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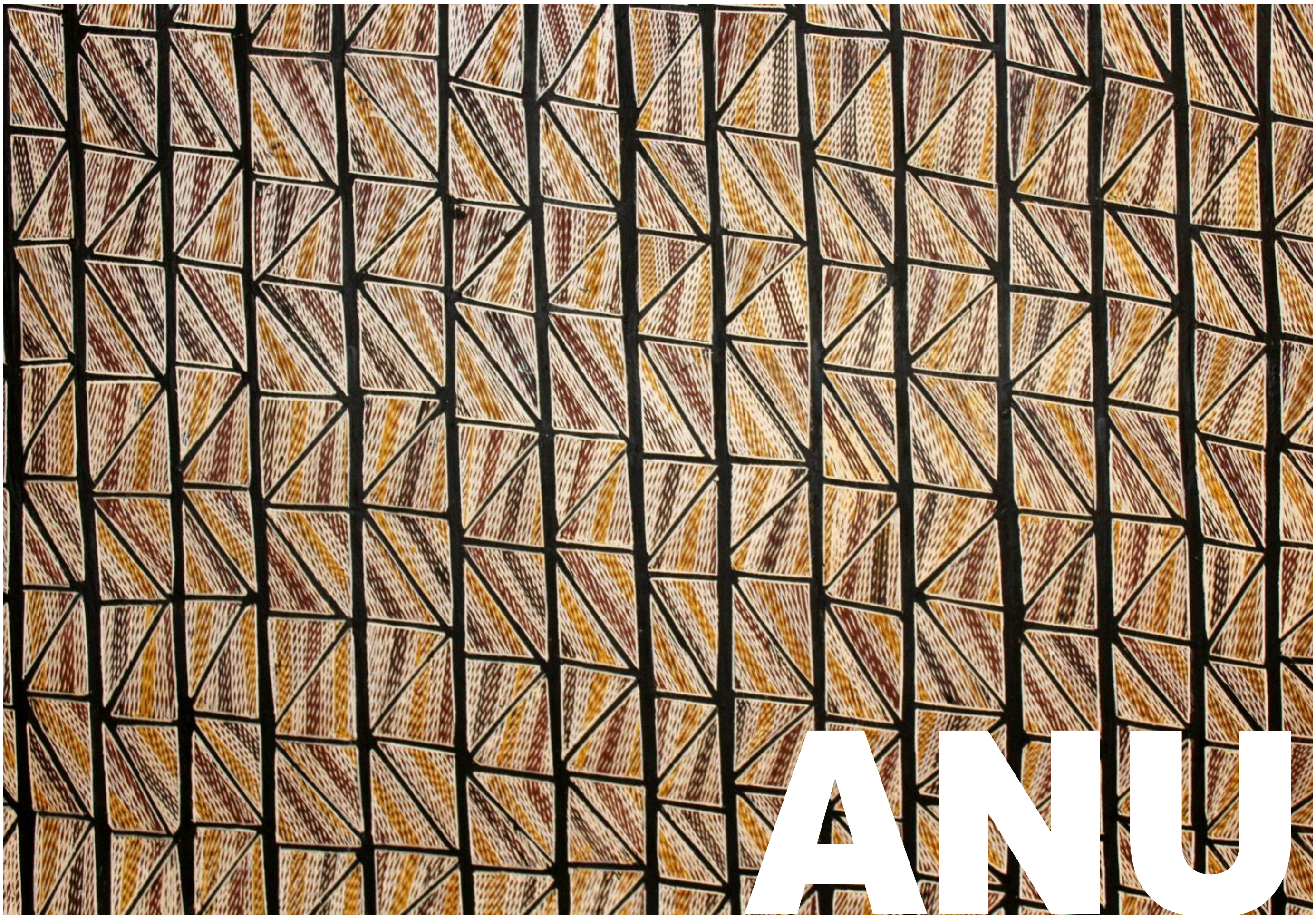

CULTURE AND INDIGENOUS WELLBEING: LITERATURE REVIEW FOR THE KIMBERLEY STRONG CULTURE, STRONG PLACE, STRONG FAMILIES RESEARCH AND EVALUATION PROJECT

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Culture and Indigenous wellbeing: Literature review for the Kimberley Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project

K. Birchmeier, G. Buchanan, Y. Dinku, M. Haviland, S. Kinnane and M. Yap

Abstract

This report is the first published output from the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project. This project is a co-design partnership between the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU), and communities in the Kimberley region of Western Australia. The project partners are working with participating Aboriginal groups and communities to co-design and co-produce an outcomes measurement framework for culture and wellbeing, drawing on the lived experience and perspectives of Aboriginal people and communities in the Kimberley.

This report presents the results of a review of the literature on the measurement of culture and wellbeing in Australia and internationally, with a focus on Indigenous examples. This literature review aims to complement the collection of primary data to support the development of a set of culture and wellbeing indicators that will ultimately form part of an outcomes measurement framework to evaluate cultural initiatives. To ensure that the indicators are centred on Kimberley Aboriginal peoples' lived experience and perspectives, they will be developed primarily from one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted by KALACC Community Research Practitioners with members of their communities.

This report highlights evidence of how culture contributes to the wellbeing of Indigenous peoples in Australia and elsewhere. It identifies key examples of research and analysis that has sought to identify domains, determinants, and indicators of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing – including those that have identified cultural indicators and validated their association with wellbeing outcomes.

The report shows how a growing evidence base and related advocacy driven by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community-controlled organisations has informed key Australian government

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frameworks around Closing the Gap, health, and mental health and social and emotional wellbeing. This report notes that there is still significant work to be done to convert recognition into action at a whole-of-government level. This work involves the development of rights-based, strengths-based and evidence-based responses that support the implementation of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Acknowledgments

We acknowledge the key roles that Wes Morris, KALACC Coordinator and Wayne Jowandi Barker, KALACC Director of Cultural Programs have taken in establishing the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project.

This report has benefited greatly from knowledge sharing throughout the co-design process so far with Mr Morris and Mr Barker, and with KALACC Community Research Practitioners: Kristin Andrews, Ismahl Croft, Russell 'Wossy' Davey, Sherika Duckhole, Johani Mamid, Mervyn Mulardy, Zandamiah Mulardy, Lynley Nargoodah, and Aggie Pigram.

We thank the two anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive comments and suggestions which have helped strengthen this report.

The Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency.

Acronyms

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACCHO	Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
ANU	Australian National University
CAEPR	Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (ANU)
CHMS	Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies (ANU)
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRP	Community Research Practitioner
CSEWB	Cultural, Social, and Emotional Wellbeing
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organisation
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
ICH	Intangible Cultural Heritage
ICIP	Indigenous Cultural and Intellectual Property
IDM	Individual Deprivation Measure
IWI	International Wellbeing Index
KALACC	Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre

KLC	Kimberley Land Council
LSF	Living Standards Framework
NACCHO	National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation
NAHS	National Aboriginal Health Strategy
NAILSMA	North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance
NATSIHP	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan
NATSIHS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey
NATSISS	National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey
NIAA	National Indigenous Australians Agency
NWI	National Wellbeing Index
NYARS	National Youth Affairs Research Scheme
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
PWI	Personal Wellbeing Index
RSHA	Research School of Humanities and the Arts
RSSS	Research School of Social Sciences
SEWB	Social and Emotional Wellbeing (model)
TCE	Traditional Cultural Expression
TK	Traditional Knowledge
UN	United Nations
UNDRIP	United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples
WM2Adults	What Matters 2 Adults

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Preface

This report is the first published output of the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project – a research collaboration between the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU). KALACC – the Kimberley region's peak Indigenous Law and culture centre – has been funded to undertake this project by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA), with part of this funding being dedicated by KALACC to its partnership with CAEPR under a two-party research collaboration agreement.

This project developed out of long-term discussions and advocacy by KALACC Coordinator, Wes Morris, and KALACC Director of Cultural Programs, Wayne Jowandi Barker. The project is a co-design partnership between KALACC and CAEPR in collaboration with the ANU Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies (CHMS) and the Nulungu Research Institute at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome. The project partners and collaborators are working with participating Kimberley Aboriginal groups and communities to co-design and co-produce an outcomes measurement framework for culture and wellbeing, drawing on the lived experience and perspectives of Indigenous people and communities in the Kimberley – the northernmost region of Western Australia.

The project seeks to develop a network of community-based and academic researchers in the Kimberley to enable the design and implementation of the project and the future use of the outcomes measurement framework in program development, implementation and evaluation. Project objectives include:

- strengthening research capacity in the Kimberley by establishing and delivering training to a team of community research practitioners (CRPs)
- providing opportunities through the design and conduct of the project for two-way skills and knowledge transfer between CRPs and academic researchers
- establishing and maintaining a Culture and Wellbeing Measurement Network to support knowledge exchange and to provide peer-review on the outcomes measurement framework.

The project will disseminate research results and methodologies to contribute practical examples, evidence and tools to support Indigenous culture and wellbeing outcomes measurement. First and foremost, it will support outcomes measurement in regional and community contexts, but it will also inform national efforts.

This first published outcome from the project presents the results of a review of the literature on the relationship between culture and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples and communities in Australia and internationally. This literature review aims to complement the project's collection of primary data to support the development of a set of culture and wellbeing indicators for the outcomes measurement framework. To ensure that the indicators are centred on Kimberley Aboriginal people's lived experience and perspectives, they will be developed primarily from one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted by CRPs with members of their communities.

Future phases of the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project will involve the CRPs and academic researchers working collaboratively to validate and refine the indicators to be included in the outcomes measurement framework, and then using the indicators and framework to evaluate programs with a cultural focus in the Kimberley. The outcomes measurement framework will be refined further based on lessons learned from the evaluations. The final outcomes measurement framework (and associated tools) and key lessons and findings from the project will be presented at workshops in Broome and Canberra.

Up to the time of writing this report, the following KALACC CRPs had participated in the co-design and co-production process: Kristin Andrews), Ismahl Croft (Lead CRP), Russell ‘Wossy’ Davey, Sherika Duckhole, Johani Mamid, Mervyn Mulardy, Zandamiah Mulardy, Lynley Nargoodah, and Aggie Pigram (Lead CRP).

This report has benefited significantly from peer review by two anonymous referees and from input and feedback from the KALACC leadership and CRPs.

Authors’ positionality statements

The following positionality statements seek to provide transparency in how the identities of the authors of this report relate to the research topic. While we collectively have significant experience of working in Aboriginal communities and with and for Aboriginal community-controlled organisations, we see this transparency as being particularly important as predominantly non-Indigenous researchers writing about First Nations peoples.

Katrina Birchmeier: I am a non-Indigenous woman of Chinese descent. I grew up on Wiradjuri Country in regional New South Wales and I currently reside in nipaluna, lutruwita (Hobart, Tasmania), palawa Country. I work for the Tasmanian Government and through my role I have the opportunity to engage with Tasmanian Aboriginal people, businesses and organisations in the tourism industry. I am also a student with ANU studying an Advanced Masters in Applied Anthropology and Development with a specialisation in Indigenous Policy and Development. My interest is in wellbeing for First Nations peoples and the intersection with policy. I was employed as the Research Officer for the first stage of the KALACC Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project.

Geoff Buchanan: I am a 49-year-old non-Indigenous Australian man with German, Irish and Scottish ancestry. I am a social researcher who grew up in regional Queensland and have been living on Ngunnawal and Ngambri country in Canberra for almost 20 years. I have a long-term commitment to working on research projects that are community-driven and community-based, and that have First Nations governance and leadership. My first research experience in the Kimberley region was in 2006–2009 as part of the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) Dugong and Marine Turtle Project. Employed by CAEPR, I worked collaboratively with the Bardi Jawi Rangers based in Ardyaloon to examine the social and economic benefits of Bardi and Jawi people's management of dugong and marine turtles. In 2010, this research fed into a regional study of customary use of wild resources in the Dampier Peninsula as part of the Kimberley Land Council (KLC) Aboriginal Social Impact Assessment for the proposed Kimberley LNG [liquified natural gas] Precinct. In 2015–2016, I returned to Ardyaloon as member of a research team from the Nulungu Research Institute at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome, working on the evaluation of the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) Youth Culture Camps. My role in this evaluation focused on the Bardi Jawi Gaalwa Project which engaged Elders and young people in the construction of the traditional gaalwa raft.

In 2012–2015, I worked at the Native Title Research Unit at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) on a project that aimed to support the capacity of native title holders to manage and benefit from the recognition of native title. After working for seven years in a policy research and advocacy role at the ACT Council of Social Service (2015–2022), a key element that drew me to apply to work on the KALACC Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project was its focus on co-design and co-production with Kimberley CRPs, data sovereignty, and the development of research capacity within Kimberley Aboriginal communities.

Yonatan Dinku: I am a non-Indigenous person with a culturally and linguistically diverse background. I am an economist by training. With an initial focus on teaching undergraduate economics courses, my work since 2018 has primarily focused on Indigenous economic policy research. Over the past five years, I have worked on a wide range of projects mainly commissioned by Commonwealth and state government agencies, including the Department of Education, Employment and Skills; the former Commonwealth Department of Communications and the Arts; the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare; the Department of Social Services; AIATSIS; and Aboriginal Affairs New South Wales; as well as by the National Native Title Council. My research heavily involves quantitative analysis applying statistical techniques to data sourced from national surveys, censuses, and administrative collections. In my work, I often seek advice and guidance from First Nations advisory groups and colleagues to ensure the research process is culturally responsive and appropriate. The Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project is my first experience engaging with research in the Kimberley region.

Maya Haviland: I am a 47-year-old non-Indigenous Australian woman, with ancestral roots in North America, Europe and Asia, born on Ngunnawal Ngambri country in eastern Australia, the first generation Australian in my family. I carry names from my French and North American ancestors and from the Tzotzil-speaking people of Southern Mexico. Throughout my youth I spent time living and attending school in Canberra, North America and in the communities of Hopevale in North Queensland and in Zinacanteco community of Navenchauc in the highlands of Chiapas Mexico. I currently work as a Senior Researcher and Translational Fellow at CHMS at ANU in the Research School of Humanities and the Arts, where I have worked since late 2016. My research and practice is currently focused on dynamics of co-creation and collaboration in the culture, art and education sectors. Before commencing work at the ANU, I lived and worked in the community of Pango, near Port Vila in Vanuatu for two years with my family, undertaking a range of community-based research and volunteer work.

I first began work in the Kimberley in 2002, as a Senior Research Officer with the Australian Institute of Family Studies, supporting participatory action research and evaluation with a number of Aboriginal-led family support and community development projects in the West Kimberley, as well as in communities in the Northern Territory and Queensland. I worked as a freelance researcher and community cultural development consultant from 2005–2015, living primarily in Derby and Broome in the West Kimberley, undertaking a range of community-based participatory research, arts and cultural projects. Major projects included work with Jalaris Aboriginal Corporation, the Derby Local Drug Action Group and with the Mowanjum Art and Culture Centre. More recent work was with KALACC on topics including cultural education in Kimberley schools. In 2014 I was employed part-time at the Nulungu Research Institute at The University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome. Since commencing my role at ANU I have been working closely with KALACC and from 2019 have been a research lead on the Following the Trade Routes research and cultural governance project instigated by KALACC, as well as playing an advisory role on issues to do with co-design, cultural and community-led research design and implementation. I have been involved in brokering relationships between KALACC and ANU for the KALACC Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project, playing an active role in the scoping, feasibility and design phase of the research and an ongoing academic advisory role in the implementation of the project.

Steve Kinnane: I have been an active researcher and writer for more than 25 years. I have worked on community-based cultural heritage and development projects and lectured in Indigenous Studies, Sustainability and Australian History. My research outputs encompass creative non-fiction and academic analysis published as books, book chapters, journal articles and audiovisual documentaries. I have completed numerous evidence-based research reports for community-based non-government organisations, government and statutory authorities. I am a Marda Marda from Miriwoong country in the East Kimberley, and retain strong personal, familial, and professional connections to the Kimberley Region, and Noongar Country in the southwest of Western Australia.

Mandy Yap: I am a non-Indigenous researcher of Malaysian Chinese heritage. I am committed to working with communities and individuals to develop indicators and measurement frameworks which give priority to their lived realities and perspectives on the ground. Specifically, this has involved working in partnership with Indigenous organisations and communities in Western Australia, New South Wales and Victoria to co-produce data and information fit for their purposes and needs. This commitment grew out of years working with quantitative data and methods as an economist. It also grew out of self-reflection and query of the utility and cultural appropriateness of existing datasets and methodologies which may not create space for different knowledge systems, or place communities as equal partners in the co-creation of knowledge. Since 2013, I have been working in partnership with Eunice Yu and the Yawuru community in Broome to co-develop culturally-relevant indicators of Indigenous wellbeing. Between 2020 and 2023, I worked in partnership with Nyamba Buru Yawuru, Nagula Jarndu and Garnduwa Amboorny Wirnan to co-create a monitoring and evaluation framework centred in community priorities and aspirations for mabu liyan to explore how art, nation-building and sports contribute to wellbeing in the Kimberley. Before returning to CAEPR in 2019, I was employed at the Crawford School of Public Policy working on the Individual Deprivation Measure (IDM) – a gender-sensitive measure of individual deprivation grounded in the experience of people living in poverty, and co-led the IDM study in two districts in South Sulawesi.

Introduction

> *Culture underpins all of who we are. It is both what we learn, the framework for how we live and engage with each other and our surrounds. Culture constructs our society and identities, our strength, self-worth and resilience, and in times of great sadness – of trauma, loss and grief – culture heals us (June Oscar AO quoted in KALACC, 2020, p. 5).*

This report presents a review of literature on the relationship between culture and Indigenous peoples' wellbeing. The literature we have reviewed includes academic research; government policies, plans and strategies; and publications by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations. While primarily drawing on Australian literature, we have also explored some international examples. This report is the first published output of the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project – a research partnership between the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC) and the Centre for Aboriginal Economic Policy Research (CAEPR) at the Australian National University (ANU) being undertaken in collaboration with the Centre for Heritage and Museum Studies (CHMS) at ANU and the Nulungu Research Institute at the University of Notre Dame Australia, Broome. This project is funded by the National Indigenous Australians Agency (NIAA). The project partners and collaborators are working with participating Kimberley Aboriginal communities to co-design and co-produce an outcomes measurement framework for culture and wellbeing that is based on the lived experience and perspectives of Aboriginal people and communities in the Kimberley – the northernmost region of Western Australia.

As part of the first phase of the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project, this literature review aims to complement the collection of primary data that will inform the development of a set of culture and wellbeing indicators for the outcomes measurement framework. To ensure that the indicators are centred on Kimberley Aboriginal peoples' lived experience and perspectives, they will be developed primarily from data collected through one-on-one interviews and focus groups conducted by Community Research Practitioners (CRPs) with members of their own communities. The CRPs are members of different Kimberley Aboriginal communities and language groups – cultural leaders and cultural practitioners – who are employed by KALACC and have been appointed as ANU Visiting Researchers and co-investigators on the project. Co-design and co-production activities complemented by research training aims to deliver two-way skills and knowledge transfer between CRPs and academic researchers over the course of the project. The CRPs have a critical role to play in the project design and planning, the collection and analysis of data, the development of indicators and the outcomes measurement framework, and in the use of the framework to evaluate cultural programs in the Kimberley.

Our review of the literature reflects the significant contributions to the evidence base around the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing over many years – especially from research, evaluations and consultations undertaken by or with Indigenous researchers and/or community-controlled organisations. Our review of the grey literature from government highlights the impact this growing evidence base and related advocacy has had on policies, plans and strategies at the Commonwealth, state and territory levels. At the same time, it highlights some key gaps that remain in terms of evidence-based, strengths-based and rights-based government responses that recognise and implement the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (cf. Arabena, 2020).

