



Media Release

Sharing home-grown solutions – Indigenous men's groups meet in Cairns

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Aboriginal men from across Queensland are meeting in Cairns this week to share stories of success in suicide prevention, improved family relationships and personal healing. More than sixty men from more than a dozen men's groups are meeting to review their experiences and successes under a groundbreaking men's suicide prevention program, Building Bridges, funded by the Department of Health & Ageing, as part of the National Suicide Prevention Strategy.

The program initially drew on the work of Yarrabah's Yaba Bimbie men's group to establish sustainable community-based approaches to build resilience and reduce suicide risk and self-harm by Indigenous men and boys.

Les Baird, one of Yaba Bimbie's founders, said a spate of suicides in Yarrabah in the 1990s forced local men to draw on their own strengths and culture to develop ways of supporting men who were struggling and at risk of suicide or self harm.

"We realised that we had to devise our own methods of supporting men at risk and in partnership with James Cook University and the University of Queensland we developed an "empowerment" approach to building wellbeing among our men," said Les Baird. "With our university partners we've been able to develop a number of programs which have worked and reduced the levels of suicide and violence in Yarrabah.

"The Building Bridges project then allowed us to share these strategies with three other communities; Hopevale and Kowanyama in Cape York and Dalby in central Queensland through meetings, workshops training sessions and normal social activities," said Les Baird. "The key to our success has been reliance on our own strengths and experiences and not waiting for health services to fix the problem."

Associate Professor Komla Tsey from the JCU School of Indigenous Australian Studies said his team had worked with Yarrabah men to share their experiences as a way of encouraging other men to seek local solutions based on their own strengths.

"The Yaba Bimbie Men's Group, the Family Well Being Empowerment program and the Life Promotion Officer project are all successful strategies developed at community level to deal with specific community health issues," said Tsey. "These home-grown solutions have improved family relationships, reduced substance misuse and enabled Aboriginal men to start healing themselves."

Tsey said that PNG men who are facing similar challenges are attending the meeting and keen to understand their Australian counterparts' methods. The Cairns meeting is being held at the Cairns Colonial Club until 3.00pm Thursday May 21.

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