

International Congress on **MENTAL HEALTH**

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander resilience and recovery: a new approach to cultural safety in mental health care**Lani Wilson***Royal Melbourne Hospital - First Nations Unit*

Statement of the problem: Almost 33% of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adolescents (or Indigenous Australians) report high to very high levels of psychological distress, representing more than twice the levels of other Australians. Compounding or perhaps precipitating these rising statistics is the lack of culturally safe and appropriate mental health care available to this vulnerable population. Australia's mental health system is characterized by an underrepresentation of Aboriginal health/wellbeing staff (less than 700 professionals for a population of 984, 00), and a western mental health system which continues to perpetuate ineffective colonial systems.

Methodology & theoretical orientation: The Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) model and a recent community study which sought insights to Aboriginal adolescent SEWB, guides the newly created mental health specialist position of Aboriginal SEWB Officer at Orygen Youth Mental Health. The position provides culturally safe, evidence-based support and care to Aboriginal adolescents experiencing acute mental health illnesses such as Bipolar disorder, Mood disorders, ADHD and ADD, suicidal behaviors and psychosis.

Findings: The role has implemented innovative strategies to offer culturally safe and responsive care to vulnerable adolescents. With the installment of Aboriginal artwork, native gardens, and work underway for building renaming to traditional titles, complimented by cultural knowledge and awareness training for staff, these additions contribute greatly to the resilience and recovery of Aboriginal adolescence in a way that honors their culture and identity.

Conclusion: Aboriginal adolescents experiencing mental health challenges need, and deserve, culturally safe and appropriate mental health and recovery care which is embedded within a context of cultural understanding and knowledge. Acknowledging and understanding the unique cultural needs of vulnerable adolescents can and should go beyond Aboriginal populations, to enact more effective and safe mental health care for First Nations peoples and diverse groups across the globe.

Biography

Lani Wilson has completed an Honours degree in Psychology at Monash University where she led a qualitative research study into the Social and Emotional Wellbeing of Aboriginal young people. In the academic field, she has also contributed to the Yoorook Youth Justice commission, the first formal truth-telling process into injustices experienced by Indigenous Australians. As an engagement and projects officer at Monash University, Lani also works in Royal Melbourne Hospital - First Nations Unit.