

A decade of community-led suicide prevention

2016 to 2026, and beyond



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Acknowledgements

For the past decade, grassroots suicide prevention and suicide response projects have transformed the lives, homes, workplaces and communities of people throughout northern Queensland.

This anthology acknowledges the often untold, usually volunteer-led work that has helped to support countless individuals during that time.

We also acknowledge the ongoing efforts—often built on the work of others—that continues throughout the 4 SPCAPs of northern Queensland:

- Mackay District SPCAP
- Townsville District SPCAP
- Cairns District SPCAP
- Torres and Cape SPCAP.

Acknowledgement of people with lived experience

We extend our deepest respect to those who have lost loved ones or have been personally impacted by suicide. We acknowledge the profound pain and grief associated with these experiences.

Our commitment remains steadfast to use this work to drive meaningful improvements.

Acknowledgement of country

We acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Nation Peoples and the Traditional Custodians of this land. We respect their continued connection to land and sea, country, kin and community. We also pay our respect to their Elders past, present and emerging as the custodians of knowledge and lore.



Contents

A unique approach	4
Aligning with national framework	6
National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework	8
Funding suicide prevention	10
Mackay District SPCAP	12
Townsville District SPCAP	18
Cairns District SPCAP	24
Torres and Cape SPCAP	28



A unique approach

SPCAPs in northern Queensland

Communities throughout Australia—from sporting clubs to community groups—run suicide prevention activities, but few are formalised under plans.

Suicide prevention community action plans (SPCAPs) exist to strengthen community connection and prioritise early intervention through deliberate, collaborative action.

SPCAPs scaffold healthcare intervention and aftercare services with prevention as well as postvention—that is, supporting people who have been bereaved by suicide.

The plans represent the emerging and changing needs of communities, and so are highly collaborative and intentionally flexible while remaining evidence-informed. Rather than health responses, they focus on the social determinants of health that prevent suicide—such as education, employment, housing and social connection.

In northern Queensland, the 4 SPCAPs are funded and led by Northern Queensland PHN, and coordinated by 2 backbone organisations:

- Wellways Australia—Mackay and Townsville SPCAPs
- Beacon Strategies—Cairns and Hinterland, Torres and Cape SPCAPs

We also acknowledge the work of previous backbone organisations over the past decade including Selectability, Mental Illness Fellowship NQ, Townsville Suicide Prevention Network, The Dr Edward Koch Foundation and Burdekin Community Association.

Looks and feels like connection

Unlike more formal health system interventions, SPCAPs look for opportunities to create community connection. That means SPCAP activities can look like advocacy, social events and workplace initiatives.

The focus is not the event—although connection often occurs at events. Likewise, the focus is never the SPCAP coordinator. The focus is the community, and the opportunity to enable networks, ideas and communities to thrive.

Iterative growth over the decade

The past decade has led to not only growth in the Northern Queensland population but in approaches to community development and the valuing of lived experience. The approaches and success of SPCAPs have also grown over this time.

By their very nature, community action changes over time. Leaders come and go. Community funding starts and ceases. And community demand—which drives all SPCAP actions—can wax and wane.

Regardless of whether an SPCAP action or a service has continued or existed only for a season, all have contributed to saving lives from suicide throughout the region.

SPCAPs: Part of the journey to safety

The work of the SPCAPs focuses on community-led initiatives in prevention and postvention. It wraps around traditional health system responses.

Prevention

A collection of community efforts to reduce the risk of suicide, these can include education, training and community events.

Intervention

This is the direct health system effort to support and prevent an individual from attempting, thinking about or acting on thoughts of suicide.

Aftercare

This is the direct health system support provided to individuals and their supports following a suicide attempt.

Postvention

Following a loss of a loved one to suicide, a collective response for individuals, families and communities is needed.

Collective Impact

The principles of Collective Impact underpin the work of the SPCAPs.

Collective Impact is a structured, collaborative framework designed to solve complex social problems by aligning organisations from different sectors around a common agenda, shared measurement, and mutually reinforcing activities. It acknowledges that system change comes from alignment across the system, not the efforts of a single stakeholder. It champions lived experience leadership.

As part of a Collective Impact site, stakeholders commit to working together toward one shared goal, rather than each running separate, uncoordinated efforts.

Uniting stakeholders within each SPCAP is a *backbone*—a dedicated organisation and staff who support grassroots initiatives with connections, coordination, capacity building and facilitation.

What makes a backbone effective?

The Northern Queensland SPCAPs have committed to these common shared principles.

Guide vision and strategy

Partners' individual work is increasingly aligned with the common agenda.

Support aligned activities

Partners can articulate their role and purpose in the initiative.

Establish shared measurement practices

Partners understand the value of shared data across the SPCAP.

Build public will

Community members increasingly act.

Advance policy

Target audiences (e.g. influencers and policymakers) advocate for changes to the system aligned with initiative goals.

Mobilise funding

New and redirected resources from public and private sources are being contributed to partners and initiatives.



Aligning with national frameworks

In the early years of the SPCAPs, programs reflected the principles of the Black Dog Institute's LifeSpan model—9 evidence-based intervention strategies ranging from aftercare to gatekeeper training.

