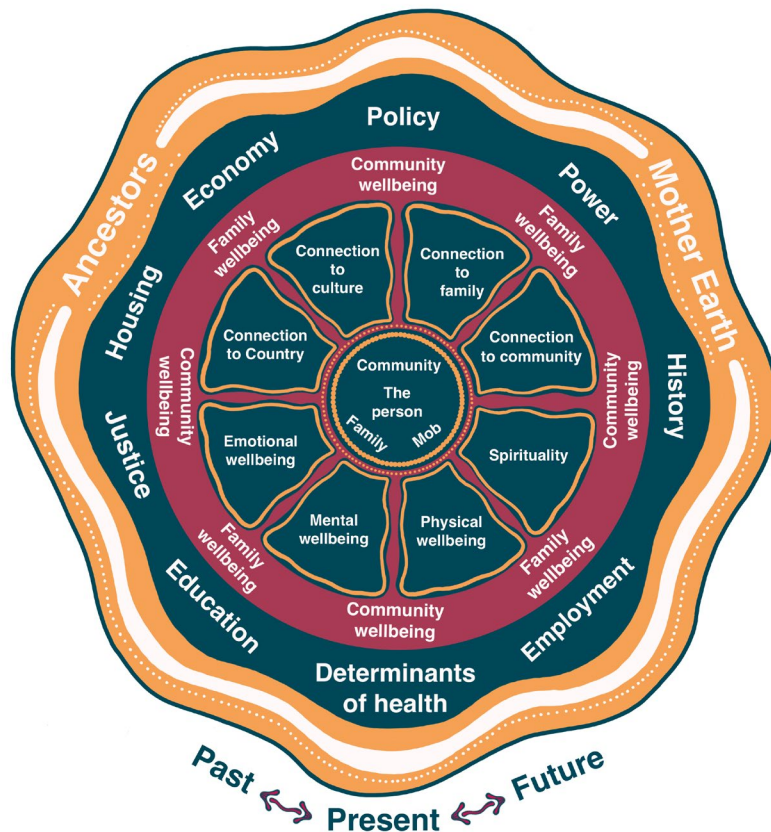


An Aboriginal person's holistic view of health in action

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Megan Williams, Mark Ragg and Jack Bulman Yulang developed a way of visualising health, from an Aboriginal person's perspective, that draws on the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation's definition of health has been used in the view shown below (Williams & Ragg, 2022). See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Aboriginal people's holistic view of health



The view that we have drawn places Aboriginal people at the centre, and not alone. Family, community and mob are there, with us.

The individual person and mob are surrounded by eight elements of health and wellbeing that Aboriginal people often talk about: emotional wellbeing, mental wellbeing, physical wellbeing, spirituality and connections to Country, culture, family and community. The wellbeing of family and community are important, not just the individual.

We recognise many things influence individual and mob health and wellbeing – the determinants of health and wellbeing, such as policy, power, history, employment, education, justice, housing and the economy are strong influences.

Surrounding us all are our ancestors and connection to Country – our Mother Earth, spirits of the land and air and waterways.

We acknowledge the influences of time – the past, the present and visions for the future.

Supporting holistic health and wellbeing needs clear principles, healthy relationships and healing, critical self-reflection and critical thinking, resources, data, evaluation, trained, skilled and supported workforces, partnerships, and more.

Putting holistic health into action

Over the past two years, we have worked with many Aboriginal people working in health, mental health and in social and emotional wellbeing, and have drawn on the earlier work of Chiera et al. (2021) to map what they told us into Table 1 below.

A table like this can be used to map a health service against the domains of Aboriginal health. It can also be used to identify gaps in service delivery, and where partnerships are needed.

Table 1: Activities to support connection to Country

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Connection to Country	<p>Walking on Country</p> <p>Learning the history of the place</p> <p>Hosting and attending cultural comps</p> <p>Being on Country</p> <p>Facilitate conversations with Elders</p> <p>Learning methods of caring for Country</p> <p>Gathering resources from country e.g. food, materials for making instruments</p> <p>Regenerating gardens, bushland</p> <p>Developing healing gardens and sensory gardens e.g. at health centres</p> <p>Using resources from local Country or processes from local people for making items e.g. weaving</p> <p>Spending time on Country enjoying its benefits</p>

Table 2: Activities to support connection to culture

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Connection to culture	<p>Understanding and acknowledging history of colonisation in local areas, processes truth-telling</p> <p>Uncovering, recovering and discovering local cultures</p> <p>Opportunities to share cultures including Aboriginal and western cultures; intercultural dialogues</p> <p>Support people to be on Country</p> <p>Facilitate conversations with Elders</p> <p>Culturally informed assessment and cultural approach to symptoms</p> <p>Opportunities for transfer of knowledge between generations</p> <p>Leadership programs and youth leadership development, mentoring and role modelling to convey cultures, pass cultural on</p> <p>Support to engage with Elders about local governance, treaty-making meetings and discussions</p> <p>Attend cultural events</p>