Australia endorsed the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) in 2009. The UNDRIP establishes a universal framework of 'minimum standards for the survival, dignity and well-being of the indigenous peoples of the world' (United Nations (UN), 2007, p. 28, Article 43). The Declaration recognises 'that respect for indigenous knowledges, cultures and traditional practises contributes to sustainable and equitable development' (UN, 2007, p. 4). Among its 46 Articles, UNDRIP recognises the right of Indigenous peoples to:

- freely pursue their cultural development by virtue of the right to self-determination (Article 3)
- maintain and strengthen their distinct cultural institutions (Article 5)
- not be subjected to the destruction of their culture (Article 8)
- practise and revitalise their cultural traditions and customs (Article 11)
- manifest, practise, develop and teach their spiritual and religious traditions, customs and ceremonies (Article 12)
- access education in their own culture and provided in their own language (Article 14)
- the dignity and diversity of their cultures, traditions and histories (Article 15)
- maintain, control, protect and develop their cultural heritage, traditional knowledge and traditional cultural expressions – noting that, '[i]n conjunction with indigenous peoples, States shall take effective measures to recognise and protect the exercise of these rights' (Article 31) (UN, 2007, pp. 8 23).

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, Bunuba woman June Oscar AO describes culture as a framework for living and a source of healing (quoted in KALACC, 2020). Craig Ritchie, an Aboriginal man of the Dunghutti and Biripi nations and former CEO of the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), has noted that '[c]ulture is more than practices (dance, art, song) … it is a framework of ideas, truths, norms, values. It is about "what matters". It is how people make sense of life and the world' (quoted in Lowitja Institute, 2021, p. 18). Culture is fundamental to people's daily lives, shaping their worldviews and what is meaningful for living a good life. The interaction between culture and wellbeing is complex and multifaceted. As a way of knowing, being and doing, culture defines wellbeing as a concept and contributes to wellbeing as an outcome for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In Australia and internationally, there is a growing body of evidence affirming that culture matters for Indigenous peoples' wellbeing (e.g. Biddle & Swee, 2012; Bourke et al., 2018; Butler et al., 2019; Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Dinku et al., 2020; Dockery, 2010, 2012; Lovett et al., 2020; Nguyen & Cairney, 2013). This body of literature often refers to culture as a domain of wellbeing and/or to cultural determinants of wellbeing, though there is no single approach to understanding the links between Indigenous culture and wellbeing. As this evidence base has grown, the centrality of culture to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing – individually and collectively – has been increasingly recognised in national policy frameworks such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–31, the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023, and the National Agreement on Closing the Gap (Lowitja Institute, 2021). At the program funding level, the Australian Government's Indigenous Advancement Strategy administered by the NIAA recognises culture as 'a key factor in improving and maintaining wellbeing' under the Culture and Capability Programme (NIAA, 2021).

In its *Culture is key* report, the Lowitja Institute (2021) has called for additional action to embed cultural determinants of health and wellbeing into a whole-of-government Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural investment policy. Among other things, this policy would inform 'the government's investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives, and activities' with explicit links to and measurement of improved outcomes (Lowitja Institute, 2021, p. 5). The *Culture is key* report identifies the need to develop appropriate evaluation methodologies and practices for programs and policies that are based on an understanding of cultural determinants and the role of community-driven processes. In alignment with this, the overarching principle of the Productivity Commission's Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is 'centring

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges' (Productivity Commission, 2020, p.10).

While the primary purpose of this literature review is to draw on the evidence to inform our development of indicators of culture and wellbeing in the Kimberley, it also provides insights into if and how Australian governments have developed or are developing rights-based, strength-based and evidence-based responses that recognise and implement the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing.

The next section of this report presents insights from the literature describing the relationship between culture and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples in Australia and internationally. The report then focuses on research and data analysis that has identified indicators of culture and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including work that has statistically analysed the association between culture and wellbeing. In doing this, we highlight cultural domains, determinants and indicators identified in the literature that can inform and complement the development of indicators from data collected through one-on-one interviews and focus groups in the first phases of the Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project. The report then presents a review of key Australian Government frameworks to see if and how evidence of the relationship between culture and wellbeing has been recognised in government policies, plans and strategies in recent years. The report concludes with a brief summary of key insights gained and highlights the place this project has in supporting the recognition and implementation of culturally-centred frameworks for understanding and assessing wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Culture and wellbeing

Indigenous philosophies of wellbeing

> *Western definitions are exemplified through the disciplines of psychology, social work and psychiatry, and which tend to focus on pathology, dysfunction and coping behaviours that are rooted in the individual person. Aboriginal mental health is relational, strength and security are derived from family and community. Aboriginal traditions, laws and customs are the practical application of the philosophy and values of the group. The value of wholeness speaks to the totality of creating – the group as opposed to the individual (Little Bear, 2000 quoted in Sones et al., 2010, p. 54).*

Every Indigenous culture has its own philosophy that underpins its concept of living well. The diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in Australia means there are numerous philosophies that frame concepts and understandings of wellbeing. Across many language groups in the Kimberley region of Western Australia concepts like liyan, ngarlu and pilyurr have been described as Indigenous ways of understanding wellbeing as connections between the mind, body, spirit and Country (Dwyer et al., 2019; Roe, 2000; Yap & Yu 2016a; Yawuru RNTBC 2013). For example, the Yawuru people of the southwest Kimberley region understand wellbeing through the concept of liyan which is a 'model of living well in connection with country, culture, others and with oneself' (Yap & Yu, 2016b, p. 8). Mabu Liyan (good liyan) is based in the concepts of relatedness (family and kinship relations, and physical and spiritual connection to Country), holism (linked to feeling, being, doing and relating; a state of being) and balance (within one's self, and in one's relationship to others and to Country) (Yap & Yu, 2019; Yawuru RNTBC, 2013).

Within Native American cultures, the theme of balance and harmony is described as central to wellness, requiring balance between the four elements of life – physical, emotional, mental and spiritual. Mno bmaadis, is the Ojibway word for 'living the good life', and is based on the understanding that the four elements of life are intricately woven together and when in balance, one is said to be in a state of wellness (Hodge et al., 2009;

Pomerville & Gone, 2019; Wilson 2003). A visual representation of the Native American wellbeing paradigm is the Medicine Wheel, which is divided into four sections – north, south, east, west – representing the four elements of life. Based on the teachings of the Medicine Wheel, and quite contrary to the Western model of health care, Native American healers seek to treat the balance rather than the person in order to restore wellness (Hodge et al., 2009). Reference to the four directions in the Medicine Wheel is illustrative of the importance of connection to the natural world for Native American wellbeing. Similar to the Yawuru concept of liyan, the balance required for mno bmaadis extends beyond balance within the individual and entails harmony with one's community and the spirit world.

Understandings of Maori wellbeing are likewise embedded in interconnectedness of the spiritual realm through the concept of wairua, whereby illness is viewed to be as a result of 'wrong living' or spiritual intervention (Valentine et al., 2017, p. 65). Wairua is transcendental, like a sixth sense existing beyond time–space boundaries. Maori also view wairua as a critical link to ancestors, the relational aspect linking the spiritual to the physical and the past to the present. Wairua is fundamental to Maori existence – 'an active ingredient in the constitution of all Maori' – and 'without wairua, there is no well-being' (Valentine et al., 2017, pp. 67, 70).

In Latin America, a sense of relatedness and interconnectedness underpins Indigenous philosophies such as sumac kawsay (in the Quechua language) or buen vivir (in Spanish), understood to mean 'living well'. Harmonious and reciprocal relationships with humans, other living beings, nature, ancestors and the cosmos are believed to be the key to achieving individual wellbeing in these communities (Selibas, 2021). Sumac kawsay or buen vivir is a pluralistic worldview grounded in the values of equity, inclusion, social cohesion, community power and sovereignty. These ethical values are also reflected in public policies in countries such as Ecuador and Bolivia. More than providing a sense of inclusive wellbeing, buen vivir embraces a form of solidarity to 'confront neoliberal capitalism and coloniality' and promotes 'human security, dignity, and sustainability' (Ciofalo et al., 2022, p. 7). In this view, sumac kawsay or buen vivir is a holistic, empowered and collective approach to living and being well.

Against a backdrop of increasing global and national interest in conceptualising and measuring wellbeing, Indigenous peoples around the world have highlighted the need for recognition of Indigenous philosophies of living well (Yu, 2012). Critical to achieving this is understanding the relationship between culture and wellbeing from Indigenous peoples' perspectives. Core values identified in the literature as being foundational to Indigenous culture – holism, collectivism, relatedness, and reciprocity – are also the key themes underpinning Indigenous perceptions of wellbeing. In the following sections we further explore the overlaps and linkages between Indigenous peoples' cultures and their wellbeing.

Connecting culture and wellbeing: domains and determinants

> *Culture has become life-giving medicine for our people, closing the wounds of the past and standing us strong to face the future (Dudgeon, quoted in KALACC, 2021, p. 1).*

Across the literature there is significant agreement that culture and wellbeing are interlinked. Culture and wellbeing could be inseparable concepts embedded within each other in such a manner that it shapes and frames one's whole of life approach and lived realities. Culture is commonly viewed as fundamental to peoples' daily lives, shaping their worldviews and what is meaningful for living a good life. The interaction between culture and wellbeing is complex and multifaceted. As a way of knowing, being and doing, culture both defines wellbeing as a concept and contributes to wellbeing as an outcome or experience for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In this section, we discuss seven broad domains and/or determinants of Indigenous wellbeing that have been synthesised from the literature: family, kinship and community; connection to Country; spirituality and healing; cultural expression, identity and authority; self-determination and autonomy; meeting basic needs; education, learning and knowledge systems; and history and racism. As highlighted later in this report, this is not a complete list of domains and/or determinants of Indigenous wellbeing identified in the literature, but covers some of the most discussed cultural, social, historical, and political domains and determinants of Indigenous wellbeing.

Family, kinship and community

Family, kinship and community is identified as a key cultural domain important to Indigenous wellbeing due to a collective and relational view of wellbeing (Butler et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2014; KALACC, 2020; Salmon et al., 2019). Strong family, kinship and community bonds imbue a sense of identity, belonging and connection which is understood to enhance social, emotional, and mental wellbeing (Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012; Garvey et al., 2021; Gee et al., 2014). The concept of family in Indigenous cultures often goes beyond immediate blood relations and encompasses kinship and ancestral relations, which are complex family lines and social structures maintained through cultural ties and reciprocal relationships (Butler et al., 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2022; Gee et al., 2014).

The critical links between family, kinship, community and wellbeing have been stressed in the literature addressing the contemporary crisis of youth suicide in Indigenous communities. In Inuit societies, family is identified as the centre of their lives, and kinship structures are foundational in Inuit social organisation. Studies have indicated that the breakdown in traditional Inuit family structures due to colonisation has had adverse impacts on individual wellbeing and increased the rate of social problems such as youth suicide (Kral & Idlout, 2012). Understanding familial and kin relationships deepens one’s sense of belonging, determines the nature and extent of interactions between family members, and defines ‘relationships of caring, sharing, obligation and reciprocity’ (Milroy, quoted in Gee et al., 2014, p. 59). Connectedness through culturally-defined relationships can assist in building social capital – the sum of actual or potential resources, both emotional and material that are generated by formal and informal social networks – which is understood to positively influence health and wellbeing (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), 2022; Browne-Yung et al., 2013; Gibson et al., 2021). Informal and formal social networks were found to have a central role in generating resilience and social wellbeing for Sami adolescents in Norway (Nystad et al., 2014). This relational resilience was a result of social capital built through intergenerational bonds within siida and fattar – traditional Sami social networks of extended family and work units.

Whilst social capital overall is seen to have a positive influence on subjective wellbeing, for Indigenous communities there are complex interactions between social capital and wellbeing (Biddle, 2012). Mediating factors such as remoteness, and a reproduction of power and structural inequalities can impede the benefit of social capital to Indigenous wellbeing (Biddle, 2012; Browne-Yung et al., 2013). A study undertaken by Browne-Yung et al. (2013) employed Bourdieu’s theory of social capital – which examines power and structural inequalities and how they are reproduced – augmented by the distinction between bonding, bridging and linking social capital to gain an insight into the impact of social capital on wellbeing for Aboriginal communities in urban settings. The study’s authors found that connectedness to family and friends were important to building strong bonding networks. However, the benefits of bonding social capital were limited by lack of reciprocity within these networks often underpinned by limited access to economic resources, which could be understood as weak linking social capital.

Bridging social capital was found to be the strongest form of social capital in environments where Aboriginal status was the dominant capital (e.g. in Aboriginal organisations), which involved connecting heterogenous kinship groups through shared cultural and intergenerational experiences (Browne-Yung et al., 2013). This demonstrates the importance of the Indigenous community as the container for cultural maintenance, cultivating spiritual energy for cultural learning, practice and transmission (McCubbin et al., 2013). This can be viewed as a psychological sense of community or a building of cultural capital, generating a sense of attachment and belonging which is known to have positive impacts on individual and collective social wellbeing and resilience (Browne-Yung et al., 2013; Colquhoun & Dockery, 2012). In Maori culture, society is viewed as an extension of whanau (family), which defines a collectivist model of social relations. This community dynamic develops human capacity (bridging social capital) through collective Maori synergies, with evidence suggesting that community wellbeing may be not only linked to individual wellbeing, but in fact be a determinant of personal wellbeing (Durie, 2006; Houkamau & Sibley, 2011). However, it can be challenging for Indigenous communities to build bridging and linking social capital in different social contexts (i.e., in mainstream society), due to barriers such as racism and unequal access to economic and cultural resources (Browne-Yung e tal., 2013). This suggests that structural and power inequalities continue to be reproduced based on the dominant mainstream culture.

Connection to Country

> *Our ontologies, our ways of being Indigenous are inextricably connected to being in and of our lands. This is an inherent sovereignty not temporally constrained. It functions through the logics of relativity finding expression in kin relations, respect, responsibility, and obligation that exist outside the logic of capital and familial ties to private property and nation states (Moreton-Robinson, 2020, p. 259).*

The literature describes how the intimate relationship that Indigenous communities have with their ancestral lands is foundational to culture and identity – 'In country, humans and nature, nature and culture are not regarded as separate but are entangled together in all types of relationships' (Weir, quoted in Kingsley et al., 2013, p. 682). Indigenous Canadian professor Taiaiake Alfred (2015) has articulated this deep relationship to the land as fundamental to being Indigenous:

> *… in our love of the land, in our relationship of the land, in the view that we as Indigenous people – in terms of the relationship being one of reciprocity and respect and the intimate connection between ourselves and our mother, the earth, as she's made up in the land and the water and the trees and the plants and the animals and so forth – that relationship is what makes us Indigenous.*

This bond with the land is deeply rooted in Indigenous creation stories which are at the core of Indigenous culture and identity and describe 'different kinds of relations born of a conscious and alive earth' (Moreton-Robinson, 2020, p. 259). There are numerous Indigenous creation stories specific to each culture and place, such as the Aboriginal Dreaming, Kanaka Maoli and the Anishinaabe Ojibway stories, all of which tell Indigenous peoples of the origin of their cultures and beliefs and hold 'people in place and in relations to each other and country [land]' (Dudgeon & Bray, 2018, p. 104). Creation stories inform the spiritual and cultural connection to ancestors and a 'complex relationality connecting past, present, and future life forms' (Ciofalo et al., 2022, p. 5).

In Maori culture,

> *… 'whakapapa' makes landscapes, seascapes, waterways, natural resources and other creatures 'tupuna' (ancestors), 'whanau' (kin), and imbued with 'mana' (spiritual and physical authority and power) and 'mauri' (a spiritual life essence).… 'Whakapapa', in this way, highlights the inter-dependence of all things for well-being, and the reciprocal relationships that exist between people and the natural world (Watene, 2016, p. 292).*

This blurring of human and non-human elements and the familial connection to land contributes to a person's sense of individual and collective identity and their place in the world, as depicted through this description of the Maori wellbeing concept of Hauora:

> *Hauora emerges from the Earth and permeates all life, animate and inanimate. Hauora fosters a sense of belonging and identity; presents a place to anchor oneself and collectivities in the world; enables a portal to Indigenous knowledge, wisdom, and critical cultural learning and transmission opportunities; and invigorates and permits uniquely Maori forms of expression and being. Hauora asserts a spirituality within and beyond the body and into relationships where wellbeing can be expanded as an unlimited quality (Ciofalo et al., 2022, p. 5).*

In the Australian literature, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' deeply intimate relationship to the land – or to Country – is a defining aspect and the importance of people's connection to Country is commonly identified as a key cultural domain of wellbeing (Butler et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2014; KALACC, 2020; Salmon et al., 2019; Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b). Country – land, water and sky – is understood as a holistic concept deeply connected to traditional laws, customs, knowledge systems, language, and ceremony (Butler et al., 2019). Cultural connection to Country interweaves biophysical and cultural identity with emotional and spiritual dimensions of life such that Country is an extension of self, providing a sense of identity, belonging and pride that promotes spiritual and emotional wellness (Butler et al., 2019; Panelli & Tipa, 2007). This relationship to Country is captured by Ambelin Kwaymullina, a First Nations writer and illustrator who comes from the Palyku people of the Pilbara region of Western Australia, who notes that:

> *…country is much more than a place. Rock, tree, river, hill, animal, human – all were formed of the same substance by the Ancestors who continue to live in land, water, sky. Country is filled with relations speaking language and following Law, no matter whether the shape of that relation is human, rock, crow, wattle. Country is loved, needed, and cared for, and country loves, needs, and cares for her peoples in turn. Country is family, culture, identity. Country is self (Kwaymullina, 2005, p. 12).*

Based on her work with Aboriginal people in different parts of Australia, the late non-Indigenous anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose observed that in Aboriginal English the word Country was both a common and a proper noun:

> *People talk about country in the same way that they would talk about a person: they speak to country, sing to country, visit country, worry about country, feel sorry for country, and long for country. People say that country knows, hears, smells, takes notice, takes care, is sorry or happy … country is a living entity with a yesterday, today and tomorrow, with a consciousness and a will toward life. Because of its richness, country is home, and peace: nourishment for body, mind, and spirit; heart's ease (Rose, 1996, p. 7).*

Cultural connection to land and water can have therapeutic benefits to health and wellbeing outcomes (see, e.g. Burgess et al. 2009). Research involving in-depth interviews with Anishinabek living on reserve in Ontario, Canada provides a deeper conceptualisation of therapeutic landscapes through the importance of the interconnection between physical, symbolic, spiritual, and social aspects of Indigenous cultures as shaping health, whilst also emphasising the important role therapeutic landscapes play in people's everyday lives (Wilson, 2003). The therapeutic value of connection to Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been described as follows:

> *going back to country or 'being on country' is regarded as cultural and therapeutic practice that aligns people to sacred places, lore, birthing sites, and cultural responsibilities to care for country which forms*

> *part of the custodial relationship Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have to the land (Ciofalo et al., 2022, p. 4).*

Aligned with this, Biddle and Swee (2012) found that Indigenous Australians living on their homelands and undertaking customary harvesting activities reported higher levels of happiness.

The therapeutic value of connection to Country and culture underlies the Yiriman Project in the Kimberley. The Yiriman Project is an initiative by the cultural bosses of the region that takes young people out into Country to connect them to their ancestral stories, ceremonies and traditions, and 'gradually builds the young people as country themselves' (Préaud, 2009 quoted in Dudgeon & Bray, 2018, p. 104). The project is a leading example of cultural resurgence and cultural healing for Aboriginal communities. It also exemplifies the cultural strength and grounding that connection to Country provides. In its response to the recommendation of the 2017 Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of 13 children and young people in the Kimberley, the Western Australian Government recognised 'the considerable value of programs such as the Yiriman Project as models for cultural healing, and building strength and resilience in young Aboriginal people' (Government of Western Australia, 2019, p. 21).

