

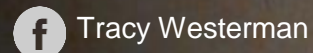
**Adjunct Professor Tracy Westerman
Managing Director, Indigenous Psychological
Services**

Without measurability there is no accountability: a focus on Indigenous Suicide

September 2019



indigenous
PSYCHOLOGICAL SERVICES



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Overview



1. What are the SEVEN core drivers of the escalation in Indigenous suicides
2. A road map to solutions
3. Why optimism is crucial for prevention

Nº 2456

Pursuant to the
Natives (Citizenship Rights) Act, 1944 (as amended),
and Regulations
We hereby certify that

(whose photographic likeness is affixed hereto) having fulfilled to our satisfaction the requirements of the Act and Regulations is hereby granted full rights of Citizenship as provided by the Act.

Dated at Port Hedland this 25th day
of February 1964

February 60
Parker - Secy.
M. L. Wadsworth } Board Members.

Pursuant to the Act and Regulations WE HEREBY CERTIFY that the children named in this Certificate, of whom the abovesigned citizen is the responsible parent, are included in this Certificate.



What Optimism has **Meant to Me**

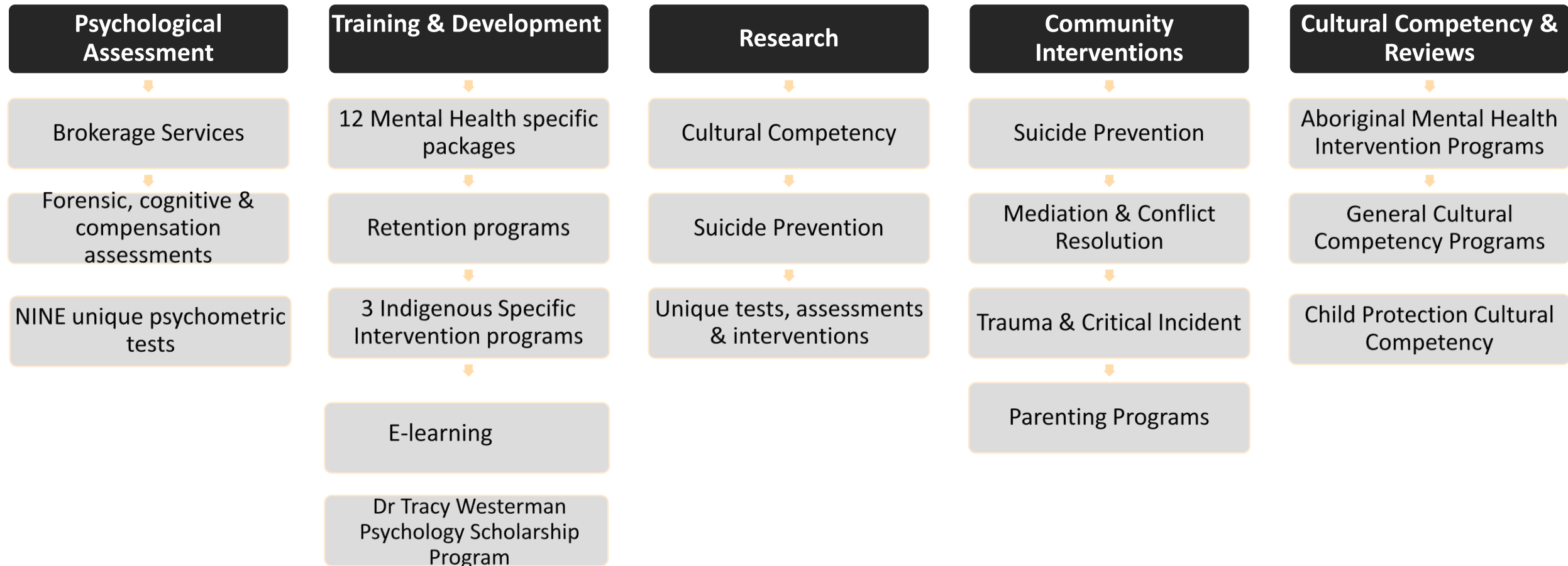
- Early disadvantage has been my significant advantage
- The 'light bulb' moment
- The strength of Aboriginal people
- Aboriginal parenting is optimum

