

# Strengthening Aboriginal wellbeing through Culture

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Government  
of South Australia

Wellbeing SA

Supporting your state of wellbeing

# Viewed as a deficit

- Colonisation and assimilation created and applied a deficit narrative on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Systematically oppressed for multiple generations
- Left out of the plan to progress the country



# Strength in culture

- Our strength has always been there
- Resilient in the face of destructive practices
- Heroes from many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have demonstrated this strength and sovereignty
- From Pemulwuy to Charlie Perkins, Eddie Mabo to Chelsea Watego, David Unaipon to Lowitja O'Donoghue



# 1901-1975

- Quite possibly the most destructive era
- The Immigration Restriction Act 1901 outlined a range of racist laws to protect the creation of a 'White Australia'
- Restricting non-white population growth
- Created a path for further action to assimilate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples



# 1901-1975

- Assimilation was a policy response to ‘protecting’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples

*The policy of assimilation means that all Aborigines and part-Aborigines are expected to attain in the same manner of living as other Australians and to live as members of a single Australian community, enjoying the same rights and privileges, accepting the same customs and influenced by the same beliefs as other Australians [1]*

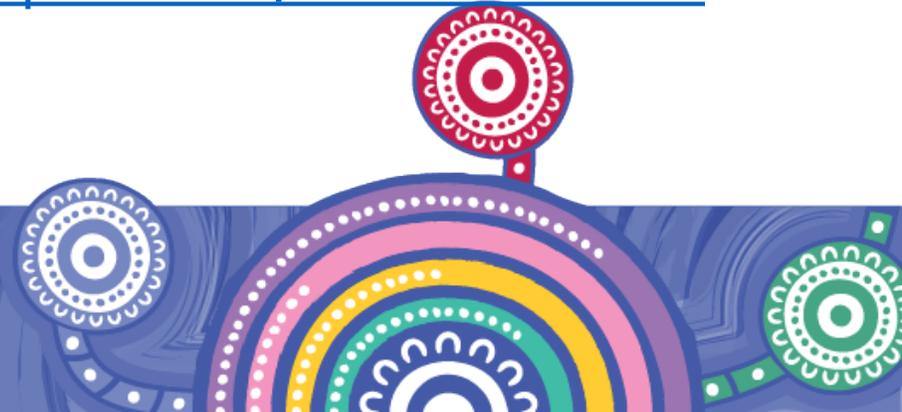
1. Cited in H Reynolds, *Aborigines and Settlers: The Australian Experience 1788- 1939*, Cassell Australia, Sydney, 1972, 175



# The role of policy and strategy

- The first National Aboriginal Health Strategy was released in 1989
- Closing the Gap 2009-current
  - 4 Priority Reform areas
  - 19 Socioeconomic outcome areas

<https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/dashboard>



# Aboriginal health and wellbeing

*Health is not just the physical wellbeing of the individual but the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of the whole community. This is a whole of life view and it also includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life.*

National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working  
Party, 1989



© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2013

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# Cultural Determinants

- Mayi Kuwayu National Study for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing
  - Strengths-based
- Prof. Ray Lovett, ANU
- Evidence for the importance of culture in determining positive outcomes for Aboriginal people
  - Policy makers, program designers, governments etc



## Connection to Country

### SUB-DOMAINS

spiritual connection  
health and traditional foods  
living on Country  
land rights and autonomy  
caring for Country

*"Our country is like our garden – we need to look after it. There are trees, birds, waterways, fish, mammals and reptiles, and they are all important. We keep country healthy and country keeps us healthy."*

Dhimurru Senior Ranger Fiona Yupunu Marika

## Family, kinship and community

### SUB-DOMAINS

family and kinship  
community

*"A child is a gift to the family—that is to the entire kinship network: he or she is the living evidence that the culture is alive and surviving."<sup>21</sup>*

## Indigenous beliefs and knowledge

### SUB-DOMAINS

spiritual and religious beliefs  
traditional knowledge  
traditional healing  
knowledge transmission and continuity

*"Culture is central to identity since it "defines who we are, how we think, how we communicate, what we value and what is important to us."*

Steve Larkins<sup>22</sup>

## Cultural expression and continuity

### SUB-DOMAINS

identity  
cultural practices  
art and music

*"Having your own voice is very powerful and healing... [M]usic was great therapy for me – it still is. It gave me a way to express myself..."*

Archie Roach AM<sup>23</sup>

## Indigenous language

### SUB-DOMAINS

impacts of language on health  
language revitalisation  
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language education

*"The research shows that knowledge of language helps Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people strengthen their cultural identity, integral to health and wellbeing and by extension, the health and wellbeing of society as a whole."*

Craig Ritchie, CEO AIATSIS<sup>24</sup>

## Self-determination and leadership

### SUB-DOMAINS

cultural safety  
self-determination and wellbeing  
leadership.