In Australia, there is a strong association between remote residence and higher levels of disadvantage and poorer health outcomes for Indigenous peoples (Schultz et al., 2018). Despite these statistics, Aboriginal people in remote areas have been found to report higher levels of overall life satisfaction (subjective wellbeing) compared to Aboriginal people living in non-remote regions (Schultz et al., 2019a; Wright et al., 2022). Measures of remoteness were developed to address inequitable distribution of government services, but they can also reflect people's presence on or proximity to their homelands. Thus, the paradox of poor health statistics (based on mainstream measurements of physical health) but high levels of subjective wellbeing for Indigenous people who are living on their homelands can possibly be explained by the ability to engage in customary practices, maintain spiritual and cultural ties, and a sense of belonging and identity when they have access to their ancestral lands (Johnston et al., 2007; Schultz et al., 2019b).

The ability of Indigenous peoples to live on or have a close connection to their ancestral lands is integral to traditional language and cultural maintenance through engaging in customary activities on a daily basis. As Indigenous culture is an everyday practice – a way of doing, knowing and being – strong ties to land can enhance the quality of connection to language and culture that are associated with higher levels of social, emotional and economic wellbeing (Biddle & Swee, 2012; Dinku et al., 2020; Wright et al., 2021a). A comprehensive examination of the association between culture and wellbeing for Indigenous rangers in remote Australia found a positive association between ranger status and wellbeing outcomes (Wright et al., 2021a). Indigenous ranger programs are employment programs that support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to work on Country undertaking land management and conservation activities based on cultural and traditional environmental knowledge – often referred to as caring for Country. Improved wellbeing from working on Country was found to go beyond individual employment, economic and environmental benefits. Collective wellbeing was also facilitated by the ranger programs through greater social and cultural participation of the broader community, regular connection to customary activities, traditional language, and the ability to pass on traditional knowledge about the biophysical environment and sacred sites.

Evaluations of such initiatives as the Caring for Country Ranger Programs and the Yiriman Project have found them to be crucial to re-establishing and maintaining connection to culture for Indigenous youth (Palmer, 2006, 2012; Thorburn & Marshall, 2017). There is a growing body of scholarship suggesting that Indigenous youth are less connected to their ancestral lands and cultural traditions than previous generations and this lack of cultural connection has been linked to higher rates of social and physical health problems (Biddle & Swee, 2012; Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Hossain & Lamb, 2020; Hunter, 2002; Johnston et al., 2007). Wexler (2009, p. 270) claims that ‘affiliation with one’s Indigenous culture can provide a framework in which individuals can locate themselves in relation to others, to a larger shared context, and to history’, translating ‘into feelings of connection, belonging, and purpose which have been associated with resilience and well-being in many different age groups and peoples’. Strong cultural identity is linked to resilience and wellness for Indigenous youth. The Yiriman Project in the Kimberley has proven to build greater resilience, self-esteem and identity in Indigenous youth through ‘the journeying back of the generations born in the postcolonial incorporated Indigenous communities to the lands where their forefathers had led a nomadic life over several millennia’ (Préaud, 2009, p. 3). The Yiriman Project is grounded in intergenerational exchange on Country led by local Elders, through which Aboriginal youth are able to participate in land care, community, health care, storytelling, and Law and custom, and to understand relationships of respect and reciprocity to the land, to ancestors and to kin (Palmer, 2006). The Yiriman Project further demonstrates the importance of the connection to ancestral lands for Indigenous peoples’ wellbeing, as it tethers the past to the present through ancestral, spiritual, and historical connections.

Spirituality and healing

Across the literature, spirituality is often considered foundational to Indigenous peoples’ culture and an important cultural domain of wellbeing (Butler et al., 2019; Gee et al., 2014; Grieve Williams, 2014; Salmon et al., 2019; Tse et al., 2005). Dudgeon and Bray (2018, p. 104) describe the Aboriginal origin story of the Dreaming as ‘a living, sacred intelligence that flows through both humans and non-humans and is continually communicating and listening’.

> *Spirituality is a dynamic, evolving, contemporary expression of Indigeneity. Spirituality connects past, present and future. Spirituality emphasizes peoples’ relationships with each other, the living (other entities – animals) and non-living (mating season, tides, wind and mythology) life forces premised by an understanding or experience of their place of origination (Poroch et al., quoted in Salmon et al., 2019, p. 13).*

Spirituality contributes to a sense of identity, meaning and purpose in life and is found to be positively connected to social and emotional wellbeing for Indigenous peoples as well as assisting in building coping and resilience for mental wellness (Salmon et al., 2019; Tsey et al., 2005). A 2009 study with Aboriginal people living in a highly urbanised context in Australia found spirituality to be the number one factor contributing to the wellbeing of this community, revealing the potency and contemporary importance of spirituality as a determinant to living well (Grieve Williams, 2014). Study participants stated that spirituality ‘is about being in an Aboriginal cultural space, experiencing community and connectedness with land and nature … feeling whole, an understanding of cultural roots and “deep wellbeing”’ (Grieve Williams, 2014).

Indigenous peoples have developed effective healing traditions and their own health care systems based on philosophies of interrelationships of land, people and ancestors. The continuity of Indigenous healing modalities has been interrupted by ‘knowledge nullification’ – the devaluing of Indigenous knowledge – imposed by colonial health care models and policies embedded in the individual (Dudgeon & Bray, 2018; Howell et al., 2016, p. 113; Sherwood, 2013). Traditional and sacred medicines provided from the land are powerful due to the spiritual component and cannot be accessed through Western medicine and analysis. Pomerville and Gone (2019) assert that Western scientific knowledge is inadequate for assessing the efficacy of Indigenous cultural and spiritual healing practices due to their vastly different epistemologies. Indigenous knowledge is embodied knowledge and experientially grounded, whereas Western scientific knowledge is objective – ‘knowledge without a knower’ – and empirically grounded (Althaus, 2020, p. 199). As articulated by a traditional Ojibway healer, ‘herbal medicines can’t be arranged like Western medicine because there is a spiritual component which becomes weaker when it is analyzed … Western medicine is the physical, mental, emotional but not the spiritual' (quoted in Wilson, 2003, p. 89). There is a renaissance of Indigenous cultural and spiritual healing practices – a form of cultural reclamation – due to a greater acknowledgment of their efficacy in improving emotional and psychological wellness for Indigenous individuals and communities (Dudgeon & Bray, 2018; Pomerville & Gone, 2019). In the Australian context, this renaissance is being led by Ngangkari (traditional healers of the Western Desert) who focus on physical and mental wellness through addressing the spirit cause of illness and restoring spiritual balance with sacred tools, medicines, and ceremonies (Dudgeon & Bray, 2018; Dudgeon et al., 2020; Edwidge & Gray, 2021; Salmon et al., 2019). For Indigenous peoples to achieve holistic wellness, it is essential that healing modalities align with their philosophical conceptions of wellbeing.

Cultural expression, identity, and authority

Cultural expression, identity and authority is an important domain of wellbeing as it engenders a sense of pride and empowerment (Biddle & Swee, 2012; Butler et al., 2019). This domain is seen as being critical to cultural continuity, which has been demonstrated to be a key contributor to psychological wellbeing (Chandler & Lalonde, 1998; Chandler & Proux, 2006).

Cultural expression through language and arts are considered essential platforms for transmitting cultural knowledge and perspectives (Salmon et al., 2019). Indigenous language is more than a means of communication – it is a form of cultural expression carrying meaning beyond words, it provides a platform for cultural knowledge connection and transmission, and it is often central to Indigenous identity (Dinku et al., 2020). Data from the 2014–15 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) illustrates that Indigenous language usage is positively linked to participation in cultural and customary activities, connection to Country, tribal or clan identity, and also associated with higher levels of emotional wellbeing, social efficacy, and social wellbeing (Dinku et al., 2020).

Engagement in art has also been found to have positive associations with cultural identity, authority and wellbeing. Results from a national survey of Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled art centres found that they 'play a wide ranging and vital role in supporting the health and wellbeing of older artists' (Mackell et al., 2022, p. 2). The survey found that art centres provide a 'safe place' where Elders can 'fulfil cultural obligation through arts practice, storytelling and teaching younger generations' (Mackell et al., 2022, p. 6). This was seen to be reinforced by the pivotal role of the community-controlled model with Elders as knowledge keepers at its core. Art centres were also found to support the wellbeing of older artists by facilitating bush trips which,

> *… provide opportunities for cultural practices such as gathering foods, painting, weaving and sharing stories on Country, and are important to maintain a connection to Country and culture; wellbeing; the cultural determinants of health; as well as supporting a good quality of life for older Aboriginal peoples (Mackell et al., 2022, p. 9).*

Related research that explored the role Aboriginal community-controlled art centres play in keeping Elders strong and connected drew on interviews with 75 people associated with three Aboriginal community-controlled art centres (Mackell et al., 2023). Similarly, it found that:

> *Aboriginal community-controlled art centres keep older people strong and connected within a reciprocal, relational, and intergenerational model of care. Emerging from and responsive to each Country, the model prioritises law and culture, purpose, and healing (Mackell et al., 2023, p. 294).*

Art centres were seen as places that care for older artists and nurture their social and emotional wellbeing. At the same time, they were seen as places where older people 'provide care by keeping culture, language and law strong, teaching younger generations, supporting their (often large) families through income generation' (Mackell et al., 2023, p. 299).

Language and the arts could be considered as more readily measurable aspects of cultural expression that have a positive association with social, emotional and cultural wellbeing. Aspects such as traditional beliefs, philosophies, values, spirituality and knowledge that provide a sense of identity and connection can be harder to measure.

There is a considerable body of evidence that secure cultural identity is a powerful protective factor for suicide prevention, especially for Indigenous youth (AIHW, 2022; Dudgeon et al., 2017; Hamley & Le Grice, 2021; Snow & Tootoo, 2021; Williams et al., 2018). Suicide is a challenging issue disproportionately impacting Indigenous youth – rates are higher amongst Indigenous populations compared to non-Indigenous populations – and thus suicide has often been viewed as an Indigenous problem (Barker et al., 2017; Chandler & Dunlop, 2015). This view can mask the traumatic impact that colonisation has had on Indigenous peoples. Speaking at the Provincial Forum on First Nations Youth Suicide in Canada in 2007 Chief Shawn Atleo stated, 'The word "suicide" does not exist in our traditional languages as we have no oral history of our people taking their own lives in the past', (Barker et al., 2017, p. e208). There is now a greater acknowledgement of Indigenous youth suicide being 'linked to trauma from the effects of colonisation, such as the loss of connection to culture, Country and spirituality and the removal of children from their families, which is a trauma that is passed down through generations' (AIHW, 2022, p. 7; see also, Axelsson et al., 2016; Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Kral & Idlout, 2012; Panelli & Tipa, 2007).

Evidence shows that the loss of connection to culture and Country and the intergenerational trauma resulting from colonisation are risk factors for future suicidal behaviour – and alternatively, that strengthening cultural identity and connection is a protective factor (AIHW, 2022; Dudgeon et al., 2010; Dudgeon et al., 2017). In line with this evidence, cultural resurgence and healing through programs such as the Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing project in Australia are regarded as key to improving social outcomes (Dudgeon et al., 2022). The Western Australian Government's response to two major reports on Aboriginal youth suicide in the Kimberley region and remote areas 'acknowledges the vital role of culture in ensuring the long-term wellbeing of Aboriginal children and young people' (Government of Western Australia, 2019, p. 32). This response accepted recommendations around the need for cultural healing programs and to develop 'a state-wide Aboriginal cultural policy that recognises the importance of cultural continuity and cultural security to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people in this State' (Government of Western Australia, 2019, p. 32).

There are many layers of Indigenous cultural expression that are not public in nature and that carry authority and responsibility. The custodians of cultural knowledge and authority are Indigenous elders – the 'living libraries' of Indigenous culture (KALACC, 2021, p. 1). Aboriginal cultural authority is quite distinct from Western perceptions of authority:

> *…the term 'cultural authority' pertains to the body of knowledge exercised by Senior Lawmen and Lawwomen, Cultural Custodians, Traditional Owners and Knowledge Keepers in the context of Indigenous cultural and intellectual property (ICIP), intangible cultural heritage (ICH), traditional knowledge (TK), and traditional cultural expression (TCE), it is knowledge that is in direct reference to song, dance, story, music, symbols, iconography, ceremony and creation narratives. It does not reference the notion of an administrative structure such as a 'statutory authority' brought into effect by statute (Lydia Miller, quoted in KALACC, 2021, p. 2).*

'Following the Trade Routes' is a collaborative project with the aim of rekindling and rejuvenating the social and cultural significance of traditional Aboriginal trade routes through Western Australia, Northern Territory and

South Australia. The project is based on an understanding that trade relates ‘not only physical materials but also a rich tapestry of songs, dances, art, stories, rituals and ceremonies from diverse language groups’ (KALACC, 2021, p. 3). Following these trade routes and songlines, digital recordings will be made to capture the local oral history embedded in Country and cultural authority of Aboriginal elders, maintaining continuity of these valuable cultural traditions and stories by passing the knowledge down to younger generations. Sharing these stories and traditions can generate social solidarity through intergenerational exchange (National Youth Affairs Research Scheme (NYARS), 2006), and enhance spiritual wellness through ancestral connections.

A study by Houkamau and Sibley (2011) assessed the impact of Maori cultural efficacy (one’s ability to engage in Maori social and cultural contexts) on subjective wellbeing based on the International Wellbeing Index (IWI). The IWI is divided into two distinct domains – Personal Wellbeing Index (PWI) and the National Wellbeing Index (NWI), which are known to be reliable indicators of wellbeing across cultures and nations. The PWI is a subjective assessment of one’s own life circumstances, and there was found to be a positive association between higher levels of Maori cultural efficacy and personal wellbeing. Contrastingly, higher levels of Maori cultural efficacy and active identity engagement as Maori were found to have a negative association with the level of life satisfaction when rated against the state of the nation. Houkamau and Sibley (2011) suggest that these results may be due to incommensurability of the Western individualistic model of social relations governing New Zealand that has generated systemic disadvantage, and the Maori collectivist view of society as an extension of family that provides a sense of belonging and strong social support for wellbeing. The study illustrates the complexity of cultural identity and efficacy as a determinant of wellbeing. More importantly it highlights how different wellbeing measurement indicators can produce significantly different outcomes, and the potential dilemmas this could produce in developing public policy for Indigenous wellbeing.

Self-determination and autonomy

In the literature, self-determination and autonomy is seen as either a cultural domain or as a political determinant of Indigenous wellbeing encompassing governance, leadership, self-determination, authority, purpose and control, and empowerment (Butler et al., 2019; Garvey at al., 2021; KALACC, 2020; Salmon et al., 2019). Self-determination for Indigenous peoples is often referred to as a means to achieving better socioeconomic outcomes. However, it is worth drawing the distinction between self-determination as a project of colonial authority and self-determination as Indigenous project (Rademaker & Rowse, 2020). Gurindji Stolen Generation descendant Nangari Josephine Crawshaw (2018) has highlighted the difference between the Indigenous project of self-determination and the State’s enactment of self-determination in a settler colonial structure in Australia in her Vincent Lingiari Memorial Lecture titled ‘The right for Australia’s First Peoples to be self-determining requires a collective mindshift’. Torres Strait Islander academic, Associate Professor Sana Nakata (2020, p. 338) argues that ‘in the context of ongoing settler colonial governance’ in Australia ‘self-determination has necessarily operated as a framework for Indigenous governance within a context of contested but near invincible state sovereignty’.

For Professor Megan Davis (2008, p. 217), a Cobble Cobble woman of the Barunggam Nation, the purpose of articulating a framework for the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the State based upon the right to self-determination is aimed at recognising ‘the distinctiveness of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture’ and achieving ‘the full and effective participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the decisions that affect them’. Dockery (2010, p. 316) argues that the true essence of self-determination ‘embodies both a recognition of the legitimacy and value of Indigenous culture in its own right, and the belief that Indigenous people should be empowered to choose and pursue their desired balance between cultural maintenance and engagement with the mainstream economy’. Former Chair of the Murdi Paaki Regional Council, Sam Jeffries (2004, p. 1), has similarly argued that at the sub-national or regional level:

> *self-determination is fundamental to control by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people over their own destiny, underpinned by a special relationship between Indigenous people and government that derives from the history of this land and recognition of our status as Indigenous people, bringing with it specific rights, responsibilities and obligations.*

The ongoing impacts of colonisation have resulted in continued marginalisation of Indigenous peoples through inequitable government policies that have denied their existence, identity, and basic human rights, leading to a relative powerlessness over their own lives and affairs, undermining their freedom, agency and dignity (Butler et al., 2019; Rademaker & Rowse, 2020; Tsey et al., 2003). 'The control factor', referring to the amount of control people have over their lives as well as their integration into supportive social networks and relationships, is suggested to be one of the most significant psychosocial factors that contribute to health and wellbeing outcomes (Tsey et al., 2003). This was articulated in the Ottawa Charter for Health promotion in 1986 that stated: 'people cannot achieve their fullest health potential unless they are able to take control of those things which determine their health' (Nguyen & Cairney, 2013, p. 12). Carey (2013, p. 190) notes that 'control is an integrative concept that could bridge what is sometimes seen as the divide between the physical and mental.' There are numerous elements that contribute to Indigenous agency and control including socioeconomic stability, cultural identity and efficacy, the ability to pass on cultural and spiritual knowledge, traditional language literacy, and the ability to access and care for Country (Butler et al., 2019; Dudgeon et al., 2014; Garvey et al., 2021; Nystad et al., 2014; Schultz et al., 2019a; Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b).

Within an enabling environment, Indigenous communities can re-establish their authority, governance and leadership embedded in their cultural values and regain autonomy and control over their lives. Cultural autonomy in Indigenous communities in Arctic Canada was found to be a vital element of their cultural wellbeing and the ability to achieve this was based in the enabling environment of laws and policies advocating for cultural autonomy and minorities, sufficient resourcing of these institutions, and proportional representation within institutions that advocate for their culture (Larsen & Schweitzer, 2010). Whilst these accounts appear positive, in this view Indigenous self-determination and empowerment can only be found through the mainstream social institutional, and governance structures. Thus, a cultural freedom – or cultural autonomy – does not exist in its own right, but continues to be mediated by the normative terms and dominant narrative of the colonial authority. Indigenous self-determination in a colonial setting highlights the tension of 'becoming equal and remaining different' and is often subsequently viewed as failing to empower Indigenous peoples (Altman, 2020). Arguably this failure of self-determination and empowerment through the colonial system can negatively impact psychological and economic wellbeing of Indigenous peoples.

Despite this perceived failure, self-determination and empowerment continue to be viewed as overarching elements critical to supporting Indigenous health and wellbeing (Bobba, 2019; Yap & Yu, 2016a) – so what does Indigenous self-determination and empowerment look like as an Indigenous project and how does it support their wellbeing aspirations? Rademaker and Rowse (2020, p. 12) argue that 'for many Indigenous people, "self-determination" could not be "bestowed" by governments, it must be asserted, practiced and maintained, often despite government policy.' Thus, we return to the decolonising movement of Indigenous resurgence – reclaiming their cultures, lands and ways of being without reference to the colonisers – where Indigenous self-determination can be viewed as cultural authority.