Indigenous Psychological Services



Commenced in 1998

Complete absence of funding





Lets **PREVENT** the gap rather
than **CLOSE** the gap with
Optimism



Driver 1: We are NOT “the most researched people on the planet”

The state of play – a whole of Government response



1. Suicide rates – 40% of child deaths are by suicide
 - 2 times that of non-Aboriginal Australians
 - The normalisation of suicide – “it comes in threes”
 - The Canadian experience – enables targeting of high-risk areas
2. Mental health – prevalence unknown
3. Child Protection - 54% in care are Aboriginal – most for neglect
 - 83% of treatment programs in the city
4. Education – the longer Aboriginal kids are at school, the worse they do
 - Aboriginal English–numeracy & literacy development
 - Parenting (natural growth) & ADHD
 - IQ testing & impacts
 - Pederson & Walker’s (2000) research & suspension rates
5. Justice - 51.5% increase in past 10 years v 3.1% non-Indigenous
 - Over policing – increased harshness by the judicial system
 - Normalisation of criminality – e.g. Roebourne
 - Aboriginal specific criminogenics & Aboriginality as a RISK factor
 - Under policing - 148% increase in incarceration of Aboriginal women



Driver 2: We have yet to determine Indigenous suicide Causal Pathways

Indigenous suicide is different

Some common examples



Aboriginal young girl experiences ‘spiritual visits’ of her friend who passed away from suicide. The visits from her friend are telling her she should ‘join her’ (as in suicide).

Suicide intervention is different

Culture Bound Syndromes manifest as mainstream mental illnesses



Another example

Aboriginal male has a history of suicidal behaviours. He is a lore man. He only speaks 'bits and pieces' of English. He has made a recent suicide attempt. The community says it is because he fell in love with someone who is 'wrong way' for him.

Suicide risk factors are different

Individual versus community context to risk

Are you doing the clinically or culturally right thing?



What a failure to understand **Causes** has resulted in

HEADLINE: Living hard, dying young in the Kimberley

- Hopelessness & Helplessness is a strong predictor of suicide
 - Racism as hopelessness
 - 160% increase in suicides since the NT intervention
- The DOSE responsive nature of suicide risk





#changethenarrative
#controlthenarrative

Indigenous Suicide Causes – mostly hypothesised rather than empirically determined



- Life expectancy & infant mortality-4th world conditions
- Excluded from education, employment
- Forcible removal leading to attachment disruption
 - Critical to a child's development is secure attachment to parents
- Modelling of trauma - genetics, biology, environment
 - 30% of trauma is genetic, 60% of suicide risk is impulse control
 - Trauma feeds trauma - repetition compulsion
 - The need for CONTROL with PTSD
- What neuroplasticity tells us - the brain normalises
 - Tolerance for intolerable emotions - e.g. the man who couldn't LOVE
 - No Indigenous specific attachment programs
- Restriction of human rights i.e. cashless welfare cards; alcohol reforms; NT intervention



What role does Racism play?



- Impacts in the same way as a violent assault - racism as trauma
- 75% regularly experience racism (Paradies, Pedersen, 2013)
 - Low access to housing, health-care, and education,
 - Explains 30% of depression & 50% of chronic stress (Priest & Paradies, 2010)
- Racism costs \$45 billion/yr - a bigger health cost than smoking (Paradies & Elias, 2016):
 - Racism costs 285,000 years from lives, compared to 205,000 from smoking (3.6% of the GDP)
 - Racism perpetrators also have poor outcomes - equiv of smoking two packs of cigarettes/day
 - Significant predictor of suicide -hopelessness & helplessness



It's a Combination Thing...

