool at our disposal to make a substantial, positive difference.

"I-ASIST will be an important tool in Closing the Gap and ensuring a sustained reduction in the number of suicide deaths down to zero.

"I-ASIST ensures the focus is squarely on prevention and early intervention with Indigenous trainers providing culturally sensitive support across the country, particularly in our remote communities."

Building on the success of the existing LivingWorks ASIST program, LivingWorks in partnership with the University of Queensland's **Professor Maree Toombs**, co-designed **LivingWorks I-ASIST** (Indigenous Applied Suicide Intervention Skills Training) program for First Nation communities.

The much-needed program comes after the latest ABS suicide data released in September showed that despite a slight national decrease in the first year of COVID, there was a 3.7% increase in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander suicides in 2020.

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

**Prof Toombs**, proud Euralie and Kooma woman and University of Queensland (UQ) Associate Dean of Indigenous Engagement with the Faculty of Medicine, said: "*I-ASIST suicide prevention first aid training is a **missing piece**, sitting alongside mental health awareness and crisis supports.*

*"We know the medical model is not always the right fit for our people in the first instance, especially for young Indigenous people.*

*"We require people trained in suicide first aid skills embedded within their Indigenous communities as trusted supports and connectors. These communities are often geographically isolated and difficult for outreach services to support."*

I-ASIST trains friends and family and other outreach services to identify people with suicide thoughts early and use skills to develop an individualised safety plan, added Prof Toombs.



## LIVINGWORKS

LivingWorks Australia CEO **Shayne Connell** said a chance meeting with Prof Toombs in early 2016 when they both attended a LivingWorks ASIST Train the Trainer program, led to the partnership to co-design I-ASIST.



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*“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 LivingWorks I-ASIST”, Mr Connell said.*

*“In the first wave of 250 people trained in LivingWorks I-ASIST, more than 140 suicide interventions were made in communities, undoubtably saving lives.*

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

LivingWorks I-ASIST also 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.

Professor Toombs said there is now an imperative to not only fulfill parts of the Productivity Commission Report into Mental Health and other key policy recommendations, but also deliver on the vision of an at-scale social enterprise model for Indigenous suicide intervention.

*“LivingWorks 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.”*

An excellent example of the social enterprise model in action is the establishment of **Healing Works** by **Dean Bayliss**, a Kamilaroi man living and working respectfully on Awabakal country.

Dean, an Indigenous suicide prevention expert and lead I-ASIST trainer, said: *“**Healing Works** has already secured support from **PHNs** and organisations across the East Coast to deliver I-ASIST. The demand for I-ASIST training within the community has outstripped capacity, with further investment required.”*

With the right investment, over the next 3-years the LivingWorks I-ASIST program aims to:

- Develop and mentor 50 Indigenous trainers within community to deliver suicide first aid skills
- Train up to 50,000 community members in the LivingWorks I-ASIST suicide intervention skills.
- Open a **Centre for Indigenous Suicide Prevention Training** for Indigenous-led research and knowledge translation, evaluation, data sovereignty, Indigenous PHD placements, in collaboration with industry partnerships and Carbal Institute of Health Research [www.cihr.com.au](http://www.cihr.com.au).

Gayaa Dhuwi Proud Spirit Australia (GDPSA) and the **Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP)** are supporting the I-ASIST implementation.

**Professor Pat Dudgeon**, CBPATSISP Director and GDPSA board member, said: *"he Centre of Best Practice supports LivingWorks I-ASIST because it uses Indigenous Knowledge, support, leadership and implementation, with Indigenous oversight. We look forward to government support for its implementation in community."*

Further information visit: [www.livingworks.com.au](http://www.livingworks.com.au)

### **ENDS**

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**Lifeline 13 11 14** [www.lifeline.org.au](http://www.lifeline.org.au)

**Beyondblue 1300 22 4636** [www.beyondblue.org.au](http://www.beyondblue.org.au)

### **Note for Editors**

Online event: LivingWorks Australia will be officially launching its Indigenous ASIST (I-ASIST) training program on November 3, 2021, 12.30pm-2pm via a virtual online event Details via <https://iasist.eventbrite.com>

#### ***Guest speakers***

- **Professor Maree Toombs** - *University of Queensland (Chair of proceedings)*
  - **Professor Pat Dudgeon** - *Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention – **Acknowledgment of Country***
  - **Tom Brideson** - *Gayaa Dhuwi*
  - **The Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP** - *Federal Minister for Indigenous Australians*
  - **The Hon Linda Burney MP** – *Shadow Minister for Indigenous Australians*
  - **Christine Morgan** - *National Mental Health Commission and National Suicide Prevention Adviser to Prime Minister Scott Morrison*
  - **Nieves Murray** - *Suicide Prevention Australia*
  - **Tegan Schefe** – *I-ASIST Trainer, Thirrili Ltd*
  - **Dean Bayliss** - *Healing Works Australia*
  - **Michelle Gissara** – *young Indigenous woman*
  - **Shayne Connell** - *LivingWorks Australia (MC)*
- On World Suicide Prevention Day 2021, His Excellency Governor-General the Honourable David Hurley AC DSC presented the Suicide Prevention Australia (SPA) award to Professor Toombs for her work to develop LivingWorks I-ASIST

- LivingWorks I-ASIST contributes to fulfilling key recommendations for building capacity in our Indigenous communities, as outlined in the recent Productivity Commission Report into Mental Health, the Final Advice to the Prime Minister by Suicide Prevention Advisor Christine Morgan, and the Victorian Royal Commission into Mental Health Report
  - [Productivity Commission Mental Health Inquiry Report](#)
  - [Final Advice – National Suicide Prevention Adviser to the Prime Minister](#)
  - [The Royal Commission into Victoria’s Mental Health System](#)
- **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, Defence, veterans, veterinarians, First Responders, and community.

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