LifeSpan takes a systems approach to preventing suicide by focusing on the systems that exist within a defined region, including government, non-government, health, education, frontline services, local businesses and community groups.

In June 2026, the National Suicide Prevention Strategy and outcomes framework were released. The outcomes are designed to be person-centred and include what is important to people who have lived through suicidal distress, cared for a person experiencing suicidal distress,

and those who have lost loved ones to suicide. Unlike LifeSpan, the framework is strongly rooted in lived experience.

The SPCAPs have realigned their priorities and reporting to this new national framework. It takes a systems approach and shares other principles with LifeSpan. However, by reflecting the national framework, the community efforts within each SPCAP can be better measured and recognised.

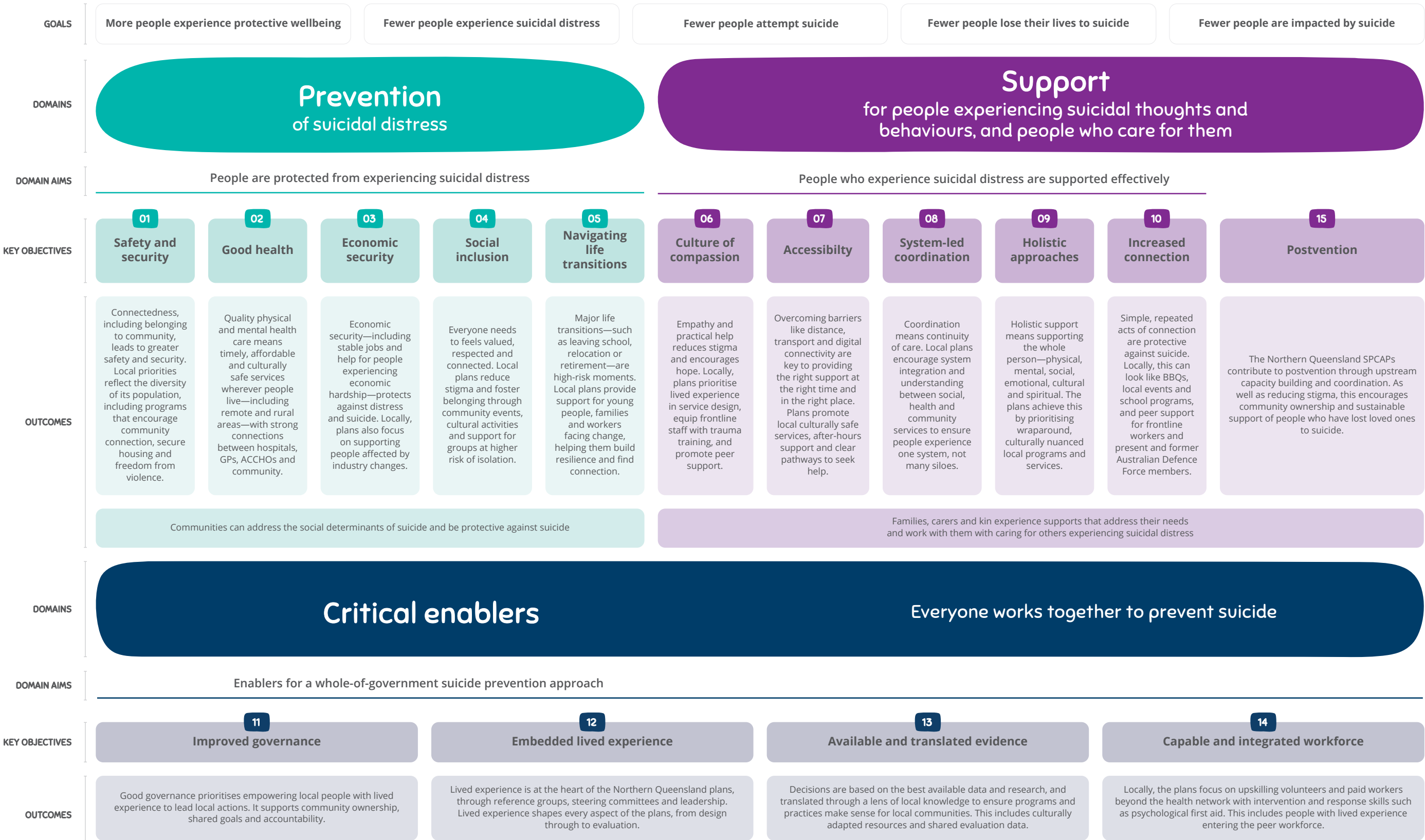




The SPCAPs connect to the **Joint Regional Wellbeing Plan**, an overarching strategy that coordinates mental health, alcohol and other drugs, and suicide prevention planning with the hospital and health services in the region.



National Suicide Prevention Outcomes Framework for Northern Queensland



Funding suicide prevention

Northern Queensland PHN identifies local needs, co-designs community-led strategies, and distributes targeted grants to frontline health and wellness organisations.