- Researchers found no evidence of a racial bias among their study participants at the age of 5, but the bias began showing up among participants at the age of 7, and then became particularly prominent at the age of 10
- Exposing children to diversity is critical to address the maintenance of unconscious bias
- Only 30% of Australians regularly socialize with Aboriginal people

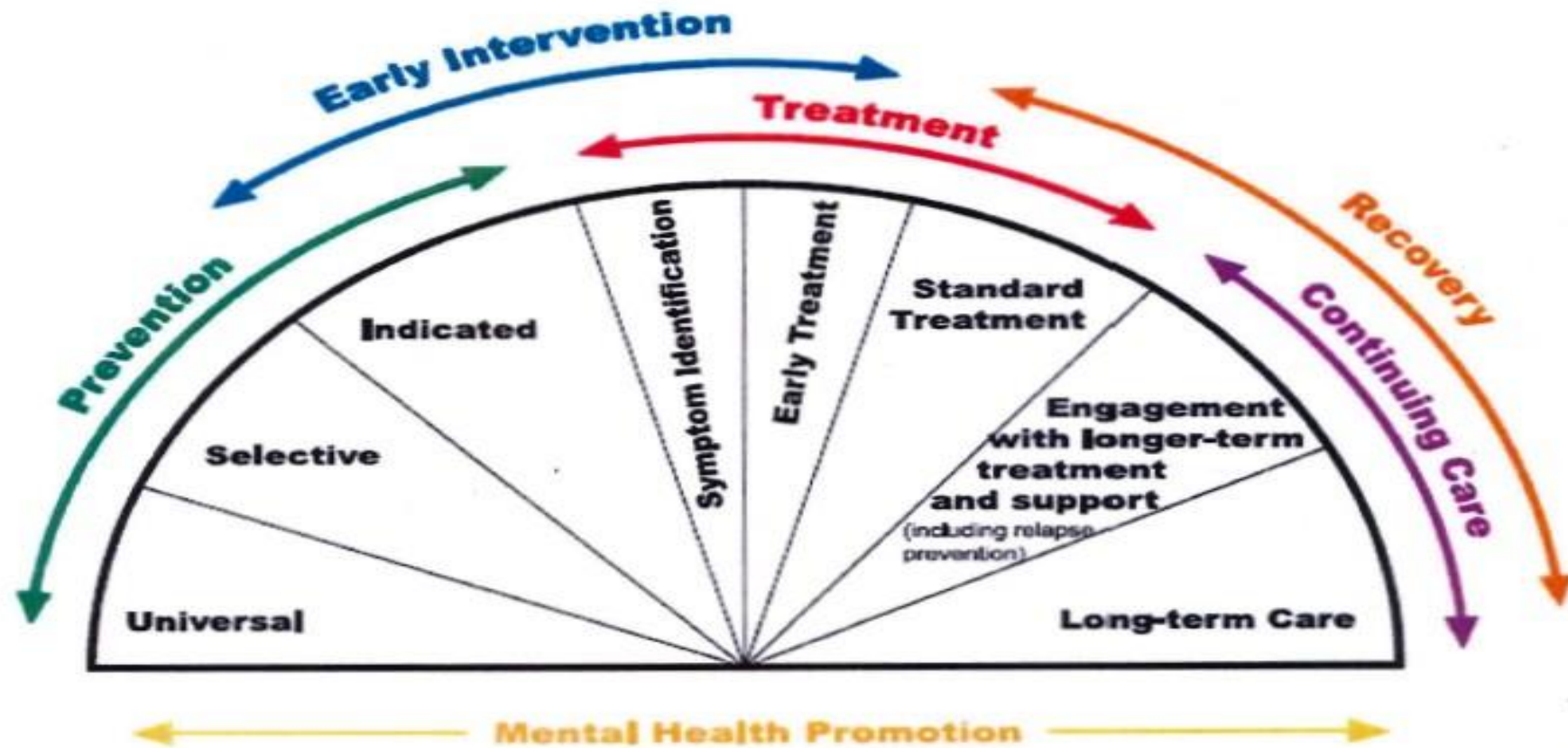


**CHILDREN WILL PLAY
WITH ANYONE...**

**UNTIL A PARENT TELLS
THEM NOT TO.**

Driver 3: We have a **prevention** **'allergy'** and a deficit love affair

Prevention & Intervention is Badly Understood



Where we are at with prevention efforts?