*"We need to own our own risk and that any dramatic shift and change in our circumstances for the better of our children and families can only come from our own determination, our discipline, commitment and leadership, at an individual and collective level, in driving the change required."*

Peter Yu, CEO Nyamba Buru Yawuru<sup>25</sup>

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# Wellbeing SA Aboriginal Health Promotion

- Strengthening the cultural determinants
- Building capacity in South Australian Aboriginal communities
- South Australian Aboriginal Health Promotion Strategy 2022-2030 + Action Plan 2022-2026
- Community Grants Program
- Anti-Racism Strategy
- Partnerships
- Evaluation



South Australian  
**Aboriginal Health  
Promotion Strategy**  
2022-2030

Strengthening and  
promoting the Cultural  
Determinants of  
Health and Wellbeing



Government  
of South Australia  
**Wellbeing SA**

**Action Plan**  
2022-2026

Strengthening and promoting the  
Cultural Determinants of Health and Wellbeing



South Australian  
**Aboriginal Health Promotion Strategy**  
2022-2030  
**Wellbeing SA**

### Strengthening Our Culture Community Grants Program

The *Strengthening Our Culture* community grants program supports Aboriginal Community Controlled Organisations and Aboriginal communities to deliver projects that focus on strengthening the Cultural Determinants of Health, as defined by the Mayi Kuwayu National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing:

- Connection to Country
- Family, kinship and community
- Beliefs and knowledge
- Cultural expression and continuity
- Language
- Self-determination and leadership

Have questions?  
Contact the Aboriginal Health Promotion team at:  
[WellbeingSA.AboriginalHealthPromotion@sa.gov.au](mailto:WellbeingSA.AboriginalHealthPromotion@sa.gov.au)

Need more information?  
Visit our website:  
[www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/  
StrongeningOurCulture](http://www.wellbeingsa.sa.gov.au/StrongeningOurCulture)



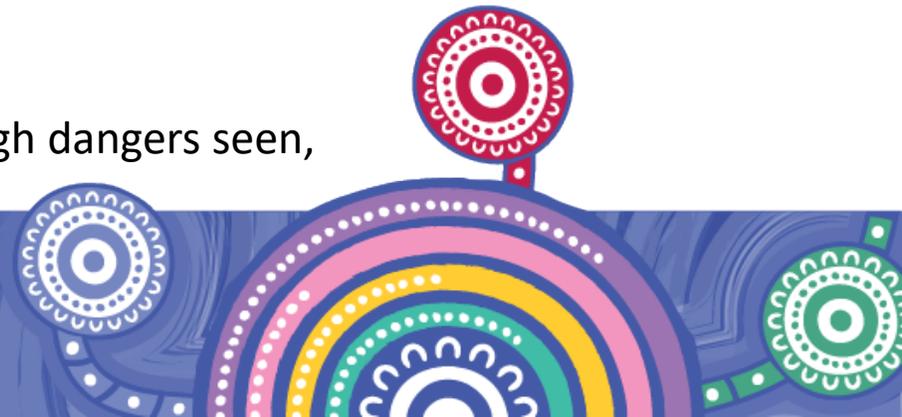
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# What is your role?

- Positionality is key
  - *“researching the self, researching the self in relation to others, engaged reflection and representation, and shifting from self to system” [2]*
- Decolonising practices
  - Dr Carmen Parter *“decolonising public health policies”*
- Understand your influence
  - *Nothing about us, without us*

2. Milner HR. Race, culture, and researcher positionality: Working through dangers seen, unseen, and Unforeseen. *Educational Researcher*. 2007;36(7):388–400.



# Next steps in public health

- Ongoing Anti-Racism efforts
- Building and translating the evidence for Aboriginal Culture as a protective measure into practice
- Better curriculum in University settings, preparing people for the workforce
- Reforming systems to include Aboriginal Culture, voice and leadership



# Thank you

**Nathan Rigney**

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Any questions?