A further element of Indigenous empowerment that contributes to positive wellbeing outcomes through cultural autonomy is truth-telling and a high level of ownership and understanding of Indigenous peoples' own cultural and historical past (Chandler & Dunlop, 2015; Rademaker & Rowse, 2020). Through the National Empowerment Project's Cultural, Social, and Emotional Wellbeing (CSEWB) Program in Western Australia, Dudgeon et al. (2022) found that when Aboriginal peoples viewed their cultural past not in disempowering terms of colonisation, but by understanding the impact of the past in their present lives, it provided a pathway for acceptance, healing and moving forward. Through their research into the differing rates of youth suicide across various Aboriginal communities in Canada, Chandler and Dunlop (2015) found that by taking ownership of their cultural past, Indigenous communities were empowered – taking control of ‘their own civic futures’ through strong self-governance and resuming responsibility for their own health and welfare. Additionally, when young people have a strong understanding of their cultural past, present, and future, they can have a more empowered and connected approach to their future (Wexler, 2009).

Indigenous self-determination, empowerment, leadership and governance can take many forms, however all are culturally bound and foundational to enabling collective wellbeing.

Meeting basic needs

Meeting basic needs has been identified by Indigenous communities as an essential domain for living a good life contributing to physical and mental wellbeing (Butler et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2021; Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b). Basic human needs include a range of measures such as sufficient income for basic living requirements; quality, availability, and security of food; quality of housing conditions; employment; access to services; education; and justice (Butler et al., 2019; Garvey et al., 2021; Jordan et al., 2010; Mitrou et al., 2014; Prout, 2012; Yap & Yu, 2016a). Whilst many basic human needs may be universal, culture can have a significant impact on how these basic needs are conceptualised, constructed and ultimately met (Williams, 2021). This is illustrated through the following examples around prosperity and the hybrid economy, food security, income, and education.

The cultural construct of ‘basic needs’ highlights potential trade-offs between cultural maintenance and socioeconomic outcomes whereby participation in the mainstream economy may come at the expense of cultural participation (Dockery, 2010). The notion of prosperity has been explored to determine whether this concept is a more suitable fit for policy design and implementation to meet the basic needs and aspirations of Aboriginal people in NSW (Thomassin et al., 2020). Like the concept of wellbeing, the notion of prosperity can have multiple meanings across different cultures and societies. Thomassin et al. (2020) suggest a spectrum model of perspectives on Aboriginal prosperity, ranging from a market-based perspective to a relational and holistic perspective. This model suggests that there may be value in flipping the current policy narrative and reshaping mainstream market economies to adapt to Indigenous cultures rather than the reverse.

Moving along the spectrum of prosperity proposed by Thomassin et al. (2020) we see deeper incorporation of Indigenous culture, ways of living and worldviews. It depicts the complex balance that is necessary – but not always attainable – for Indigenous communities to meet their basic needs without compromising their cultural values, obligations and responsibilities. The market economy is heavily based in a Western, neoliberal perspective, leaving little room for diversity of worldviews and culture. There is a central assumption that Indigenous peoples need to change their behaviours to adjust to the market economy structure to achieve material and educational prosperity. Incorporation into the market economy on the terms of the dominant culture runs the risk of being assimilatory rather than empowering for Indigenous peoples, echoing a colonial mindset with the potential to adversely impact wellbeing (Dockery, 2010). The relational and holistic perspective of prosperity could be viewed as true self-determination as it centralises Indigenous culture, worldviews, and philosophies. Diverse and community economies, as conceptualised through the hybrid economy, are a means for Indigenous peoples to meet their basic needs and achieve a sense of wellbeing that is meaningful to them (Altman, 2010; Gibson-Graham, 2006).

The hybrid economy is a unique feature of Indigenous communities globally, and includes the market, customary and state sectors (Altman, 2010; Larsen & Schweitzer, 2010; Thomassin, 2016). In addition to providing basic needs, customary sector activities also have broader cultural significance, such as in the Torres

Strait where, despite the expansion of the fishing industry driven by non-Islander operators, Masig Islanders continue to engage in their customary fishing due to its importance for subsistence living, ceremonial activities, and maintaining kinship and familial relationships (Thomassin, 2016). The hybrid economy can offer greater wellbeing value to Indigenous communities than the mainstream economy alone, as it aligns with their cultural values of work being relational, communal, reciprocal, and social (Dockery, 2010). Community-controlled art centres provide a good example of this as discussed above in relation to their role in supporting Elders' wellbeing (Mackell et al., 2022, 2023). Likewise, harvesting customary food, materials and medicines are themselves spiritual practices and everyday traditional practices that provide healing and medicine through a connection to the land (Kant et al., 2013, 2014; Wilson, 2003).

Food security is important to meeting basic needs, and a study of Indigenous communities in the Arctic illustrates the importance of the customary sector to meet this basic, as two-thirds of the households surveyed reported that traditional food accounted for one-half or more of their household's consumption (Larsen & Schweitzer, 2010). Power (2008) argues that the ability to meet basic food requirements through customary activities is another level of food security for Indigenous populations. She calls this 'cultural food security', which affects the four pillars of food security – access, availability, utilization, and stability of supply – as defined by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Cultural food security is influenced by the level of traditional food knowledge, access to traditional food systems, and the safety of traditional food. Thus, customary food provisioning can be threatened by lack of access to traditional lands, environmental contamination, engagement in the mainstream economy, and decreased transfer of cultural knowledge between generations. The benefits of cultural food security flow beyond meeting basic needs of maintaining a quality diet and physical wellbeing – these customary activities are also a primary means of transmitting cultural values, skills and spirituality, and are foundational to social activities and social integration, thus contributing positively to the spiritual and social wellbeing of Indigenous communities (Power, 2008).

A sufficient level of income is required to meet basic needs, and income is often used as a proxy measure for wellbeing to inform public policy. However, research by Biddle (2015) illustrates that on its own this socioeconomic measure is problematic in designing policy for Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander peoples. Biddle (2015) notes three reasons as to why this measure is inadequate: the relationship between income and wellbeing is non-linear; distribution of income matters; and how income is generated matters. Results from Biddle's (2015) statistical analysis highlight the importance of understanding the Indigenous cultural context of the relationship between income and subjective wellbeing. For example, the positive relationship between income and wellbeing was less apparent in remote areas, indicating that there are other factors, possibly those associated with the hybrid economy that contribute to wellbeing; and the positive relationship between income and subjective wellbeing was stronger for equivalised household income than personal income, highlighting the significance of collectivist cultures. These findings illustrate that the way income might be viewed differently and how its importance to wellbeing is influenced by cultural factors which must be taken into consideration when designing policies and programs for Indigenous communities.

Education, learning and knowledge systems

'Closing the gap' on education attainment has been another area of struggle for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. This is arguably due to the narrow and standardised Western view of education as literacy and numeracy (Fogarty et al., 2017). There is a distinct failure to acknowledge the non-Indigeneity of education policy and curriculum, whereby a naturalising view emerges of schooling being culturally neutral (Maxwell et al., 2017). This enduring colonial mindset in education raises questions about the commensurability of Indigenous knowledges and ways of learning with Western educational paradigms – Indigenous knowledge is culturally embedded in a social framework, and belongs to a knowledge holder; in contrast, Western knowledge is objective, impersonal and disembodied from the knower (Althaus, 2020). Based on their review of the literature, Nguyen and Cairney (2013) concluded that Western outcomes-based education is not generally recognised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as having a positive influence on health and wellbeing outcomes.

An alternative to Western education that is generating positive outcomes in remote Indigenous communities in Australia is Learning through Country, embedded in a 'pedagogy of place' and experiential learning through Indigenous land and sea management and Ranger programs (Fogarty, 2013; Fogarty & Schwab, 2012). As a modality of teaching, Learning through Country successfully incorporates mainstream literacy objectives and Indigenous knowledge systems. It nurtures cultural connections to Country and builds contextually appropriate pathways to employment for Indigenous youth in remote settings. The Learning through Country model takes a 'strengths-based approach' (Fogarty et al., 2017) that leverages the uniqueness of Indigenous linguistic, cultural and social contexts so that education becomes personalised and 'learner-centred', increasing student engagement and positive education outcomes. It also creates a culturally-aligned learning environment that is less contrived and more integrated with daily life where skills can be learned by observation, practice and interaction (Palmer, 2012).

Much of the policy for Indigenous populations in wealthy countries such as Australia, Canada, and New Zealand is focused on closing the gap on social inequalities and disadvantage in areas such as participation in the mainstream economy, health, and education – despite these efforts progress has been relatively static (Mitrou et al., 2014). The above examples demonstrate the complexity surrounding many of these socioeconomic indicators and highlight the need to consider cultural factors and determinants to design effective policy. To achieve this, governments and policy makers need to provide the means for Indigenous populations to apply their culture, philosophies, methodologies, and knowledge in policy development (Parter et al., 2019).

History and racism

> *The brutal impact of colonisation that has displaced our people, has left a great wake in its path and has had a devastating impact on our communities. The growth of Australian society has established its own structures to maintain this position and brick by brick, has engulfed us. This legacy has left us as aliens in our own lands and led to much of the structural racism and social disadvantage that we face today. As a result, many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people live out our lives overshadowed by ongoing and relentless experiences of trauma (KALACC, 2017, p. 16).*

The literature highlights the complex interplay between cultural and other determinants which flag the need for structural and systemic change to remove barriers to realising a positive, strengths-based relationship between culture and wellbeing. An understanding of Indigenous wellbeing would be lacking without an exploration of the contemporary impacts of colonisation, discrimination, unjust practices, and inequitable policies that overtime have embedded barriers to both maintaining culture and supporting wellbeing. This is broadly understood as historical trauma – 'the snowballing of collective experiences and effects of "colonial injury"' through 'ever-shifting historical sequences of adverse policies and practices by dominant settler societies' – which has created cross-generational 'legacies of risk and vulnerability' that continue compounding trauma 'until "healing" interrupts these deleterious processes' (Dudgeon & Bray, 2018, p. 98).

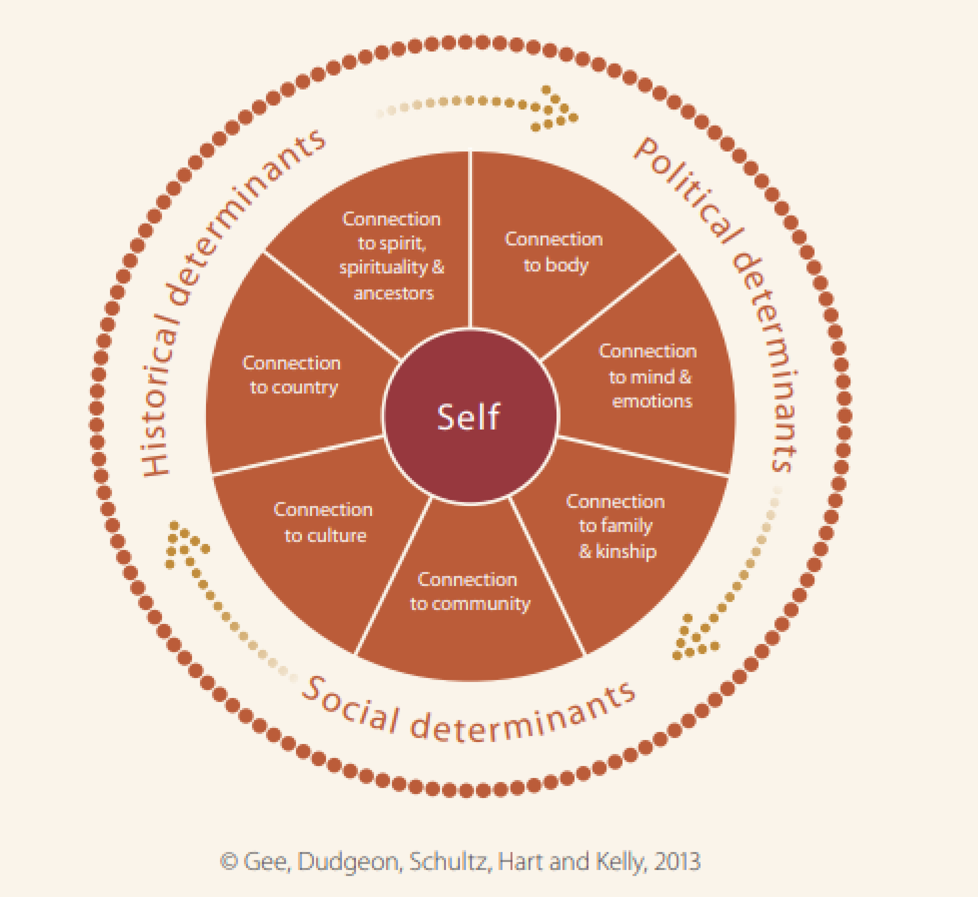
Through numerous studies, Krieger (2001) has brought a scientific lens to the issue of discrimination as one form of societal injustice becoming embodied inequality and manifested as health inequities. The Ecosocial Framework is a contemporary framework seeking to contextualise complex determinants of health and wellbeing (such as racism, discrimination, and trauma) on multiple levels – as we are simultaneously social beings and biological organisms, the health impacts are not simply about exposure, but are embedded in biological processes over time (Krieger, 2001). The ecosocial approach has four core concepts – embodiment (of the material and social world in which we live); pathways to embodiment (simultaneously shaped by social arrangements and our biological evolution); cumulative interplay between exposure, susceptibility, and resistance (conceptualised at multiple levels, in multiple domains, and manifested over multiple spatio-temporal scales); and accountability and agency (of institutions and epidemiologists) (Krieger, 2005).

Krieger's Ecosocial Framework provides a pathway to understanding the complexity of racism and historical trauma, how it presents contemporarily and internally for Indigenous communities.

> *Inequitable race relations simultaneously – and not sequentially – (1) benefit the groups who claim racial superiority at the expense of those whom they deem intrinsically inferior, (2) racialize biology to produce and justify the very categories used to demarcate racial ethnic groups, and (3) generate inequitable living and working conditions that, via embodiment, result in the biological expression of racism – and hence racial/ethnic health inequities (Krieger, 2012, pp. 936–937).*

In Australia, the impact of history in trauma and loss and the impact of racism and stigma as determinants of wellbeing, are explicitly observed as two of the nine guiding principles of the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023 (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). The Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) Model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples is heavily referenced in Indigenous health policy in Australia (Figure 1).

Figure 1 Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people


Historical determinants
Political determinants
Social determinants
Connection to spirit, spirituality & ancestors
Connection to body
Connection to country
Self
Connection to mind & emotions
Connection to culture
Connection to family & kinship
Connection to community
© Gee, Dudgeon, Schultz, Hart and Kelly, 2013

Source: Gee et al., 2014.

The circular graphic represents the holistic notion of Indigenous wellness as the interconnection between people, place, spirituality and culture, as opposed to a Western conception that would view connections as more linear (Hodge et al., 2009). Central to wellbeing is 'Self', which is embedded in community, family, kinship and culture, representing the collective nature of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing. The determinants surrounding the model represent the ecology of determinants that can be either supportive of or corrosive to wellbeing (Arabena, 2020). In this SEWB model, historical determinants refer to:

> *the impact of past government policies and the extent of historical oppression and cultural displacement experienced by individuals, families and communities or, conversely, the extent to which communities have managed to accommodate cultural displacement … and build capacity for self-governance that helps to maintain or renew cultural continuity and control (Gee et al., 2014, p. 62).*

Despite this recognition and understanding, there remains a gap in effective program and service delivery in the health system to address racism and historical trauma as a barrier to Indigenous wellbeing (Gupta et al., 2020). Studies in health care settings have shown that the presence of interpersonal racism (discriminatory interactions between individuals) and institutional racism (inequity expressed through economic and political systems) contribute to poor health and wellbeing outcomes for Indigenous people and people of colour (Bailey et al., 2017; Larson et al., 2007). In a recent study, Thurber et al. (2021) found that everyday experiences of discrimination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults were associated with reduced cultural wellbeing, including having a low level of control of their life, feeling torn between their traditional culture and mainstream culture, and feeling disconnected from their traditional culture. These findings are also substantiated by qualitative research by Garvey et al. (2021) who found that experiences of racism engendered feelings of shame and disempowerment for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and impinged on their right to live with respect and dignity.

The perpetual deficit discourse that surrounds Indigenous communities is a form of institutional racism, undermining respect and dignity, that can manifest as internalised racism – that is, adaptations made by persons who experience discrimination, such as internalising negative racial stereotypes (Fforde et al., 2013; Larson et al., 2007). This is captured in the following statement by Kerin (quoted in Fforde et al., 2013, p. 163):

> *Those who have the ability to shape discourse define what it is possible to think while suppressing other ways of thinking. The ability to shape discourse, legitimise and reproduce it builds power. By defining what is possible to think and suppressing others, those with institutional power – like governmental agencies – do not need to draw on coercive force to change people's behaviour because the dominant discourse has established the framework, or 'rules of the game', that individuals and groups must 'play to' in order to be recognised and participate.*

Further, the deficit discourse pathologises Indigeneity as the cause of disadvantage and poor health outcomes among Indigenous populations in ways that 'indicators of public health, mortality and morbidity statistics become supportive of frames that accept the cause of "illness" as part of Indigenous identity' (Fforde et al., 2013, p. 167). This in turn can distort policy discussions and result in misdirected policy further entrenching Indigenous disadvantage and poor wellbeing. Moving towards a decolonising, strengths-based approach to Indigenous wellbeing is essential to shift the discourse and engender societal transformations. Without this, 'reform will fail in addressing historical trauma and the assumed universality of entrenched health systems, leaving injustice entrenched in the system' (Moewaka Barnes & McCreanor, 2019, p. 26; see also, Arabena, 2020; Fforde et al.,2013).

Understanding the pathways to Indigenous wellbeing is complex and arguably impossible to understand by employing a purely Western perspective of wellbeing. The imposition of Western values and beliefs through colonisation has resulted in an embeddedness and invisibility of the dominant Western culture, which has created a barrier to understanding different worldviews and ways of knowing, being and doing (Althaus, 2020; Wexler, 2009). Accordingly, attempts to generate improvements in Indigenous wellbeing are based on the underlying assumption that wellbeing can only be achieved by adopting the fundamental tenets of Western society (Yu, 2012). Indigenous peoples have a significantly different lived experience to the mainstream population, and the cultural domains and determinants of Indigenous wellbeing identified above attempts to capture the aspirations and values important to Indigenous communities for living a good life. This review has also attempted to highlight how Indigenous culture determines the conceptualisation of these domains and what might be considered more universal aspects that constitute a meaningful life. Further, it has attempted to highlight how achieving fulfilment across these domains is heavily bound in the unique protective factors and strengths of Indigenous culture.

The following section focuses on frameworks and indicators that have been developed, building up the evidence base on the cultural domains and determinants of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing frameworks and indicators

To inform the development of a culture and wellbeing outcomes measurement framework in the Kimberley, our review of the literature has included a focus on identifying existing or emerging frameworks that seek to measure Indigenous wellbeing outcomes and/or examine the relationship between cultural indicators and wellbeing outcomes. In this section of the report we review some key frameworks and sets of indicators that specifically aim to measure wellbeing outcomes and/or the cultural determinants of wellbeing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Rather than replicate other recent reviews of the literature on Indigenous wellbeing, our review has focused on identifying literature on those indicators that link cultural domains and determinants to wellbeing outcomes – including literature where such indicators have been measured and/or their association to wellbeing outcomes has been statistically analysed and validated. This includes work undertaken within the government, research, and community-controlled sectors, including where undertaken in partnership between sectors. The primary purpose of this is to help inform the development of a set of indicators of culture and wellbeing in Kimberley Aboriginal communities – identifying existing indicators and frameworks that may be relevant and that can be compared against our findings from our primary data collection through interviews and focus groups being undertaken by CRPs with Kimberley Aboriginal people and communities.