Table 3: Activities to support connection to family

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Connection to family	<p>Advocacy with government agencies and legal systems for access to children, with support for each of the family members</p> <p>Aboriginal Family Wellbeing Program</p> <p>Access to local child and family support services</p> <p>Access to childcare</p> <p>Access to carer support</p> <p>Access to respite care</p> <p>Access to aged care</p> <p>Healing programs</p> <p>LinkUp and family history research</p> <p>Supporting children to visit family in prisons and have communication with family in prisons</p> <p>Open supports to family members</p> <p>Support kinship care</p> <p>Support for processes of grieving</p> <p>Support through others' death including dying on Country, having access to cultural support, support for funeral attendances and during sorry business</p> <p>Follow-up after sorry business</p> <p>Supporting days of remembrance and of local significance – events and leaders</p>

Table 4: Activities to support connection to community

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Connection to community	<p>Supporting community leaders to self-determine events, processes, days of significance, responses to issues</p> <p>Invest in community relationships – with Traditional Owners, other Elders, organisations – empowering community and supporting ownership of events, knowledges and processes</p> <p>Spend time at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community events</p> <p>Work with communities to develop partnerships, Terms of Reference, Memorandums of Understanding, coming together to prioritise, collaborate on solutions</p> <p>Support communities through sorry business, through process of dying and death, grieving and remembering</p> <p>Take people to funerals</p> <p>Celebrating community strengths and resources including natural resources, Elders, people and processes of significance</p> <p>Making and building projects processes of community stimulating empowerment and ownership</p> <p>Supporting mainstream community to understand and use anti-racism including <i>It Stops With Me</i> campaign</p> <p>Programs or activities for leadership training that includes group facilitation skills</p>

Table 5: Activities to support spirituality and connection to ancestors

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Spirituality/ancestors	<p>Yarning about how people experience spirituality, what people mean</p> <p>Yarning about positive connections with other people including ancestors</p> <p>Learn about local cultures and ones' own cultures and their spirituality and processes</p> <p>Participate in ceremony with Elders and/or in groups</p> <p>Facilitate cleansing ceremonies, house smoking, after discharge from hospital or prison</p> <p>Facilitate cleansing ceremonies/house smoking, etc.</p> <p>Visiting sites of significance</p> <p>Remembering days of significance and doing nurturing activities on those</p> <p>Participating with others in events including to have a voice, have a say, express feelings</p> <p>Remembrance ceremonies e.g. of significant Elders, people who have passed</p> <p>Visiting and caring for gravesites, contributing to projects like headstone-making</p> <p>Using arts, music, dance to express, share and be with others</p> <p>Locally led healing programs</p>

Table 6: Activities to support physical wellbeing

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Physical wellbeing	<p>Support health system navigation</p> <p>Support engagement with ACCHO for regular health checks, immunisations, health promotion activities and follow-up</p> <p>Link with GP and specialist care</p> <p>Dental program</p> <p>Drug and alcohol harm reduction programs, health promotion programs e.g. Ocoober, Dry July, and residential rehabilitation</p> <p>Join group activities and challenges locally in the general community and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations</p> <p>Meditation, Dadiri</p> <p>Team sport, including football Knockouts, AFL Redi, #whereiskate</p> <p>Deadly Choices programs</p> <p>Using local resources like the beach, places to swim and walk as part of connecting to Country</p> <p>Joining others for boomerang and spear making and throwing</p>

Table 7: Activities to support mental wellbeing

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Mental wellbeing	<p>Access to processes to identify triggers and healthy responses</p> <p>System buffering</p> <p>Support mental health system navigation</p> <p>Support culturally-informed assessment and risk re-assessment</p> <p>Advocate for change of diagnosis where required</p> <p>Access to multi-modal therapies for complex trauma and post-traumatic stress disorder</p> <p>Addiction medicine and addiction support services including for drugs and alcohol, co-dependency, gambling, social media</p> <p>Use of culturally appropriate tools, for example, the Aboriginal Resilience and Recovery Questionnaire</p> <p>Support access to Elder-led, Traditional Custodian-led, and/or Aboriginal organisation-led healing and physical and spirituality programs</p>

Table 8: Activities to support emotional wellbeing

To support ...	Activities that health services can provide directly or through partnerships
Emotional wellbeing	<p>Processes and activities for identifying feelings and healthy responses</p> <p>Culturally-informed assessment to understand emotional wellbeing</p> <p>Feedback to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who do emotional wellbeing assessment and programs</p> <p>Processes for expressing feelings e.g. arts, dance, music, theatre, writing</p> <p>Support access to Elder-led, Traditional Custodian-led, and/or Aboriginal organisation-led healing and physical and spirituality programs</p> <p>Peer support groups, gender-based groups, coming together with people with similar experiences</p> <p>Peer support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff</p> <p>Connection to physical activity and mental health programs</p>

Source: The domains are adapted from Gee et al., 2014. The concept of a mapping tool is adapted from Chiera et al, 2021, pp. 40-41

Suggested citation

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