- No nationally accepted evidence-based programs across the spectrum of early intervention & prevention - suicide, attachment, trauma reduction
 - Lack of funding due diligence to ensure prevention focus - despite \$134M of federal funding in last 3 years
 - Suicide risk factor reduction is not a required funding outcome
 - Not part of the Closing the Gap Targets
- The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Evaluation Project (**ATSISPEP**) report drives Government funding
 - 19 programs evaluated as being 'promising programs'
 - Over 50% were either non-Indigenous programs or adapted from a non-Indigenous program
 - None measure clinical utility
 - None were shown to reduce suicide risk or rates of suicide
 - None measured risk
 - Work not included or evaluated
- Protective factors have not been determined
- Suicide and mental health causal pathways have not been determined
- Programs cannot be developed & outcome evaluated based upon risk reduction



Some **Solutions** – The Work of **IPS**.....

Driver 4: Assessment is CRITICAL!



- IT SAVES LIVES - e.g. the FOGLIANI Inquiry
 - Risk changes
- Get assessment wrong, get treatment wrong, make things worse!
- Misdiagnosis, underdiagnosis & overdiagnosis - culture impacts on test validity
- Error with existing tests - IQ tests; MMPI; BDI, Criminogenics (Ewart v Canada 2017)
- Risk can be confused with culture - secret nature of culture; the term “killing yourself”; psychosis or ‘cultural grief’; self harm or sorry cuts
- Labels stick creating a self fulfilling prophecy
- Self funded over 20 years

Unique Tests 1 & 2: The Westerman Aboriginal Symptom Checklist – Youth (13-17 yrs) & Adults



- Over 3,000 youth screened & 25,000 clinicians accredited
- Canadian Health (2009) - a "substantial contribution" to Aboriginal youth suicide
- Validation studies (Westerman, 2003; Little, 2007; Stanthis et al, 2012 etc)
- Determined a different aetiology for depression, suicide, trauma - impulsivity accounts for 64% of suicide risk
- Determined cultural resilience buffers risk for the first time
- Only tool capable of identifying early risk
- Enables prevalence determination
- Measures treatment impacts & efficacy - GLOBAL first opportunity to track continuous suicide data against suicide death rate
- Lack of government support limits roll out

Unique Test 3: The Acculturative Stress Scale for Aboriginal Australians



- Gauges the level of stress related to racism, marginalisation etc.,
- Strongly correlated with depression, anxiety, PTSD and attachment (Westerman, 2003)
 - Strong association with suicide - hopelessness/helplessness (Westerman, 2003)
 - 160% increase in suicides following the NT intervention
- Klonoff, Landrine & Ulmaine (1999) racism accounted for 15% of the variance in psychological symptoms of African Americans
 - Is an alterable (dynamic risk factor)
 - can be reduced as part of treatment intervention - external factor; internal restraints

Unique Test 4: The Acculturation Scale for Aboriginal Australians



- Gauges cultural connection relative to other Aboriginal people (Westerman, 2003) - Value:
 - Provides extensive cultural mapping
 - Enables cultural (black) identity formation to be understood
 - Strong relationship between robust racial identity, suicide and mental health outcome (Graham, Taylor, & Hudley 1998; Hughes & Demo, 1989; Pedersen & Walker, 2000)
 - This needs to be determined at a population level to inform program intervention design
 - Is an alterable (dynamic) risk factor
 - Buffers racism



Driver 5: A lack of Cultural Competence in the Existing Workforce

Most of the children who died by suicide experienced 'system failure'

Solution: Make cultural competence objective & measurable



- Unique Test 5: The Aboriginal Mental Health Cultural Competency Profile (CCP) 2003
 - Determined the predictors of cultural competence - scientifically and culturally (18 areas are targeted)
 - National Norms - determined average levels of competency
 - Unique Test 6: General Cultural Competency Profile (GCCP)
 - Unique Test 7: Cultural Competency in Child Protection (CCP-CP)
 - Objective, measurable over time
- Generates an individual cultural supervision plan
- Determines organizational cultural competence
 - Enables targeted intervention



The complexity of the journey to
cultural competence – addressing
'unconscious bias'

