



**Submission to the Aboriginal and Torres
Strait Islander Healing Foundation
Development Team, August 2009**

Name and designation:	Associate Professor Patricia Dudgeon Chair Steering Committee
Organisation:	Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association
Postal address:	Australian Psychological Society Level 11, 257 Collins Street, Melbourne PO Box 38, Flinders Lane VIC 8009 Mobile: 0422 615 003 Fax: +61 3 9663 6177
Email:	pat_dudgeon@optusnet.com.au

The Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA)

AIPA is committed to improving the social and emotional well-being and mental health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities by collaborative work with others committed to 'closing the gap' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous health outcomes. Specifically AIPA is working to increase the number of Indigenous psychologists and to lead the change required to deliver equitable, accessible, sustainable, timely and culturally safe psychological care to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in urban, regional and remote Australia. AIPA is the only peak national body representing Indigenous psychologists in Australia.

AIPA supports the following understanding of Indigenous social and emotional well being drawn from the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Well Being 2004 - 2009*:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is viewed in a holistic context that encompasses mental health, and physical, cultural and spiritual health. Land, family and spirituality are central to well being. It must be recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have great strengths, creativity and endurance and a deep understanding of the relationships between human beings and their environment. The centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander family and kinship must be recognized as well as the broader concepts of family, and the bonds of reciprocal affection, responsibility and caring.

(Social Health Reference Group, 2004).

AIPA supports the need for a Healing Foundation and its members have attended many of the consultation workshops held in various locations. AIPA believes Indigenous psychologists bring a deep understanding of the complex and trans-generational trauma associated with colonization, prolonged disadvantage and the forcible removal of children and the impact this has had on the spiritual and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals, families and communities across the generations.

In its paper 'An Overview of Factors Impacting on the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People: Risk and Protective Factors and Serious Psychological Distress' (2009), AIPA has collated epidemiological data which identifies the unique factors associated with serious psychological distress among Indigenous people and its contribution to health risk behaviours and preventable morbidity and mortality. Psychological distress should not be equated with 'mental illness', rather, it should be seen as 'normal human distress' in response to stressful or difficult circumstances. It can be seen as evidence of the need for practical support and for culturally appropriate 'healing' strategies. If unaddressed, serious psychological distress appears to become the 'common causal

pathway', which translates the social determinants of health to individual risk of morbidity and mortality.

On-going assessments of psychological distress and other measures of positive wellbeing can be used to increase the accountability of those providing healing programs, by measuring whether distress has been eased and whether positive wellbeing has been increased at an individual, community and population level. Indigenous psychologists are best placed to competently translate the international and other evidence and apply these findings to our people.

To that end, AIPA proposes the following recommendations:

Recommendation 1: *That AIPA has a representative on the Board of the Healing Foundation.*

Recommendation 2: *That Indigenous psychologists have a central role in evaluating and documenting the effectiveness of healing models or programs and their contribution to closing the gap in health outcomes.*

Recommendation 3: *That one of the roles of the Healing Foundation is to serve as a Clearing House for literature relating to healing and its evaluation and measurement, and that this function be managed by Indigenous researchers. AIPA would be interested in playing a leading role in developing and operating a Clearing House for the Foundation.*

Recommendation 4: *That the Healing Foundation has a research capacity or 'arm' that draws upon international and national research to build an evidence base in relation to Indigenous trauma and healing.*