ABS Framework for measuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s wellbeing, 2010

In 2010, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) published a framework for measuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples’ wellbeing (ABS, 2010). This framework consisted of the following nine domains, with the ABS noting the potential for interaction between them:

- culture, heritage and leisure
- family, kinship and community
- health
- education, learning and skills
- customary, voluntary and paid work

- income and economic resources
- housing, infrastructure and services
- law and justice
- citizenship and governance (ABS, 2010).

The ABS identified elements of each domain, split into two categories: individual characteristics; and social, cultural and economic environments. The elements of the 'culture, heritage and leisure' domain as well as cultural elements of other domains are shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Selected cultural domain elements in the ABS Framework for measuring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wellbeing, 2010

Domain	Individual characteristics	Social, cultural and economic environments
Culture, heritage and leisure (all elements)	Identifying with a clan, tribal or language group Respect of culture Traditional knowledge and lore Cultural responsibilities and roles Participation in traditional activities Spiritual and religious issues Participation in recreation and leisure activities, including sports Connection to land Language spoken and proficiency	Recognition of a clan, tribal or language group Protection and ownership of intellectual rights of cultural heritage Recognition and practice of Indigenous knowledge and lore Cultural obligations and traditional rights Cultural representation, especially through art Access to traditional lands Caring for country Land ownership and control Maintenance of and support for Indigenous languages
Family, kinship and community (selected elements)	Family roles and responsibilities Contact with extended family Removal from family Participation in community events Sense of belonging to community	Family and community support structures Family history and inter-generational effects Community events Community cohesion and empowerment
Health (selected elements)	Social and emotional wellbeing, e.g. strength of spirit and mental health	Customary health practices and medicines Community involvement in primary health care Indigenous health workers

Domain	Individual characteristics	Social, cultural and economic environments
Education, learning and skills (selected elements)	Indigenous cultural studies at school and other places	Language and cultural content in school curriculum Involvement of Indigenous people in development and delivery of Indigenous studies Indigenous education workers
Customary, voluntary and paid work (selected elements)	Customary work (e.g. hunting, fishing and gathering) Balancing work and family/community roles	Traditional economies Indigenous business activity Employer support for working arrangements
Law and justice (selected elements)	Customary obligations (including conflicts)	Native title Recognition of Indigenous rights and obligations in Commonwealth and state law Customary law
Citizenship and governance (selected elements)	Participation in community organisations and other bodies Exercising leadership and responsibility Control over decision making; free, prior and informed consent in decisions	Self determination Community controlled organisations Legitimacy of governance structures (e.g. imposed vs local development and control)

Two key ABS data sources for measuring outcomes against these elements (or indicators) were the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey (NATSIHS) and the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS) which we discuss later in this report.

Mayi Kuwayu Study

The Mayi Kuwayu National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing is a longitudinal study that commenced data collection in 2018. Led by Indigenous academics, the study looks at how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing is linked to peoples' cultures and is designed to be used as an evidence base for policies and programs and to 'drive change towards a culturally-centred approach under frameworks such as the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan and the new Closing the Gap Agreement' (Lowitja Institute, 2021, p. 12). The study has identified six cultural indicator domains which contain several sub-domains – these are also referred to in the literature as cultural determinants of Indigenous health and wellbeing. While distinct from the SEWB model, Table 2 highlights significant alignment and overlap with the Mayi Kuwayu Study's cultural domains or determinants.

We found a number of recent reviews of the literature and evidence on the domains and determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing (Bourke et al., 2018; Butler et al., 2019; Nguyen & Cairney, 2013; Salmon et al., 2018; Verbunt et al., 2021). The cultural domains and determinants identified across these reviews align significantly with the Mayi Kuwayu Study cultural determinants and the SEWB model. Two of these reviews were undertaken as part of the Mayi Kuwayu Study to inform their cultural domains (Bourke et al., 2018; Salmon et al., 2018).

In their comprehensive literature review to identify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' domains of wellbeing, Butler et al. (2019, p. 138) identified 'nine broad interconnected wellbeing dimensions: **autonomy, empowerment and recognition**; **family and community**; **culture, spirituality and identity**; **Country**; basic needs; work, roles and responsibilities; education; physical health; and mental health' (emphasis added to highlight overlap with Mayi Kuwayu Study and SEWB cultural domains). Verbunt et al. (2021, p. 1) found that '**Family/community**, **Country and place**, **cultural identity** and **self-determination** were strongly identified across reviews as having a positive impact on the health and wellbeing outcomes of Aboriginal peoples' (emphasis added to highlight overlap with Mayi Kuwayu Study and SEWB cultural domains).

Out of 72 publications assessed by the Mayi Kuwayu Study as part of its evidence review, only seven (10%) were scored as having a high quality of evidence (Bourke et al., 2018). Of these seven high quality publications, only two were undertaken in Australia: the Yawuru Wellbeing Survey (Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b) and the Interplay Wellbeing Framework (Cairney et al., 2017). Our review of the literature has identified another relevant study – What Matters to Adults (WM2A) – that has published its Fabric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing conceptual model after the evidence review was completed by the Mayi Kuwayu Study (Garvey et al., 2021). A brief overview of these three studies is provided below.

Table 2 Shared domains and determinants from the Mayi Kuwayu Study and the SEWB model

Mayi Kuwayu Study cultural domains	Mayi Kuwayu Study sub-domains	Related SEWB model domains and determinants
Connection to Country	Spiritual connection Living on Country Land rights and autonomy Caring for Country	Connection to Country Connection to spirit, spirituality and ancestors
Indigenous beliefs and knowledge	Spiritual and religious beliefs Traditional knowledge Traditional healing Knowledge transmission and continuity	Connection to spirit, spirituality and ancestors
Indigenous language	Impacts of language on health Language revitalisation Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language education	Connection to culture
Family, kinship and community	Family and kinship Community	Connection to family and kinship Connection to community
Cultural expression and continuity	Identity Traditional practices Arts and music Community practices Sport	Connection to culture Connection to spirit, spirituality and ancestors
Self-determination and leadership	Cultural safety Self-determination and wellbeing Leadership	Political determinants

Yawuru Wellbeing Project

The Yawuru Wellbeing Project is an example of an Indigenous community setting its own wellbeing agenda and priorities (Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b). Through this project, wellbeing indicators were developed from the ground up, working with the Yawuru people and prioritising their voices in the conception and measurement of wellbeing (Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b). For many language groups in the Kimberley concepts like liyan, ngarlu and pilyurr have been described as Aboriginal ways of understanding wellbeing as connections between the mind, body, spirit, and land (Dwyer et al., 2019; Roe, 2000; Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b; Yawuru RNTBC, 2013). Yawuru people – traditional owners of the lands and waters in and around Rubibi (the town of Broome) in the southwest Kimberley – understand wellbeing through the concept of liyan, which is a 'model of living well in connection with country, culture, others and with oneself' (Yap & Yu, 2016a, p. 8). Mabu Liyan (good liyan) is based on the concepts of relatedness (family and kinship relations, and physical and spiritual connection to Country), holism (linked to feeling, being, doing and relating; a state of being) and balance (within one's self, with relationships to others and to Country) (Yap & Yu, 2019).

The Yawuru Wellbeing Project was carried out in three distinct stages:

- Stage 1 involved face-to-face semi-structured interviews to conceptualise Yawuru's ideas of a good life and mabu liyan
- Stage 2 involved focus group activities to select the relevant indicators of wellbeing generated from the themes arising from the interviews
- Stage 3 presented the potential lists of indicators back to community for discussion, refinement and validation.

The project identified eight themes, each with a number of indicators that Yawuru people saw as contributing to mabu liyan – a Yawuru conception of wellbeing based on their concept of a good life (see Table 3).

Table 3 Yawuru Wellbeing Project examples of themes and indicators

Themes	Example indicators
Family, identity and relatedness	Sharing your fish or kill with family and friends Seeing and spending time with family
Community	Participating in community cultural events Being able to have a say or have control over what happens in my community
Connection to country	Looking after country Eating bush tucker, eating fish that was caught in season and meat that was hunted in season
Connection to culture	Speaking and understanding the Yawuru language Participation in law and ceremonies
Safety and respect	Feel respected and show respect to Indigenous groups in my community Feel respected and show respect to family and friends
Standard of living	Adequate housing conditions Having a secure income stream including a diversity of sources of income
Rights and recognition	Environment free from pollutants and hazards Feel recognised and proud to be Native Title holders
Health	Healthy body to enjoy life Minimise ill health from too much alcohol or drugs

Source: Yap & Yu 2016a, 2016b.

Interplay Wellbeing Framework

The Interplay research project was developed by researchers at the Cooperative Research Centre for Remote Economic Participation hosted by Ninti One. It ‘aimed to develop and validate – both culturally and scientifically – a framework to quantify a holistic concept of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Australia, for the purpose of informing policy and practice’ (Cairney et al., 2017, p. 3). The Interplay Wellbeing Framework was developed following extensive community consultation, bringing together government Closing the Gap priorities ‘of education, employment and health with community identified priorities of culture, empowerment and community’ (Cairney et al., 2017, p. 4). As the name of the project suggests, the study involved an exploration of the association between government- and community-identified wellbeing domains. Table 4 provides the list of domains and sub-domains represented in the Interplay survey of 842 participants from four communities representing river, island, desert, and coast geographies.

Table 4 Interplay Wellbeing Project domains and sub-domains from survey to final analysis

Domains in Interplay survey	Sub-domains in Interplay survey	Domains and sub-domains retained in final analysis
Culture	Language, country, law, ceremony, family, importance of culture, practicing culture, culture in school	Importance of culture: Law; Ceremony Practice culture: Caring for country; Hunting/food sources Culture in school: Learned about my culture; Learn in first language; Community support of school Aboriginal literacy: Read Aboriginal language; Write Aboriginal language
Community	Leadership, safety, connectedness, trust and respect, services	Community: Feels safe; Works well together; Trust and respect
Empowerment	Inclusiveness, mobility, resilience, self-efficacy, identity, agency, hope	Empowerment: Resilience, Self-efficacy, Identity
Education	Achievements/outcomes, English literacy and numeracy, focus, motivations, barriers, pathways to work	Motivations for Education: Improve English skills; Learn new things; Improve confidence English literacy and numeracy: Speak English; Read English; Write English; Understand numbers; Add and subtract
Work	Paid job, volunteer work, cultural and family work, pathways from education, culture at work, motivations, barriers, work life balance, value/meaning in work	Work: Paid work; Voluntary work; Study/education
Health	Nutrition, food security, exercise, substance use, anxiety, depression, medical conditions, physical health, dental health, health services, barriers	General health: Normal activities; Work or study; Energy levels; Socialising Social and emotional wellbeing: Worries-hard to breathe; Worries-dizzy; Worries-shaky; Too many bad moods; Get angry or wild quickly; Trouble sleeping Substances: Tobacco; Grog
Wellbeing	Now, past, future	

What Matters to Adults (WM2Adults)

The What Matters 2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Adults (WM2Adults) study ‘aims to develop a nationally relevant, strengths-based measure of wellbeing that is grounded in the parts of life that are important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults’ (Garvey et al., 2021, p. 2; see also Howard et al., 2020). Using an Indigenist research approach, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led research team developed a conceptual model called the Fabric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing model (Garvey et al., 2021). Through a process of collaborative yarning exploring the views of 359 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults, the research team identified three fundamental connective threads – family, community, and culture – that are understood to be woven in and around five critical parts of life that impact wellbeing: belonging and connection; holistic health; purpose and control; dignity and respect; and basic needs. A summary of these is provided in Table 5. This conceptual model is intended to 'be used to inform the development of a holistic measure of wellbeing that can be used by health services and policy makers working with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Garvey et al., 2021, p. 9).

Table 5 Description of elements in the Fabric of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing model

Critical element	Description, including connection to the connective threads of family, community, and culture
Belonging and connection	Belonging and connection was the theme most commonly spoken about by participants; it was predominantly associated with an individual's relationships and bonds with family and community, and the importance of culture in developing and maintaining a sense of shared experience and understanding.
Holistic health	Holistic health referenced the idea that being healthy as an essential component of wellbeing; health was described as a holistic and multidimensional state of wellness often determined the quality of one's connections to family, community and culture.
Purpose and control	Purpose and control were fundamental to wellbeing and were most often discussed in the context of stability at home, employment and financial security, education and cultural and familial responsibilities.
Dignity and respect	The importance to wellbeing of an individual feeling that they were viewed and treated by others with dignity and respect was described, which was experienced in the contexts of interpersonal relationships, policies, services and experiences of racism.
Basic needs	Participants expressed the imperative to have their needs, and the needs of their family and community met, in order to move forward and achieve good wellbeing. Basic needs identified by participants included: housing, money, access to services, education, employment, opportunities to thrive and justice.

The frameworks discussed above identify several cultural domains and determinants of wellbeing. In the following section we review research that has sought to statistically analyse the association between such cultural domains and determinants and wellbeing outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Statistical analysis of the association between culture and wellbeing

Our review of the literature identified several research papers that have applied statistical techniques to analyse survey data to test the association between culture and wellbeing. The research discussed below is based on analysis of data from two ABS surveys: the NATSIHS and the NATSISS.

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Survey

In 2009, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW) published a report on measuring the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (AIHW 2009). The report was published as part of efforts – in collaboration with the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

(NACCHO) and ABS – to develop measures of social and emotional wellbeing. The report assessed how well the interim social and emotional wellbeing module was working in the 2004–05 NATSIHS, and reports on outcomes of stakeholders' workshop held in 2006 that reviewed the interim module (AIHW, 2009). At that time, there were eight domains in the NATSIHS SEWB module:

- psychological distress (Kessler-5)
- impact of psychological distress
- positive wellbeing
- anger
- life stressors
- discrimination
- cultural identity
- removal from natural family.

The cultural identity domain of the 2004–05 NATSIHS was based on: whether a person identified with a tribal group, language group or clan; if they recognised an area as their homelands or traditional Country; and, if so, whether they lived there or could visit there – this question was only asked of respondents in non-remote areas. The report presents results of analysis to test the interim module's validity – i.e., 'whether it measures the concept it was designed to measure' (AIHW, 2009, p. 30). The outcomes of the cross-validation of the eight domains included the findings that in non-remote Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who identified with a tribal group, language group or clan were significantly more likely (compared to those who did not) to report that:

- they recognise their homelands and live there, or not live there but have access to them
- they felt discriminated against in any setting because of their Indigenous origin
- a relative had been removed from their natural family
- they experienced a higher number of stressors (this was also the case for those who recognised their homelands than for those who did not).

Table 6 provides the overall cross-validation results. Given some significant qualifications on this data – including its age and the fact that respondents on cultural identification were only from non-remote Australia – this holds limited value for our purposes, though it provides a useful example of how cultural and wellbeing domains and the relationships have been validated in an outcomes measurement framework.

Table 6 Outcomes of the cross-validation of the eight social and emotional wellbeing domains, AIHW, 2009

Domain assessed	Results show 'expected' association with:	No association or inconclusive results with:	'Unexpected' results with:
Psychological distress	impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing; anger; number of life stressors; mental illness stressor; discrimination; removal from natural family (self)	cultural identification; removal from natural family (relative only)	–
Impact of psychological distress	psychological distress; anger; number of life stressors; positive wellbeing; discrimination (general) within domain	cultural identification; discrimination (when seeking health care); removal from natural family	–
Positive wellbeing	psychological distress; impact of psychological distress; anger; number of life stressors; discrimination (general); removal from natural family	cultural identification; discrimination (when seeking health care)	–
Anger	psychological distress; impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing; number of life stressors; discrimination (general and when seeking health care)	cultural identification; removal from natural family	–
Life stressors	Number of stressors: psychological distress; impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing; anger Mental illness stressors: psychological distress Discrimination stressor: discrimination	removal from natural family	–
Discrimination	psychological distress; positive wellbeing (associated with 'general' discrimination only); number of life stressors; discrimination stressor within domain	impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing (no association with 'discrimination in health care')	–
Cultural identification (non-remote population only)	discrimination; removal from natural family (relative only) within domain	psychological distress; impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing; anger; removal from natural family (self)	Number of stressors: a higher number of stressors were reported by those who recognised their homelands than by those who did not. This

Domain assessed	Results show 'expected' association with:	No association or inconclusive results with:	'Unexpected' results with:
			was also the case for those who identified with a tribal group, language group or clan.
Removal from natural family	psychological distress (associated only with removal of self, with or without relative)	psychological distress (not associated with removal of relative only); impact of psychological distress; positive wellbeing; anger; number of life stressors	-

The AIHW does not appear to have repeated this cross-validation using subsequent NATSIHS data. It is notable that in the 2018–19 NATSIHS the cultural identification module asked respondents several additional questions that could potentially provide greater insights into the relationship between culture and wellbeing. The 2018–19 NATSIHS asked respondents:

- if they identify with a tribal group, language group, clan, mission, or Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander regional group
- if they recognise an area as their homeland or traditional country, whether they live there or are allowed to visit there, and how often they visit there
- if the people they mix with know that the respondent is Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- how important it is to them to be recognised as an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander person
- if they feel accepted by other Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people
- how satisfied they are with their knowledge of their culture
- whether they are proud of being Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander/their culture
- whether they or any of their relatives have ever been removed or taken away from their families.

Under the language module, the 2018–19 NATSIHS also asked respondents if they speak an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language at home. Under the physical activity module, it asked respondents in remote areas if they had participated in hunting/gathering bush foods/fishing or dancing (including ceremonial dancing).

The National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey

The NATSISS provides another key national ABS dataset to explore the relationship between culture and wellbeing (Biddle, 2012, 2015; Biddle & Crawford, 2017; Biddle & Swee, 2012; Dinku et al., 2020; Dockery, 2010, 2012). In his analysis of the 2002 NATSISS, Dockery (2010, p. 315) found that 'stronger attachment to traditional culture [is] associated with enhanced outcomes across a range of factors.' His analysis of the 2008 NATSISS found that 'cultural identity has robust associations with wellbeing … Indigenous people with stronger cultural identification, who speak Indigenous languages and who partake in traditional economic activities are happy more often than others' (Dockery, 2012, p. 298). For Dockery, this association between culture and subjective wellbeing is important as it ‘reflects Indigenous people’s own values and preferences’ (Dockery, 2012, p. 298). These findings were based on statistically testing the association between wellbeing and cultural indicators as shown in Table 7.

Table 7 Wellbeing and cultural indicators analysed by Dockery (2002) and 2008 NATSISS

Wellbeing indicators	2002 NATSISS – Cultural attachment (in order of weighting – highest to lowest)	2008 NATSISS – Cultural variables (associated with four cultural factors)
2002 NATSISS Self-assessed health status Arrested in last 5 years Risky alcohol consumption Employed Years of post-primary education **2008 NATSISS** **Wellbeing indicators:** Often been happy Mental health Psychological stress Mainstream outcomes: Self-assessed health (healthy) Education (completed school) Employed Ever charged by police Risky alcohol consumption in past 2 weeks	Social activities – Funerals, ceremonies or festivals Social activities – Fishing or hunting in a group Speaks an Indigenous language Attended cultural event – ceremony Main language spoken at home is Indigenous Social activities – Recreational or cultural group activities Attended cultural event – sports carnival Attended cultural event – funeral Identifies with clan, tribal/ language group Attended cultural event – involvement with Indigenous organisation Attended cultural event – festival/carnival involving arts, craft, music or dance Cultural activity – writing or telling stories without pay Cultural activity – writing or telling stories for payment Cultural activity – music, dance or theatre for payment Cultural activity – arts or craft for payment Cultural activity – arts or craft without payment Recognises homelands and lives on homelands Recognises homelands and allowed to visit homelands Cultural activity – music, dance or theatre without payment Speaks only some Indigenous words	**Factor 1: Participation** Cultural events: festival Cultural activities: story telling Cultural activities: performance Cultural events: Aboriginal organisation Cultural activities: art/craft Cultural events: ceremonies Cultural events: NAIDOC week **Factor 2: Identity** Recognises homelands or traditional country Identifies with clan, tribal or language group Importance of attending cultural events How often attends cultural events **Factor 3: Language** Speaks an Indigenous language at home Speaks an Indigenous language **Factor 4: Traditional activities** Cultural activities: fish Cultural activities: hunt Cultural activities: gathering

Wellbeing indicators	2002 NATSISS – Cultural attachment (in order of weighting – highest to lowest)	2008 NATSISS – Cultural variables (associated with four cultural factors)
	Social activities – community or special interest group activities	
	Social activities – attendance at ATSIC or Native Title meetings	
	Recognises homelands only (does not live on or visit)	

In their analysis of 2008 NATSISS data, Biddle and Swee (2012) found a positive relationship between connections to Indigenous land, language and culture and an Indigenous person's subjective emotional wellbeing. They found that the following cultural factors were associated with a higher level of self-reported happiness even after controlling for a range of socioeconomic variables:

- living on one's homelands/traditional country
- undertaking harvesting activities
- learning and Indigenous language
- participating in cultural activities.