Positive

Cultural Competence

Cultural Precompetence

Cultural Blindness

Negative

Cultural Incompetence

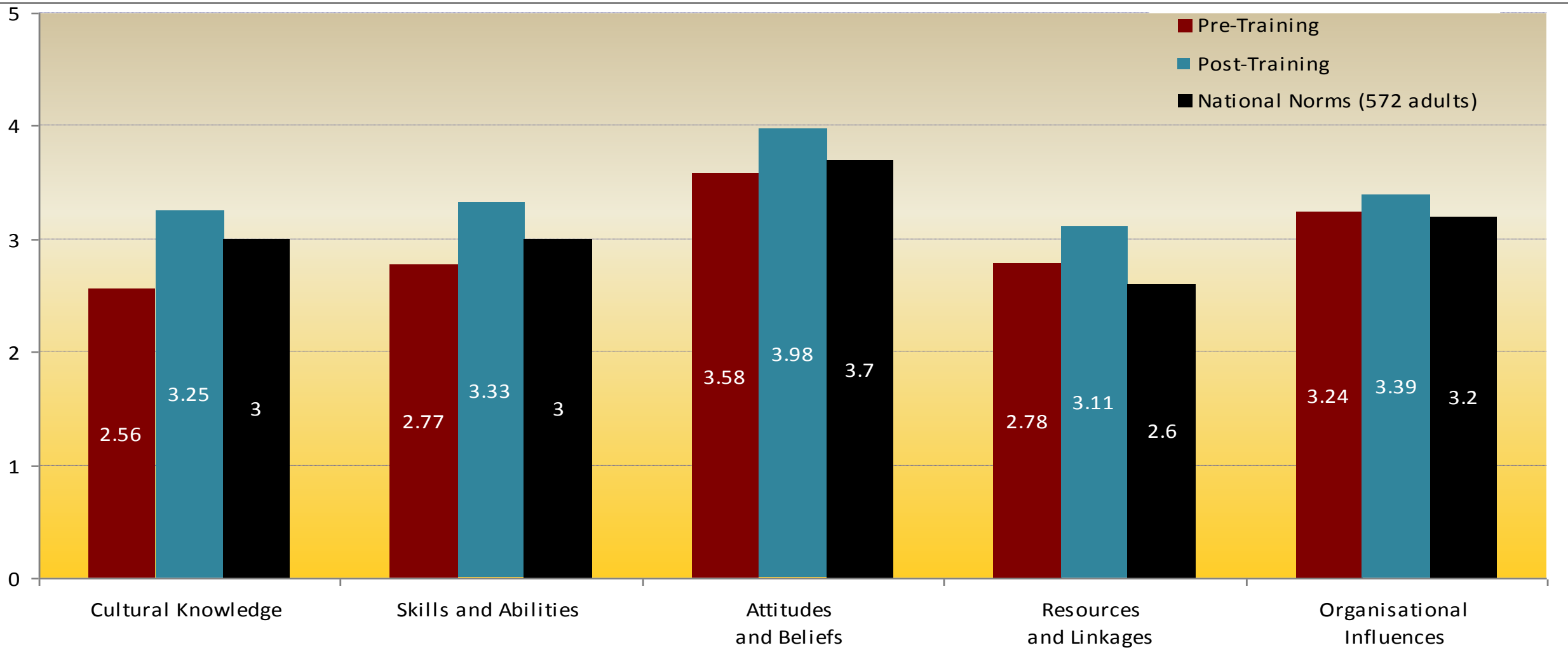
Cultural Aversion



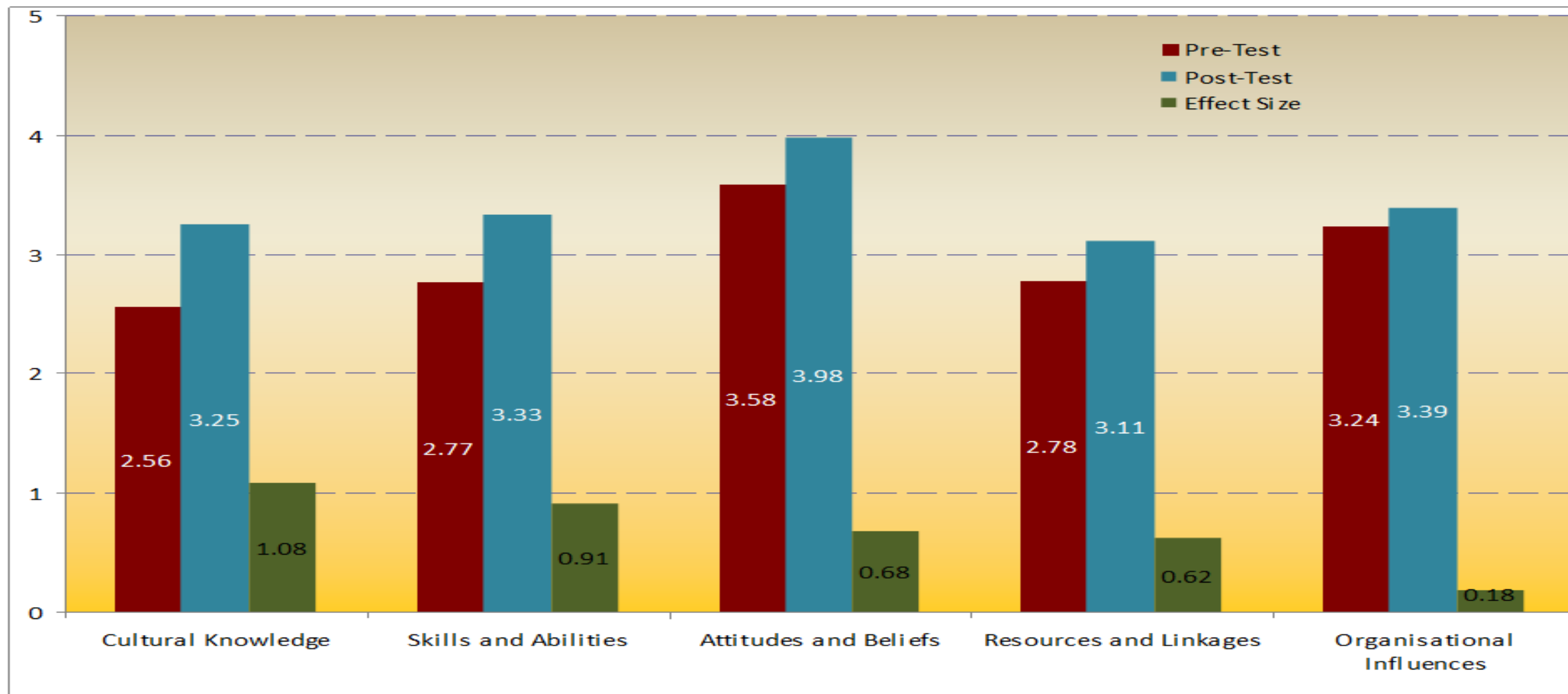
The **Impacts of Cultural** **Competency**

The Nextel and Deloitte Australia examples

Results: Across Six Regions (N=177)



Outcomes with Effect Sizes (N=177)





Driver 6: The need to address whole of community risk

IPS' Whole of Community Intervention Programs



- Targets services, youth & community – 3 stages optimum
- Only whole community intervention with significant improvements in:
 - Skills, knowledge, intentions to help, suicide beliefs, skills retention (Westerman & Sheridan, submitted)
 - Model replicated across numerous language groups in WA, NT, QLD, NSW, VIC
- Unique content (risk & protective factors) & DELIVERY
 - Visual spatial learning
 - Collaborative learning
 - 'Invivo' skills e.g. sports as a medium; exposure based therapies
- Over 1,500 trained - 85% Indigenous -majority ESL
- Recognition from USA, Canada & NZ
- Unable to deliver in WA since 2009 despite significant community demand & lobbying



Driver 7: We have yet to **determine** treatments of '**best practice**'



