



ABORIGINAL MENTAL HEALTH

The impact of history on Aboriginal people's mental health

- Aboriginal people are a diverse culture with a rich and compelling history. The impact of colonisation, legislation and the stolen generation created significant hardships for Aboriginal Australians. These problems continue today and impact on Aboriginal people and their mental health.
- Issues for Aboriginal people include:
 - continued grief and loss in the Aboriginal community
 - living in continual poverty
 - loss of identity and culture
 - chronic disease
 - low self esteem and self worth
 - incarceration
 - premature death
 - poor education outcomes
 - overcrowding in family homes
 - substance use problems.

Managing mental health problems

- The impact of history continues today with problems such as anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression becoming more common in Aboriginal communities across Western Australia (WA).
- Successfully engaging Aboriginal people in support services requires a “whole of family” approach to working with Aboriginal people and their families.
- The wellbeing of an individual is linked to the wellbeing of all significant others within their family unit.

Strengths of Aboriginal people

- Aboriginal people are resilient and tolerant and are able to cope with adversity with the support of their strong kinship systems and their acceptance of diversity.
- Aboriginal people respond to a “whole of family” approach as it acknowledges the importance of family and kinship. It is important to view mental health problems within the social and emotional context of their lives.
- Connection to the land is a central factor for the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal Australians and services.

Further information

- **Statewide Indigenous Mental Health Service** supports Aboriginal consumers and carers to access mainstream mental health services.
Phone: 9347 6910
Website: www.nmahsmh.health.wa.gov.au/services/statewide_simhs.cfm
- **Department of Health** links to Aboriginal health services and resources.
Website: www.health.wa.gov.au/health_index/a/aboriginal_health.cfm
- **Mental Health First Aid** has guidelines on supporting Aboriginal people experiencing a mental health crisis.
Website: www.mhfa.com.au
- **Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet** provides Aboriginal health information and supports 'yarning places' (electronic networks) for health workers.
Website: www.healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au
- **WA Mental Health** is a one-stop-shop for mental health information in WA.
Website: www.health.wa.gov.au/mentalhealth