This was based on analysis of the association between two measures of emotional wellbeing and seven cultural variables as shown in Table 8.

Table 8 Wellbeing measures and cultural factors analysed by Biddle & Swee, 2008 NATSISS

Wellbeing measures	Cultural factors
Probability of reporting that one was a happy person all or most of the time in the previous 4 weeks (Happiness)	Recognises an area as one's homeland or traditional country
Probability of reporting that one was so sad that nothing could cheer you up at least some of the time in the previous 4 weeks (Sadness)	Lives on homelands or traditional country
	Undertook harvesting activities in previous 12 months
	Speaks or understands an Indigenous language
	Learning an Indigenous language
	Undertook cultural production in previous 12 months
	Participated in cultural events, ceremonies or organisations in previous 12 months

In their analysis of the 2014–15 NATSISS, Biddle and Crawford (2017) found that participation in arts and cultural expression was associated with better outcomes for socioeconomic indicators such as employment, education and income, and with higher levels of subjective wellbeing. The cultural factors and wellbeing measures used in their analysis are shown in Table 9.

Table 9 Wellbeing measures and cultural factors analysed by Biddle & Crawford, 2014–15 NATSISS

Wellbeing measures	Cultural factors
Health Self-assessed health **Emotional wellbeing** Felt so sad that nothing could cheer respondent up at least some of the time in previous 4 weeks Happy person all or most of the time in previous 4 weeks **Life evaluation** Overall life satisfaction (0–10 scale) **Human capital development** Currently participating in education or intends to participate in education **Life purpose and meaning** Feels able to have a say within community on important issues at least some of the time Has contact with family or friends outside household at least once per week Feels able to find general support from outside the household	**Cultural events: festivals** **Arts Participation** Made Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander arts or crafts Performed any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander music, dance or theatre Wrote or told any Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander stories **Economic participation** Sale of paintings and art works Sale of weaving, dyed cloth, sculptures, pottery, wooden art and craft Arranging or participating in cultural dancing or performances

Another analysis of the 2014–15 NATSISS by Dinku et al. (2020, p. iv) found that ‘speaking an Indigenous language is significantly associated with greater cultural attachment, social connectedness and positive emotional wellbeing … However, Indigenous language use is also associated with increased experiences of discrimination and difficulties accessing services.’ The authors note that:

> *Our findings suggest that speaking Indigenous languages is strongly associated with indicators of wellbeing relating to actions over which Indigenous individuals, families and communities can exert agency and self-determination (for example, indicators relating to culture, identity, emotional feelings and connection to Country). In contrast, Indigenous language use is less consistently correlated to those wellbeing outcomes which are most strongly determined by external structural forces (Dinku et al., 2020, p iv).*

The associations between language and other cultural and wellbeing variables that were examined are set out in Table 10.

Table 10 Language, cultural factors, and wellbeing indicators analysed by Dinku et al., 2014–15 NATSISS

Indigenous language repertoire and English proficiency	Other cultural factors	Wellbeing indicators
Indigenous language repertoire English only: main language spoken at home is Standard Australian English and does not speak or understand an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language English L1, some Indigenous L2: main language spoken at home is English and speaks or understands a few words of an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language English L1, Indigenous L2: main language spoken at home is English and does speak or understand well an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language Indigenous L1: main language spoken is an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander language **English proficiency** Fluent English Limited English	**Cultural identity and participation** Identifies with a clan, tribal or language group Cultural activities: art, craft, music or dance Cultural events: festivals and ceremonies **Connection to Country** Living on homelands Regularly visits but does not live on homelands Participated in hunting, fishing or gathering activities	**Emotional wellbeing and mental health** High positive emotional wellbeing Extreme psychological distress Overall life satisfaction (completely unsatisfied = 1; completely satisfied = 10) Diagnosed with a mental health condition **Physical health** Very good or excellent health Diagnosed with long-term physical health condition Meeting NHMRC guidelines for fruit and/or vegetable consumption Drinking alcohol at risky level Smoking at least daily **Social wellbeing** Frequent contact with friends and family outside household Feeling like has a say in community Getting support from outside household **Education** Completed Year 12 Completed post-school qualification at Certificate level 3 or above **Economic wellbeing** Receiving income from arts activities Receiving income from cultural activities Employed in food, accommodation, arts or recreational services industries **Employed** Personal weekly income **Racism, justice and safety** Unfair treatment in last 12 months Ever been arrested Ever been incarcerated

Indigenous language repertoire and English proficiency	Other cultural factors	Wellbeing indicators
		Access to services
		Any problems accessing services
		Problems accessing services if receives government payments or allowances as main source of income
		Problems accessing healthcare and medical services if reports having a diagnosed long-term health condition
		Accessing legal services if reports being arrested in the last 12 months
		Accessing legal services if reports experiencing violence in the last 12 months
		Problems accessing housing services if household currently rents dwelling

In the following section of the report we explore if and how the evidence base on the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing has influenced key national policy frameworks.

Recognition of cultural determinants of wellbeing in policy frameworks

In this section we review some key government policy frameworks to explore if and how cultural domains and determinants of wellbeing described in the literature have been recognised and implemented and how the agenda is shifting over time. The myriad ways in which government policy development has considered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture falls on a spectrum ranging from recognising Indigenous culture explicitly in target and goal setting, to embracing culture as the foundation upon which frameworks are then developed.

Government wellbeing frameworks and Indigenous peoples

The development of the concept and measurement of wellbeing can be seen as part of a global effort to move beyond the limitations of dominant economic indicators such as Gross Domestic Product (GDP) which provide only a partial picture of quality of life. Wellbeing is viewed as a more complex concept and holistic way of understanding the circumstances of individuals, communities and countries that requires broader assessment outside the economic realm (Organization of Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2020). Wellbeing can be seen as measuring what matters for individuals, communities, and societies to support the development and evaluation of policies and programs (McGregor et al., 2015; Wellbeing Economy Alliance, n.d.).

One way in which wellbeing has been operationalised in policy settings is in the creation of wellbeing strategies or frameworks that recognise the complexity of circumstances and factors that impact the ability of people to live a good life. Internationally, the OECD has been instrumental in developing a holistic framework – the OECD

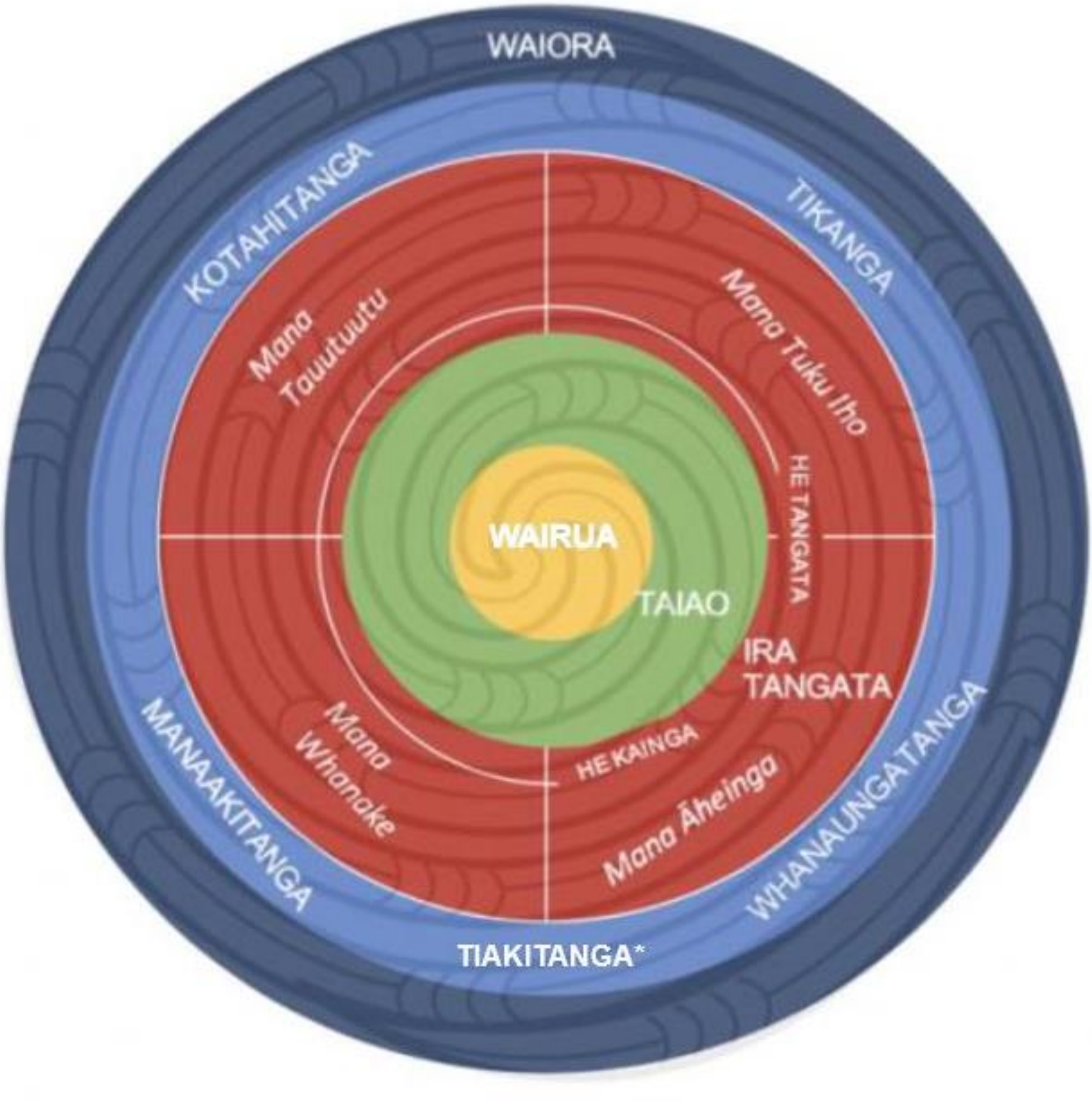
Better Life Initiative (OECD, 2020). This measures wellbeing across 11 dimensions of material living conditions and quality of life to more accurately reflect the complexity of factors impacting on living well (OECD, 2020; Yap & Yu, 2016a, 2016b). Taking inspiration from the OECD, Scotland has developed a National Performance Framework stating that 'for Scotland to become a more successful country with opportunities for all to flourish through increased wellbeing, we need to progress towards all 11 National Outcomes', including health, fair work and business, children, communities, culture and human rights (Thomson, 2021).

Despite the development of more meaningful frameworks for measuring wellbeing, many contest the efficacy of mainstream frameworks for measuring Indigenous wellbeing, as they do not adequately capture the full life circumstances and unique Indigenous criteria essential to Indigenous peoples' understanding of wellbeing or living well (Durie, 2006; Jordan et al., 2010; Prout, 2012; Taylor, 2008). Further, where Indigenous worldviews of wellbeing and culture are acknowledged in strategies and frameworks, questions remain as to how well these understandings are enabled, embedded, and operationalised in public policy and service delivery (Jordan et al., 2010; Parter et al., 2019; Wright et al., 2021b).

The New Zealand Government's approach to national wellbeing policy – the Living Standards Framework (LSF) – recognises the unique aspects of Maori wellbeing. He Ara Waiora is a framework built on te ao Maori knowledge and perspectives of wellbeing which sits alongside the LSF and helps 'apply an indigenous and uniquely New Zealand approach to lifting living standards' (Te Tai Ohanga The Treasury, n.d.). As shown in Figure 2, the centre of He Ara Waiora is wairua – spiritual wellbeing – which Maori view as the foundational source of their wellbeing. Surrounding wairua is taiao (the natural world), representing the embeddedness of Maori spirit in the land and responsibilities to maintaining the land in order to maintain wellbeing. Ira tangata is the human domain influencing wellbeing and includes identity and belonging, self-determination and intergenerational exchange of prosperity and knowledge, representing the collective notion of wellbeing embedded in community and family. The outer elements of He Ara Waiora (kotahitanga, tikanga, whanaungatanga, manaakitanga) represent the environment within which wellbeing can be operationalised through positive community, social, and political relationships (Evans & Hughes, 2021).

While the LSF sits alongside and incorporates high-level concepts from He Ara Waiora, it does not seek to comprehensively incorporate everything that is important from Maori perspectives. The LSF includes a limited number of Maori-specific indicators, including 'Maori connection to marae' (percentage of Maori adults who feel strongly connected with their ancestral marae) and 'Whanau [family] wellbeing' (proportion of Maori rating whanau wellbeing as 7/10 or higher) (Te Tai Ohanga The Treasury, 2022, p. 24). 'Te reo Maori speakers' (percentage of people who can converse about a lot of everyday things in te reo Maori) is also included as an indicator but is based on the total New Zealand population (Te Tai Ohanga The Treasury, 2022, p. 26).

Figure 2 He Ara Waiora – Maori wellbeing framework


WAIORA
KOTAHITANGA
TIKANGA
Mana Tauutuutu
Mana Tuku Iho
HE TANGATA
WAIRUA
TAIAO
IRA TANGATA
HE KAINGA
Mana Whanake
Mana Āheinga
MANAAKITANGA
WHANAUNGATANGA
TIAKITANGA*

Source: Te Tai Ohanga The Treasury, n.d.

In Australia, at the state and territory level, the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) Government has developed a wellbeing framework that identifies 12 domains of wellbeing to guide its decision making and investment (ACT Government, 2020). The ACT Wellbeing Framework recognises the need to explore wellbeing of specific groups – including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – 'to look beyond the averages to understand the diversity of wellbeing across the community' (ACT Government, n.d.). Under the domain of 'identity and belonging' the ACT framework includes indicators of 'valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and recognising our Traditional Custodians' by the broader ACT community. The data used to measure progress against this indicator is drawn from an ACT-specific wellbeing survey, Living Well in the ACT Region, conducted by researchers at the University of Canberra (University of Canberra, n.d.).

At the federal level, the Australian Government announced in its 2022–23 Budget released in October 2022 that it would release a new stand-alone Measuring What Matters Statement in 2023 that will draw on the OECD

Framework for Measuring Well-being and Progress with Treasury to consult with a range of stakeholders to inform its development (Australian Government, 2022). With respect to capturing what matters to Indigenous peoples, the intention is that this new statement would complement rather than replace 'specialised reporting processes such as Closing the Gap' (Australian Government, 2022, p. 142). In July 2023, the Australian Government released its first iteration of the national Measuring What Matters wellbeing framework with five wellbeing themes:

- Healthy: A society in which people feel well and are in good physical and mental health, can access services when they need, and have the information they require to take action to improve their health.
- Secure: A society where people live peacefully, feel safe, have financial security and access to housing.
- Sustainable: A society that sustainably uses natural and financial resources, protects and repairs the environment and builds resilience to combat challenges.
- Cohesive: A society that supports connections with family, friends and the community, values diversity, and promotes belonging and culture.
- Prosperous: A society that has a dynamic, strong economy, invests in people's skills and education, and provides broad opportunities for employment and well-paid, secure jobs (Australian Government, 2023).

These five themes are further divided into 12 dimensions and 50 indicators, while inclusion, equity and fairness are cross-cutting dimensions of the Framework. The Framework includes one Indigenous-specific indicator – First Nations languages spoken – under the theme of 'Cohesive' and the dimension of 'Valuing diversity, belonging and culture' (Australian Government, 2023). The Framework includes additional detail on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' wellbeing (Box 1), recognising the limits of mainstream wellbeing measures to represent 'intrinsic cultural differences' or 'acknowledge the past practices that have had detrimental impacts' (Australian Government, 2023, p. 17).

Box 1 Measuring What Matters: Additional detail on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's wellbeing

For First Nations people, the concept of wellbeing has always been the result of preserving and maintaining culture, which directly affects mental, physical and spiritual health. This is anchored in ways of knowing and being that have existed and continued for tens of thousands of years, shared through complex kinship systems, and passed down through systems of law, lore, ceremony, and song.

Because of this, the whole of population indicators outlined in this Framework are not an accurate measure of First Nations wellbeing as they are limited in their ability to represent these intrinsic cultural differences or acknowledge the past practices that have had detrimental impacts.

However, this Measuring What Matters statement can supplement the National Agreement on Closing the Gap metrics and add to the work already being undertaken through the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing (2017–2023).

Efforts to improve First Nations people's wellbeing should always be made in partnership with First Nations people, including through implementation of the Priority Reforms under the National Agreement on Closing the Gap.

Recognition of the culture–wellbeing nexus in Closing the Gap

In November 2008, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) approved the National Indigenous Reform Agreement which set out the original six Closing the Gap targets focused on mainstream measures relating to life expectancy, child mortality, education and employment. In its first Close the Gap Shadow Report in 2010, the Close the Gap campaign, led by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, called for 'a range of social and cultural determinant targets in addition to the existing COAG education and economic participation targets' (Close the Gap Steering Committee for Indigenous Health Equality, 2010, p. 21). The shadow report also noted the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander involvement in the development of the National Partnership Agreement for Closing the Gap in Indigenous Health Outcomes, calling for 'a genuine and inclusive approach to partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their representatives' (2010, p. 14).

The campaign repeated the call for the inclusion of social and cultural determinant targets and engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in its 2017 report on progress and priorities (Close the Gap Campaign Steering Committee, 2017). In June 2017, COAG agreed that a refreshed Closing the Gap strategy would adopt a strengths-based approach and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were central to the development and implementation of the strategy (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet, n.d.). In March 2019, the arrangements for a formal partnership between COAG and the Coalition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peak Organisations (Coalition of Peaks) on Closing the Gap were set out in the Partnership Agreement on Closing the Gap 2019–2029 (Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2019).

In July 2020, the new National Agreement on Closing the Gap was released with refreshed priority reform areas and 17 socioeconomic targets. Under the heading of 'Prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures', the parties to the agreement acknowledged 'that strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are fundamental to improved life outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' and agreed to implement activities 'in a way that takes full account of, promotes, and does not diminish in any way, the cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people' (Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020, p. 4). As part of prioritising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures the agreement includes:

> *New Closing the Gap outcome areas, targets and indicators … that support the cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in areas of languages; cultural practices; land and waters; and access to culturally relevant communications (Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020, p. 4).*

The new agreement also recognises 'the role of cultural determinants in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, spanning across a range of target areas' and includes a commitment 'to identify appropriate contextual indicators and information to aid reporting' (Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020, p. 45). Key outcomes and targets that reflect recognition of the cultural determinants of wellbeing are provided in Table 11.