Moving to best practice

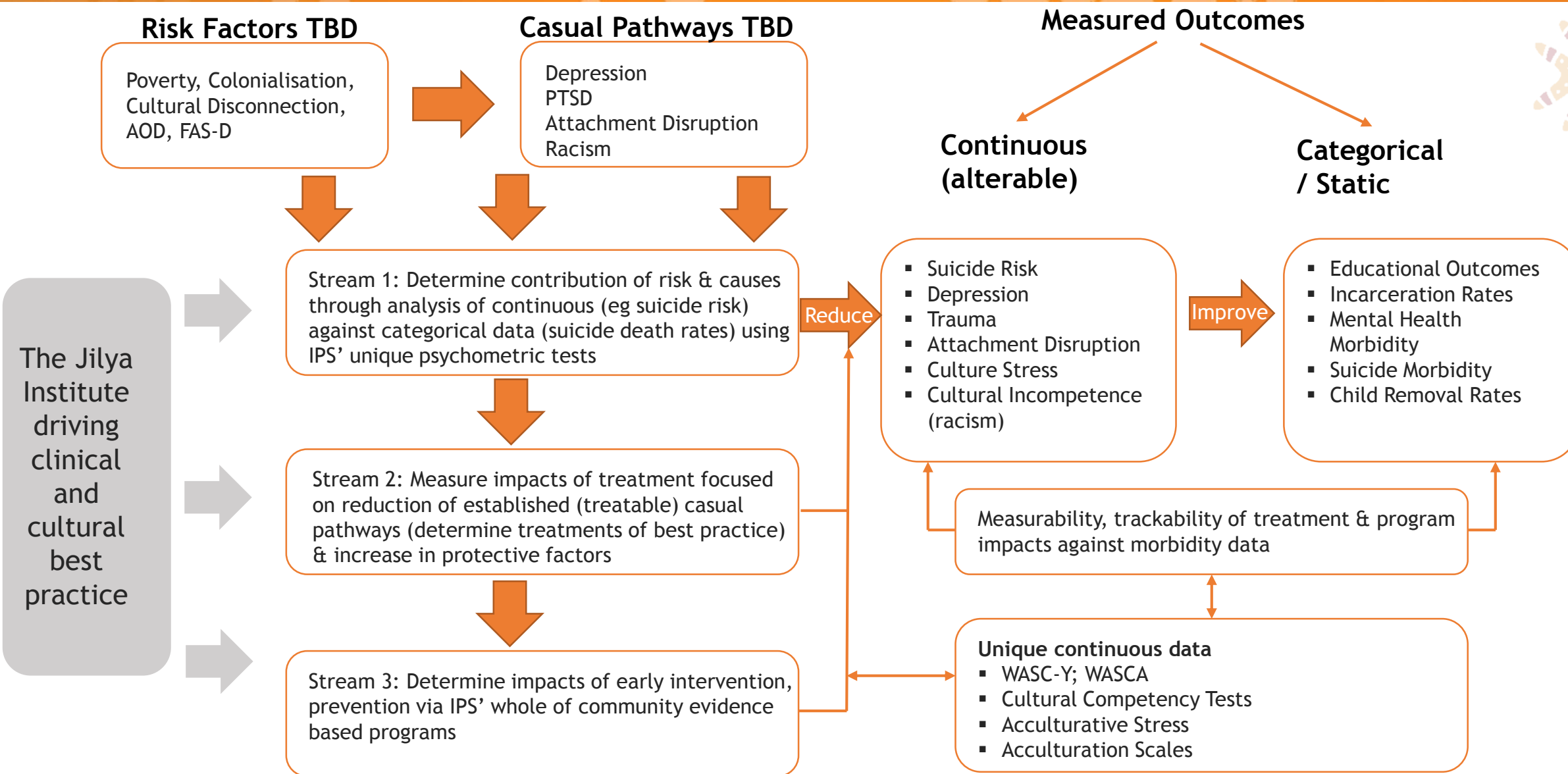
**Introducing: The Westerman Jilya
Institute for Indigenous Mental Health
Non-profit, seeking operational
funding**



To drive best clinical and cultural practice in Australia. Jilya will be cutting edge globally due to the unique skills, programs & tests developed by IPS over 21 years
Jilya means “my child”

1. FOUR STREAMS which support & feed into each other:

- Stream ONE:
 - Determine the extent of the problem.
 - Establish causal pathways to suicide
 - Map collection of dynamic data against the suicide death rates
 - Ensure informed treatment focus, ongoing analysis and determination of causal pathways
- Stream TWO: Determine treatments of best practice
- Stream THREE: Training high-risk regions in ongoing best practice program delivery
- STREAM FOUR: The Dr Tracy Westerman Aboriginal Psychology Scholarship Program



