

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Manual 2nd ed. Melbourne: Mental Health First Aid Australia; 2010. Authors: Hart, L., Kitchener, B., Jorm, A., & Kanowski, L.

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It is clear that Indigenous knowledge, voices and understandings of social and emotional wellbeing have been privileged throughout the second edition of the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Manual*. This edition draws upon the guidelines developed by the Mental Health First Aid Training and Research Program from 2006 -2009 using the consensus of a panel of Indigenous mental health professionals with extensive experience in the field of Indigenous mental health. The guidelines and information about their development can be found at www.mhfa.com.au/Guidelines.shtml. Donna Stanley, a Gunggari woman from south east Queensland, and Rhonda Woodward, a Kamilaroi woman from Gunnedah, provided cultural consultation on the Manual.

As a non-Indigenous practitioner, I found the weaving of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, knowledge and experiences to be helpful for a number of reasons. I particularly appreciated the opportunity to explore what Indigenous people's understandings can add to the mental health knowledge base of us all. This can lead to the challenging of our own understandings and assumptions about mental health, reminding us that there is always more than one way to understand and respond to the world around us and our role in it. Finally, and most importantly, when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people I will be able to use the Manual as a reference point from which to springboard deeper, more meaningful conversations.

The Manual, like the adult and youth versions developed previously, promotes mental health first aid as the help offered to a

person who may be developing a mental health problem, or who is experiencing a mental health crisis. Like traditional first aid, people can be trained and become skilled so they are equipped and ready to offer and provide mental health first aid until appropriate professional help is received, or until the crisis resolves.

Section 1.3 Mental Health First Aid sets out clearly the role and responsibilities of the Mental Health First Aider, including to give help in a culturally appropriate way. This is important given that a person's culture plays a very important role in the way they will understand and talk about mental health problems, how and from whom they are likely to seek help.

The Manual utilises the successful format and lay out of the adult and youth versions while incorporating language and imagery which is consistent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences. The artwork in the manual was provided by Johanna Parker from Lightning Ridge in New South Wales, a contemporary Indigenous artist and a descendant of the Murriwarri people. The artwork titled "Blu 'n' Bak" was provided by Charmaine Sansbury, a descendant of the Narunga people from South Australia. Her artist name is Jakana, meaning 'sister'.

Strength based approaches to indigenous mental health are evident throughout the Manual, particularly in the first section outlining social and emotional wellbeing from an Indigenous perspective. At the same time, the struggles and trauma experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples are also written about in ways that make links to the way in which these may weaken social and emotional wellbeing as well as impact on physical health. The ongoing and "unfinished business" nature of the effects of colonisation is described as issues which make it "difficult for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to have good social and emotional wellbeing" (2010, p. 11). This is well balanced with a small section titled "Story of survival" which highlights the strength and resilience of Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islander people. Readers are encouraged to notice, acknowledge and build upon these strengths when working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities (2010, p.13).

The inclusion of Prime Minister Rudd's 2008 Apology to the Stolen Generations, acknowledging the past mistreatment of Indigenous Australians adds another dimension to the first section of the Manual, setting the scene for the reader to understand what comes later in the Manual can only ever be understood within that context. The section concludes with a list of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific services and resources. These resources seem timely for readers who may feel the need to discover more or gain support in planning to work in culturally safe ways with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This approach continues throughout the Manual with reference to relevant workers, reports and literature for further reading. This sends a message that working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples requires the non-Indigenous practitioner to become aware and increase their knowledge and reach out for support as necessary.

A particularly helpful section in the Manual titled "Spirituality, culture and psychosis" helps the reader to consider the "spiritual experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which may include seeing or hearing things that other people do not see or hear, for example, communicating with ancestors or spirits" (2010, p. 75). The Manual also states that what may look like spiritual experiences or cultural beliefs may in fact be symptoms of mental illness. It is suggested that the reader check what is considered to be normal within the person's community, by asking an Elder or traditional healer.

Each section of the Manual incorporates general information about mental health disorders, then includes additional information about how this may relate more specifically to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Prompts to consider the spiritual and cultural context of the person's behaviours is reiterated throughout the

Manual. Seeking to understand behaviours in light of culture is considered crucial, as is linking with community networks and gaining support as necessary from Community Elders.

As with the previous Manuals, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health First Aid Manual is comprehensive yet accessible. As an evidence-based and culturally adapted Manual, it provides a useful resource for people interested in enhancing their knowledge and understandings of undertaking Mental Health First Aid in ways that are respectful of, and culturally safe, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.