Table 11 Key National Agreement on Closing the Gap outcomes and targets reflecting recognition of cultural determinants, 2020

Closing the Gap Outcome	Closing the Gap Target
Outcome 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years	Target 3: By 2025, increase the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children enrolled in Year Before Fulltime Schooling (YBFS) early childhood education to 95%.
Outcome 14: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing	Target 14: Significant and sustained reduction in suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people towards zero.
Outcome 15: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and waters	Target 15a: By 2030, a 15% increase in Australia's landmass subject to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests. Target 15b: By 2030, a 15% increase in areas covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's legal rights or interests in the sea.
Outcome 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing	Target 16: By 2031, there is a sustained increase in number and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken.

Source: Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020.

Further, the 2020 agreement identifies indicators (drivers and contextual information), disaggregation, and data development for each of these four outcomes. Table 12 provides selected indicators and data development identified for these outcomes and targets that are relevant to the development of culture and wellbeing indicators. Table 13 shows the priority reform outcomes and targets.

Embracing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of health and wellbeing

In reviewing national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing frameworks we found that two dominant frameworks developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and mental health professionals to conceptualise the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing have had a significant influence – the SEWB model (Gee et al., 2014) and the Mayi Kuwayu Study cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing (Salmon et al., 2019).

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and community-controlled health organisations have long pushed for recognition of their concepts of health and wellbeing as a basis for culturally-appropriate, strengths-based policies and programs. The history of this is well laid out by contributors to the landmark publication *Working together: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health and wellbeing principles and practice* (Dudgeon, et al., 2014) – with the first edition in 2010 and second edition in 2014 (see, Dudgeon et al., 2014; Gee et al., 2014; Zubrick et al., 2014). Gee et al. (2014) trace this back to the establishment of Aboriginal community-controlled health organisations (ACCHOs) in the 1970s and their efforts to define health from an Aboriginal perspective. They note that the first National Aboriginal Health Strategy (NAHS) published in 1989 adopted the definition of health used by the National Aboriginal and Islander Health Organisation (now NACCHO) in 1979 (National Aboriginal Health Strategy Working Party, 1989). Aboriginal health is defined by NACCHO as:

> *… not just the physical well-being of an individual but refers to the social, emotional and cultural well-being of the whole Community in which each individual is able to achieve their full potential as a human being thereby bringing about the total well-being of their Community. It is a whole of life view and includes the cyclical concept of life-death-life (NACCHO, 2011, pp. 5–6).*

Table 12 Selected Closing the Gap outcomes and cultural indicators (current and under development), 2020

Outcome 3: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children are engaged in high quality, culturally appropriate early childhood education in their early years

Indicators	Data development
Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early childhood education and care service providers	Access to culturally appropriate early childhood education programs Access to bilingual education Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander early years' service providers

Outcome 14: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy high levels of social and emotional wellbeing

Indicators	Data development
–	Rate of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who feel a strong connection to culture and community

Outcome 15: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people maintain a distinctive cultural, spiritual, physical and economic relationship with their land and water

Indicators	Data development
Drivers: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's owned land and water titles Number of land claims resolved under Commonwealth, state and territory land rights legislation Number of positive Native Title Determinations **Contextual information:** Number of Indigenous Land Use Agreements (ILUAs) on the Register of Indigenous Land Use Agreements Income of registered native title bodies corporate as reported to the Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations (ORIC), including income from businesses or grants Charitable trusts holding native title and land rights monies Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people employed in water and land management Australia's conservation estate that is managed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who recognise and live on homelands/traditional country	–

Outcome 16: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and languages are strong, supported and flourishing

Indicators	Data Development
Drivers: Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages categorised as strong Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being spoken Number and age profile of the speakers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, including children Proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who speak an Indigenous language **Contextual information:** Number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing Commonwealth funded language centres to maintain and preserve languages	Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being taught/transmitted/spoken in Aboriginal community settings and organisations, including Language Centres Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages spoken in Aboriginal community settings, particularly in family life Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages being taught in early-learning, primary and secondary schools Other demographic measures of people who speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language Other economic opportunities that arise for people who speak an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander language Measures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages used in media Alternative indicators that demonstrate growth and strength of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures Definition and measures of cultural enterprises that are associated with language growth and development Number of people employed as translators for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages

Source: Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020.

Table 13 National Agreement on Closing the Gap priority reform outcomes and targets, 2020

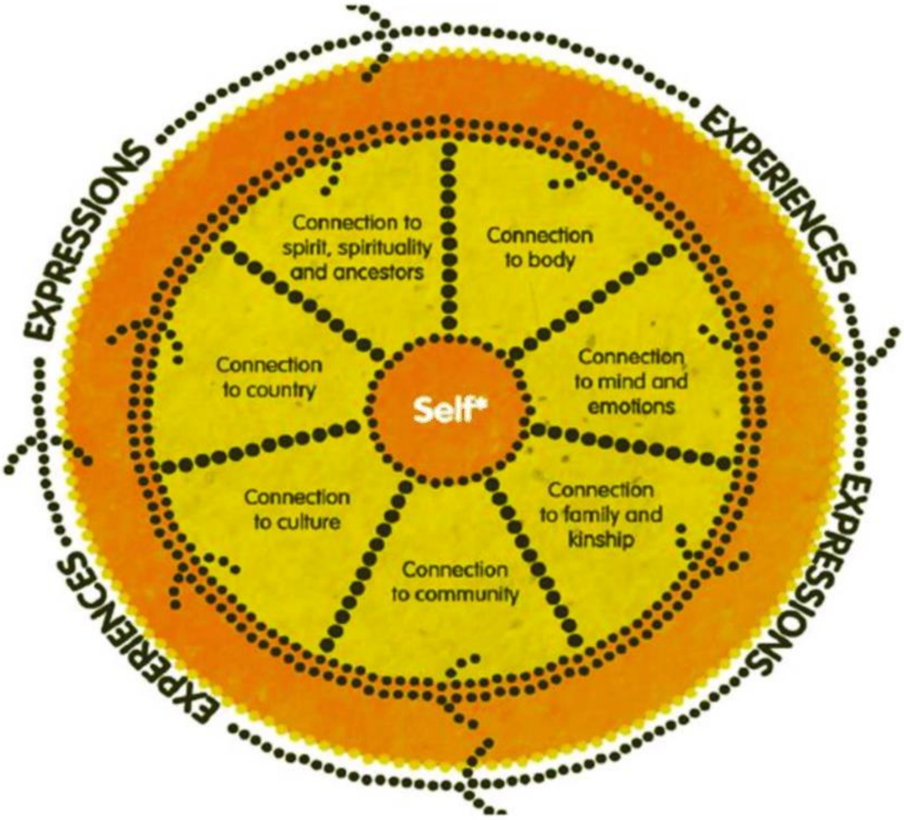
Priority Reform Outcome	Priority Reform Target
PRIORITY REFORM ONE – FORMAL PARTNERSHIPS AND SHARED DECISION-MAKING Outcome: Shared decision-making: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are empowered to share decision-making authority with governments to accelerate policy and place-based progress on Closing the Gap through formal partnership arrangements.	Target: There will be formal partnership arrangements to support Closing the Gap in place between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and governments in place in each state and territory enshrining agreed joint decision-making roles and responsibilities and where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have chosen their own representatives.
PRIORITY REFORM TWO – BUILDING THE COMMUNITY-CONTROLLED SECTOR Outcome: Building the community-controlled sector: There is a strong and sustainable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled sector delivering high quality services to meet the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the country.	Target: Increase the amount of government funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs and services going through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations
PRIORITY REFORM THREE – TRANSFORMING GOVERNMENT ORGANISATIONS Outcome: Improving mainstream institutions: Governments, their organisations and their institutions are accountable for Closing the Gap and are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, including through the services they fund.	Target: Decrease in the proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have experiences of racism.
PRIORITY REFORM FOUR – SHARED ACCESS TO DATA AND INFORMATION AT A REGIONAL LEVEL Outcome: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to, and the capability to use, locally-relevant data and information to set and monitor the implementation of efforts to close the gap, their priorities and drive their own development.	Target: Increase the number of regional data projects to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to make decisions about Closing the Gap and their development.

Source: Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020.

Gee et al. (2014) see the uptake of the term 'social and emotional wellbeing' (SEWB) as being based on it reflecting this holistic concept of health from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. In 2013, members of the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association developed a conceptual model of SEWB from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective identifying cultural domains and social, cultural, political, and historical determinants of SEWB (see Figure 1 & Figure 3). It is noted that 'this conception of self is grounded within a collectivist perspective that views the self as inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community' (Gee et al., 2014, p. 57).

Taking a 'whole-of-life view' acknowledges that wellbeing varies over the life course and that a single measure of wellbeing cannot adequately reflect the multidimensional nature of wellbeing or the interconnectedness of different wellbeing elements that make up the whole. This emphasises the importance of taking an integrated approach to understanding and measuring wellbeing that considers a whole system of domains, determinants and indicators and interactions and relationships of these elements over the life course (see Arabena, 2020).

Figure 3 Social and Emotional Wellbeing Model for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people


EXPERIENCES
EXPRESSIONS
EXPERIENCES
EXPRESSIONS
Connection to spirit, spirituality and ancestors
Connection to body
Connection to country
Self*
Connection to mind and emotions
Connection to culture
Connection to family and kinship
Connection to community

Source: Gee et al., 2014, p. 57.

National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–23

This model has subsequently informed the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023 (hereafter the 2017 SEWB framework) (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017). The 2017 SEWB framework links the cultural domains with risk and protective factors (see Table 14).

The 2017 SEWB framework notes that:

> *Cultural determinants can inform a strengths based approach to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health. They acknowledge that stronger connections to culture and country build stronger individual and collective identities, a sense of self-esteem, resilience, and improved outcomes across the other determinants of health including education, economic stability and community safety (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 9).*

The 2017 SEWB framework's Action Area 2 – Promote Wellness, Outcome 2.1 is described as 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and cultures are strong and support social and emotional wellbeing and mental health'. The rationale provided for this is that:

> *Communities can be sources of support and resilience that promote social and emotional wellbeing when community organisation and functioning is culturally-informed and provides for cultural practice and transmission. For optimal social and emotional wellbeing in individuals and families, empowering*

> *communities to heal and to revitalise culture and cultural practices may be required (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 20).*

A key strategy identified to achieve this outcome includes: ‘Strengthen community cohesion, and restore and heal connections to culture and country including through reclamation and revitalisation’ (Commonwealth of Australia, 2017, p. 20).

Table 14 The domains of social and emotional wellbeing with risk and protective factors

Domain	Description	Examples of risk factors	Examples of protective factors
Connection to Body	Physical health – feeling strong and healthy and able to physically participate as fully as possible in life.	Chronic and communicable diseases Poor diet Smoking	Access to good healthy food Exercise Access to culturally safe, culturally competent and effective health services and professionals
Connection to Mind and Emotions	Mental health – ability to manage thoughts and feelings.	Developmental/ cognitive impairments and disability Racism Mental illness Unemployment Trauma including childhood trauma	Education Agency: assertiveness, confidence and control over life Strong identity
Connection to Family and Kinship	Connections to family and kinship systems are central to the functioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies.	Absence of family members Family violence Child neglect and abuse Children in out-of-home care	Loving, stable accepting and supportive family Adequate income Culturally appropriate family-focused programs and services
Connection to Community	Community can take many forms. A connection to community provides opportunities for individuals and families to connect with each other, support each other and work together.	Family feuding Lateral violence Lack of local services Isolation Disengagement from community Lack of opportunities for employment in community settings	Support networks Community controlled services Self-governance

Connection to Culture	A connection to a culture provides a sense of continuity with the past and helps underpin a strong identity.	Elders passing on without full opportunities to transmit culture Services that are not culturally safe Languages under threat	Contemporary expressions of culture Attending national and local cultural events Cultural institutions Cultural education Cultural involvement and participation
Connection to Country	Connection to country helps underpin identity and a sense of belonging.	Restrictions on access to country	Time spent on country
Connection to Spirituality and Ancestors	Spirituality provides a sense of purpose and meaning.	No connection to the spiritual dimension of life	Opportunities to attend cultural events and ceremonies Contemporary expressions of spirituality

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–31

In 2017, the Australian Government Department of Health and the Advisory Group on the Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–23 led the ‘My life my lead’ consultations across Australia as part of a commitment to consider the social and cultural determinants of Indigenous health (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2017). These consultations aimed to inform the development of the next Implementation Plan for the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2013–23 as well as the Closing the Gap refresh referred to above.

A key theme from these consultations was that:

> *Culture is central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing and needs to be embraced and embedded across a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and mainstream services – both as a protector and enabler of health and wellbeing (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2017, p. 5).*

It notes that:

> *The cultural determinants of health encompass the cultural factors that promote resilience, foster a sense of identity and support good mental and physical health and wellbeing for individuals, families and communities … Cultural determinants are enabled, supported and protected through traditional cultural practice, kinship, connection to land and Country, art, song and ceremony, dance, healing, spirituality, empowerment, ancestry, belonging and self-determination (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2017, p. 7).*

The *My life my lead* report identified Priority Area 1 as ‘Culture at the centre of change’ (see Figure 4) and emphasises that the following principles need to underpin future action if real change is to be achieved:

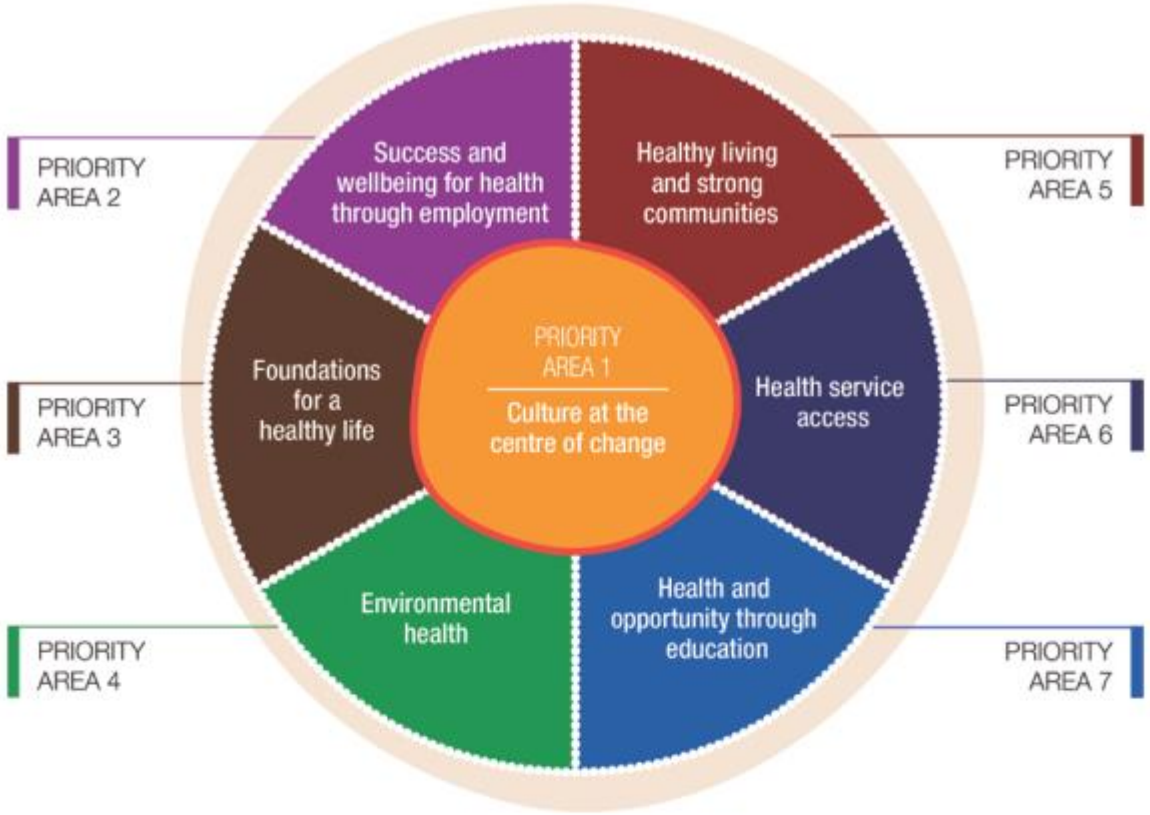
- Strong connections to culture and family are vital for good health and wellbeing: policies, programs and services must ensure a strengths-based approach that acknowledges the importance of culture and family for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and builds capacity of individuals and communities to exercise choice and control, contributing to greater resilience and wellbeing

- The best results are achieved through genuine partnerships with communities: flexible approaches that deliver the Prime Minister’s commitment to ‘do things with, not to’ Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities must be a high priority. This includes working with community-controlled organisations and providing opportunities for meaningful input from community members into service delivery at the local level.

- The impacts of trauma on poor health outcomes cannot be ignored: significant health impacts result from displacement from family, Country, institutionalisation, racism, abuse and neglect. This has led to increasingly high rates of incarceration and juvenile detention, suicide, family violence, children being taken into care, and poor physical and mental health outcomes.

- Systemic racism and a lack of cultural capability, cultural safety and cultural security remain barriers to health system access: racism makes people sick and constructive action that addresses its causes and effects will have significant positive impacts on health and broader life outcomes (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2017, pp. 7–8).

Figure 4 Culture at the centre of change


PRIORITY AREA 2
Success and wellbeing for health through employment
Healthy living and strong communities
PRIORITY AREA 5
PRIORITY AREA 3
Foundations for a healthy life
PRIORITY AREA 1
Culture at the centre of change
Health service access
PRIORITY AREA 6
PRIORITY AREA 4
Environmental health
Health and opportunity through education
PRIORITY AREA 7

Source: *My life my lead* report (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2017, p. 8).

The *My life my lead* consultations contributed to the development of the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 (NATSIHP). In alignment with *My life my lead* – and in continuity with the 2013–2023 NATSIHP – the 2021–2031 NATSIHP maintains the view of centrality of culture and wellbeing in the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Its vision is that ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long, healthy lives that are centred in culture, with access to services that are prevention-focused, culturally safe and responsive, equitable and free of racism’ (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 6). It states that all health and wellbeing approaches must include the following four foundations for a healthy life:

- holistic health and wellbeing
- the cultural determinants of health
- the social determinants of health
- a life course approach (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 17).