A/Professor Westerman Scholarship and Workforce Cultural Competence and Capability Underlies the above

STREAM FOUR:

The Dr Tracy Westerman Aboriginal Psychology Scholarship Program



Scholarship for an Aboriginal person to study psychology (undergraduate, masters or PhD) at Curtin University

- IPS funded \$50,000 (\$10,000 per annum) for the first 5 yrs
- Focus on students with remote and rural connections
- Nudging \$500K in corporation donations, \$0 in government funding
- FIVE recipients announced at Government House on May 28th
- Personal mentoring to create an alumni of Indigenous Psychologists
- Expansion into other states - seeking donations

A group of six women are standing in a row on a red carpeted path in front of a building with large stone pillars and brickwork. From left to right: the first woman wears a grey plaid blazer over a white top and a black skirt; the second wears a light pink top and black trousers; the third wears a blue and white floral dress and white heels; the fourth wears a maroon top and black wide-leg trousers; the fifth wears a black and white striped top and black trousers; and the sixth wears a black top with a pink floral pattern and a black cardigan over black trousers. All women are smiling at the camera.

#BuildAnArmy

Psychologists leap into the future



Professor Deborah Terry, Saira (Maheen) Rind, Nikki McKenzie, Yasmin Hunter, The Honourable Kim Beazley, Dr Tracy Westerman, Taylah Thompson-Patfield, Cheyenne Conway and Curtin Chancellor Dr Andrew Crane, officially launching the program. Picture: Alana Blowfield



A NEW scholarship program has awarded five psychology students \$10,000 to help with their studies.

The Dr Tracy Westerman Aboriginal Scholarship Program is designed to support Aboriginal students with rural and remote connections to become psychologists, skilled in Indigenous-specific mental health, suicide prevention and intervention programs.

Named after Njamal woman Dr Tracy Westerman – leading psychologist and Western Australia's Australian of the Year

for 2018 – the scholarship was awarded to students studying a Bachelor of Psychology at Curtin.

The inaugural recipients are Taylah Thompson-Patfield, Cheyenne Conway, Nikki McKenzie, Yasmin Hunter and Saira (Maheen) Rind.

Dr Westerman, the managing director of Indigenous Psychological Services

scholarship program, which has attracted additional donations from others who share Dr Westerman's vision to reduce suicide rates in

Indigenous communities.

"These students represent the future of our communities and it is a privilege to be able to support their dreams to improve the mental health and wellbeing of Indigenous people," Dr Westerman said. "Across Australia, Indigenous suicides occur at double the rate of other

suicides, and, alarmingly, 40% of child deaths in Indigenous communities are by suicide."

Curtin University Vice-Chancellor Professor Deborah Terry said the scholarship program had the power to transform lives through education in just one generation.

"The program is encouraging more students to follow in Tracy's inspirational footsteps to fulfil their potential and help build stronger futures for Indigenous communities," Prof Terry said.

making tomorrow better for people in the communities in which they will work."

The Scholarship Program supports Aboriginal students to study psychology at Curtin University in undergraduate or postgraduate courses.

Applicants are required to meet eligibility criteria, including connections to and a desire to work in rural and remote communities on completion of their studies. The scholarship provides students with \$10,000 to help with their study, living and transport costs, providing vital financial assistance at any stage of their undergraduate or postgraduate degree.

Readers seeking support and information about suicide prevention can contact Lifeline 13 11 14 or Suicide Call Back Service 1300 659 467 or Kids Helpline (young people aged 5-25) 1800 55 1800 78

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support services can be found at naccho.org.au or sewbmh.org.au or healthinfolnet.ecu.edu.au



Key Messaging

“There is nothing we can’t achieve as Aboriginal people if we believe in ourselves.

“It is my hope that a kid from the bush, or an Aboriginal person, or a young female who struggles with the voices around them of lowered expectations picks up the paper tomorrow and believes that anything is possible”

Australian of the Year, Facebook Video

TRACY WESTERMAN



@tracywesterman



tracy.westerman

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