Further, it notes that:

> *Culture is a foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. It is a protective factor across the life course, and has a direct influence on broader social determinant outcomes. Gains across these broader determinants, in turn, reinforce cultural connectedness, maintenance, resurgence,*

> *nation building and pride in cultural identity (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 6).*

These elements are all captured in NATSHIP's circular framework (see Figure 5). In relation to cultural determinants it notes that:

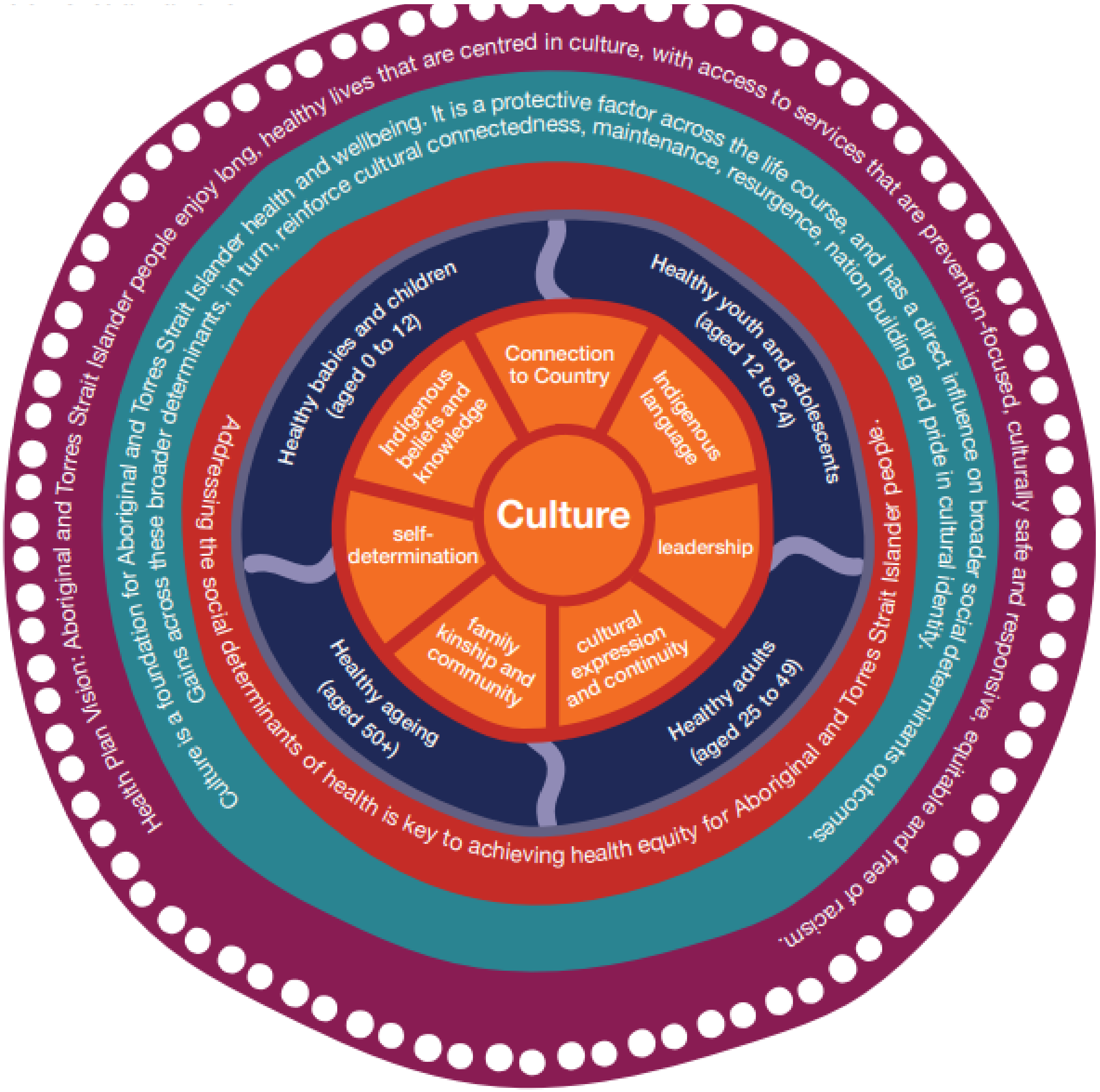
> *The cultural determinants of health are the protective factors that enhance resilience, strengthen identity and support good health and wellbeing. These include, but are not limited to, connection to Country; family, kinship and community; beliefs and knowledge; cultural expression and continuity; language; self-determination and leadership (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 18).*

The cultural determinants identified in NATSIHP – and included in the circular framework – are drawn from the Mayi Kuwayu National Study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing. Drawing on the Mayi Kuwayu study, the Lowitja Institute has called for the cultural determinants of health to be embedded across health and Indigenous affairs more broadly (Lowitja Institute, 2020, 2021). NATSIHP supports the embedding of cultural determinants as a means of recognising:

- the direct protective and strengthening impact that practising culture has on health and wellbeing
- the impact of cultural determinants on the social determinants of health
- that laws and policies that disconnect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from culture have led to disparities in health outcomes and opportunities, including through child removal, disconnection from Country, loss of language and racism (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 18).

In the absence of an implementation plan for the 2021–2031 NATSIHP, it is not clear what embedding cultural determinants might look like in practice. At the time of writing this report, the Australian Government's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Performance Framework included just one cultural determinant under its Tier 2 Determinants of Health: 2.14 Indigenous people with access to their traditional lands – measured using data from the 2018–19 NATSIHS on identification with a clan, language or tribal group; and recognition of and access to homelands/traditional country (AIHW & NIAA, n.d.). The Department of Health did fund the development of a guide to support the implementation of cultural determinants of health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples – the *Country can't hear English* report (Arabena, 2020) – which draws significantly on the cultural determinants of wellbeing identified by the Mayi Kuwayu Study as well as the SEWB model.

Figure 5 NATSIHP 2021–2031 Circular Framework


Health plan Vision: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy long, healthy lives that are centred in culture, with access to services that are prevention-focused, culturally safe and responsive, equitable and free of racism.
Culture is a foundation for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. It is a protective factor across the life course, and has a direct influence on broader social determinants outcomes.
Gains across these broader determinants, in turn, reinforce cultural connectedness, maintenance, resurgence, nation building and pride in cultural identity.
Addressing the social determinants of health is key to achieving health equity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
Healthy babies and children (aged 0 to 12)
Healthy youth and adolescents (aged 12 to 24)
Healthy adults (aged 25 to 49)
Healthy ageing (aged 50+)
Connection to Country
Indigenous language
leadership
cultural expression and continuity
family kinship and community
self-determination
Indigenous beliefs and knowledge
Culture

Source: Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 17.

Towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural policy?

The Lowitja Institute has highlighted the need to look beyond the health portfolio to embed cultural determinants in other areas of policy with ‘whole-of-government buy-in and action’ (Lowitja Institute, 2020, p. 2). To assist in achieving this, the Lowitja Institute (2021, p. 4) has developed a framework of policy mechanisms and approaches that support cultural determinants (see Figure 6). As noted above, the *Country can’t hear English* report (Arabena, 2020) provides a very detailed ‘guide supporting the implementation of cultural determinants of health with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples’. Both of these frameworks and guides are significantly informed by the cultural domains in the SEWB model and the Mayi Kuwayu cultural determinants domains.

Further advocacy for a more holistic and whole-of-government approach based on the cultural determinants of health and wellbeing is found in the 2023 Close the Gap campaign report – *Strong culture, strong youth: Our legacy, our future*. The report recommends that:

> *Australian governments partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to develop, fund and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural policy that:*
>
> - *Complements and reinforces the Revive – National Cultural Policy that respects the centrality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture in the Australian arts, entertainment and cultural sectors*
> - *Asserts the centrality of culture to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples*
> - *Informs investment in cultural governance, maintenance and revitalisation projects, initiatives and activities both for community and nation building*
> - *Provides environmental and heritage protections for sites that are sacred or culturally significant, recognising the impacts on Country, social and emotional wellbeing and the cultural determinants of health*
> - *Improves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community access to opportunities and resources that support the cultural determinants of their health and wellbeing according to their needs, priorities and aspirations*
> - *Includes cultural knowledge holders in decision-making positions that affect communities*
> - *Establishes a monitoring, evaluation and action-learning framework' (National Close the Gap Alliance Group, 2023, p. 5).*

As mentioned in the recommendation above, in January 2023 the Australian Government released its National Cultural Policy for the next five years – 'Revive'. The first of Revive's five pillars is 'First Nations First' – 'recognising and respecting the crucial place of First Nations stories at the centre of Australia's arts and culture' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p. 18). Revive sets out 19 actions under this pillar (Box 2). The first of the policy's 10 principles is that 'First Nations arts and culture are First Nations led' (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p. 19). In the Minister for Indigenous Australians' Foreword to Revive, The Hon Linda Burney MP notes the cultural determinants of wellbeing as follows:

> *For First Nations peoples, culture is more than just visual and performing arts, it includes language, stories, songlines, sacred sites and traditional knowledge. Culture is the sum of all things, the essence of our being. Connection to culture is integral for the health and wellbeing of First Nations peoples, to our sense of identity, and to maintaining the vitality and strength of our communities. Revive recognises the breadth of our culture and respects the central place of culture in our lives (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p. 8).*

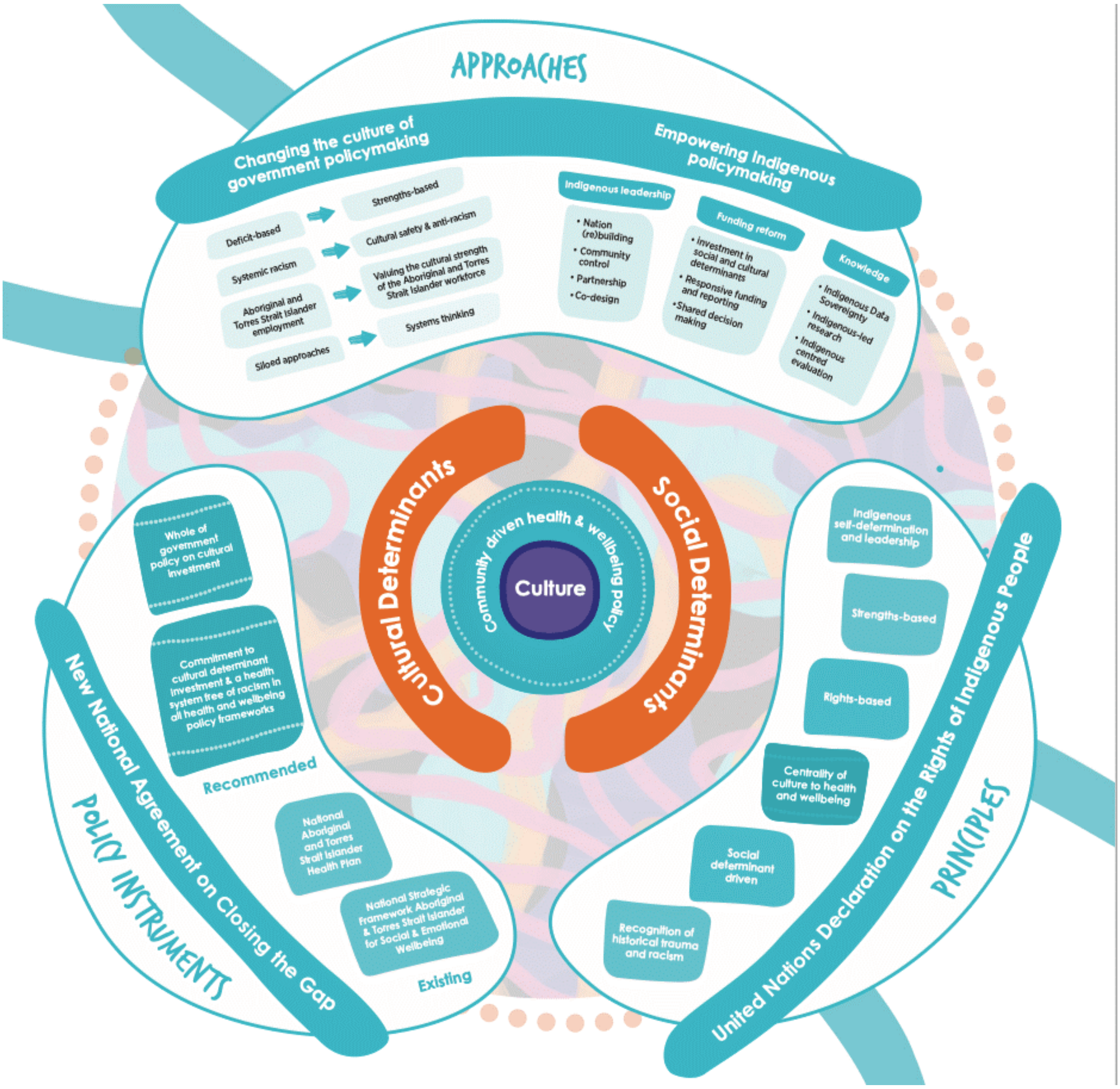
The policy itself notes that for First Nations people culture is multi-faceted, that it is central to their health, wellbeing and identity, and that:

> *Programs supported and run by First Nations peoples enhance connections to culture and Country, inherently improving Closing the Gap outcomes for First Nations peoples in education, employment, justice, health and wellbeing, and languages (Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, p. 22).*

Two recent reports commissioned and produced by the Australia Council for the Arts further highlight the importance of culture – and cultural policy – to the wellbeing of First Nations peoples (Australia Council for the Arts, 2022; Gattenhof et al., 2022).

While Revive represents recognition of the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing outside health and in the cultural policy space, there are still many gaps to be filled in working towards a whole-of-government approach to recognising and implementing cultural determinants.

Figure 6 Lowitja Institute framework for cultural determinant driven policy


APPROACHES
Changing the culture of government policymaking
Deficit-based
Strengths-based
Systemic racism
Cultural safety & anti-racism
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander employment
Valuing the cultural strength of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce
Siloed approaches
Systems thinking
Empowering Indigenous policymaking
Indigenous leadership
• Nation (re)building
• Community control
• Partnership
• Co-design
Funding reform
• Investment in social and cultural determinants
• Responsive funding and reporting
• Shared decision making
Knowledge
• Indigenous Data Sovereignty
• Indigenous-led research
• Indigenous centred evaluation
Cultural Determinants
Social Determinants
Community driven health & wellbeing policy
Culture
Whole of government policy on cultural investment
Commitment to cultural determinant investment & a health system free of racism in all health and wellbeing policy frameworks
Recommended
National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan
National Strategic Framework Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander for Social & Emotional Wellbeing
Existing
New National Agreement on Closing the Gap
POLICY INSTRUMENTS
Indigenous self-determination and leadership
Strengths-based
Rights-based
Centrality of culture to health and wellbeing
Social determinant driven
Recognition of historical trauma and racism
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People
PRINCIPLES

Source: Lowitja Institute, 2021, p. 4.

Box 2 Revive – 19 actions under Pillar 1 First Nations First

1. Implement the Uluru Statement from the Heart in full
2. Support the telling of First Nations histories and stories in Australia's galleries, libraries, archives and museums
3. Establish a dedicated First Nations-led Board within the newly established Creative Australia to invest in, create and produce First Nations works of scale and with priorities and funding decisions determined by First Nations leaders
4. Develop a First Nations Creative Workforce Development Strategy
5. Promote best practice cultural protocols, the principle of self-determination and cultural safety training, in partnership with First Nations communities, across arts and cultural organisations
6. Provide $80 million to establish a National Aboriginal Art Gallery in Alice Springs to celebrate First Nations storytelling and cultural expression
7. Provide $50 million, in partnership with the Western Australian Government, towards the establishment of a world-class Aboriginal Cultural Centre in Perth to showcase and celebrate First Nations arts and cultures
8. Provide $5 million to upgrade training facilities at NAISDA Dance College's Kariong campus
9. Establish a First Nations Languages Policy Partnership between First Nations representatives and Australian governments to improve outcomes for First Nations peoples
10. Support sixty primary schools around Australia to teach local First Nations languages and cultural knowledge in schools
11. Develop a National Action Plan that identifies priority areas that will preserve and safeguard First Nations languages, as part of the UNESCO International Decade of Indigenous Languages 2022–2032
12. Continue support for First Nations peoples to express, preserve and maintain their culture through languages and the arts, under the Indigenous Languages and Arts program
13. Introduce stand-alone legislation to protect First Nations knowledge and cultural expressions, including to address the harm caused by fake art, merchandise and souvenirs
14. Review the Indigenous Art Code to strengthen the protections for First Nations artists and consumers across the country
15. Continue investing in First Nations art centres, as well as pivotal sector organisations, through the Indigenous Visual Arts Industry Support program to benefit First Nations communities
16. Support professional development and training for First Nations peoples to ensure that artists are treated ethically and receive a fair return for their work.

17. Provide a comprehensive response to the Productivity Commission's report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Visual Arts and Crafts, building on the commitment to introduce stand-alone legislation outlined above

18. Continue pursuing, in a culturally sensitive way, the return of First Nations ancestors and cultural heritage material from overseas, and domestically the return of ancestors and secret sacred objects in Australia's major museums

19. Establish a new place of safe-keeping, the National Resting Place, dedicated to the care of ancestors returned from overseas by the Government, with provenance only to Australia

Source: Commonwealth of Australia, 2023, pp. 22, 28, 30, 32, 35.

Conclusion

This report has highlighted substantial and growing evidence of the centrality of culture to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples at the individual and community level. The centring of culture and of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's perspectives underpin key Australian government health and wellbeing frameworks such as the National Agreement on Closing the Gaps, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031, and the National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017–2023. There remains room for the greater recognition and centring of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture and perspectives by Australian governments at a whole-of-government level. There is also considerable room for recognition, action and implementation through investment in cultural programs developed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-controlled organisations.

Echoing the Lowitja Institute's (2020) call for action to implement the cultural determinants, the National Close the Gap Alliance (2023, p. 8) has recommended that 'Australian governments partner with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities to develop fund and implement an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural policy'. The Australia Council for the Arts has recommended that government 'establish commissioning pathways for First Nations programs in cultural healing' (2022, p. 6). At a state level, in 2019 the Western Australian Government accepted the recommendation of the State Coroner's Inquest into the deaths of 13 children and young people in the Kimberley to 'develop a state-wide Aboriginal cultural policy that recognises the importance of cultural continuity and cultural security to the wellbeing of Aboriginal people' (Government of Western Australia, 2019, p. 32). In response, the Western Australia Government committed to 'the development of a state-wide cultural framework focusing on cultural programs that enhance wellbeing, reinforce cultural identity and build resilience' (Government of Western Australia, 2019, p. 32). Significant work remains to be done to convert the recognition of the ways culture matters to wellbeing into action at a whole-of-government level. This involves the development of rights-based, strengths-based and evidence-based responses that support the implementation of culturally-centred approaches to health and wellbeing with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Lowitja Institute's approaches, principles and measures framework for implementing the cultural determinants (2020; see Figure 6 above) and the *Country can't hear English* report's guide to implementing cultural determinants (Arabena, 2020) provide valuable guidance. For Arabena (2020, pp. 24–26), this means developing ways of measuring the successful implementation of the cultural determinants of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing that respond to community advocacy, including:

- asking community how they would measure success
- strengths-based indicators
- sustainability measures (that recognise the need for long-term holistic programs to address cultural determinants)
- culture-embedded practices (e.g. language use, Elder involvement, and evaluation through art and stories)
- qualitative data collection
- measures of successful implementation
- data sovereignty
- self-determination measures
- development and uptake of cultural education, entrepreneurial and employment opportunities.

Under the 2020 National Agreement on Closing the Gap, the Coalition of Peaks and COAG have committed to identifying appropriate contextual indicators and information to aid reporting ‘in recognition of the role of cultural determinants in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing, spanning across a range of target areas’ (Coalition of Peaks & COAG, 2020, p. 45). Under Priority 11, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 identifies the need for ‘culturally informed and evidence-based evaluation, research and practice’ that is Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-led (Commonwealth of Australia, Department of Health, 2021, p. 67). The core and overarching principle of the Productivity Commission’s Indigenous Evaluation Strategy is ‘centring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, perspectives, priorities and knowledges’ (Productivity Commission, 2020, p. 9).

This report has shown how a strong evidence base has been built up by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, communities, organisations, and researchers over many years and how it has been recognised in key government frameworks. The Strong Culture, Strong Place, Strong Families Research and Evaluation Project aims to provide valuable insights into how culture frames and shapes wellbeing and its determinants in Kimberley Aboriginal communities. It aims to inform policy and program development so that can be centred on the perspectives of Kimberley Aboriginal people and communities and on the role that culture plays in achieving wellbeing outcomes. Our research aims to add to the considerable evidence of the importance of culture to the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This report presents a first step towards the development of an outcomes measurement framework to evaluate the role cultural initiatives play in supporting Aboriginal peoples’ wellbeing in the Kimberley – with potentially transferrable application to other regions, communities, or nationally.

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