Within suicide prevention, it funds and facilitates the 4 SPCAPs in the region, as well as the CORES (Community Owned Response to Eliminating Suicide) initiative.

NQPHN also manages Targeted Regional Initiatives for Suicide Prevention (TRISP) funding. TRISP supports community-led programs, wellness initiatives and local suicide prevention strategies across the region, including stepped care and after care.

As part of its work, NQPHN also allocates the TRISP community wellbeing grants. Both established projects and early ideas are eligible for TRISP grant funding if they benefit local communities and focus on priority populations.

TRISP also funds workplace wellness initiatives, such as Healthy Minds @ Work, ONENQ and Capacit8.

Together, CORES, OneNQ and Capacit8 are vital enablers for the work of the SPCAPs throughout the Northern Queensland PHN region.

CORES has trained more than 3000 people across the Townsville and Mackay districts.

On average, 1 in 4 people trained have then intervened to support another person.

CORES

Lifespan 6 | NSPS 6.2A 6.2A

CORES is a community-driven initiative that provides grassroots education. A not-for-profit initiative that operates in partnership with NQPHN, CORES trains participants to spot the signs of distress, offers initial support and guides individuals to professional care. CORES has reached more than 3000 people across Mackay and Townsville regions, including through 'train the trainer' education. It is now being rolled out through the Cairns and Torres and Cape regions.

Healthy Minds @ Work

NSPS 12E

NQPHN funded Healthy Minds @ Work after a successful pilot project where 111 workplace leaders and staff from government, not-for-profit and private sector organisations across Northern Queensland attended 6 online workshops and a face-to-face session in Mackay. Key topics covered by Healthy Minds @ Work include mentally healthy leadership, consultation and communication, psychosocial hazard identification, risk assessment, risk controls and workplace wellbeing. The program strengthens participants' understanding of psychosocial risk management and practical workplace strategies.

OneNQ

Lifespan 2 3 4 | NSPS 9.1A
NSPS 14.2A / 14.2B / 14.1A

OneNQ is a NQPHN initiative designed to support, connect and upskill the region's health workforce in recognition of the high burnout rates within the workforce. An integrated, system-wide workforce program, it also responds to persistent challenges in attracting and retaining clinicians and practitioners, particularly in rural and remote areas. It offers targeted education and professional development, wellbeing resources, bursaries and career development opportunities tailored to the needs of health professionals working across northern Queensland.

Capacit8

NSPS 13.3A

This initiative supports small organisations with capacity-building, such as direct coaching and training to improve outcomes and sustainability. The Capacit8 program offers some online resources such as a podcast and organisational capacity-building materials, and has delivered coaching and training.





People trust familiar faces.
That makes it easier to talk
about a tough subject.

ROSS

CASE STUDY

Building lifesaving skills from the ground up

Lifespan **6** | NSPS **6.2A**

For CORES Queensland, suicide prevention starts not in clinics, but in communities.

Ross Romeo (pictured above) is based in Ayr and has been part of the organisation since 2009. He now acts as its Queensland coordinator. Ross's work focuses on equipping everyday people with the confidence and skills to act when it matters most.

"We don't come from a clinical angle," Ross explains. "It's a community perspective. We help people understand suicide, recognise warning signs, and know what to do, what to say, and where to go."

At the heart of the CORES approach is a one-day intervention training program, open to anyone aged 15 and over. Often compared to first aid training, it gives participants practical tools rather than just awareness.

"Talking is important," Ross says, "but you really need some basic skills in case someone says, 'No, I'm not going that well'."

This focus on practical action is what drew Ross to the organisation. A former cane farmer in the Burdekin, he saw first-hand the impact suicide could have on a close-knit community.

"I went looking for answers," he says. "I wasn't interested in something that was just all talk."

CORES has since grown into a statewide network, largely powered by volunteers and community facilitators. A key goal is sustainability by training local people to deliver programs within their own communities.

"It's all about something run by the community, for the community," Ross says. "People trust familiar faces. That makes it easier to talk about a tough subject."

Beyond training, CORES provides ongoing support, recognising the complexity of the issue.

"You can't just teach people and leave them," Ross explains. "People come back and ask if they're doing the right thing. Follow-up is important."

With additional workshops in self-care, grief and inclusion, CORES continues to evolve. But its prime purpose still lies in empowering communities with the skills and confidence to support each other.

"It's grown because communities have grabbed it and run with it," Ross says. "That's what makes it work."

Mackay District SPCAP



The Mackay SPCAP covers the same region as the Mackay Hospital and Health Service, stretching from Bowen to St Lawrence along the coast, and west to Clermont. It covers 3 local government areas and numerous mining and tourism regions.

Past and current projects

Grapevine Group

Lifespan **6** | NSPS **6.2A**

A volunteer-run local charity, the Grapevine Group provides free suicide prevention training. The SafeTALK training teaches community members to recognise the signs of suicide and the crucial first steps they can take to provide help.

Run for MI Life

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **4.1**
6.2 / 6.3 / 8.5 / 10.1 / 10.2 **14.4**

Established in memory of Matthew Ivory, Run For MI Life is a volunteer-led suicide prevention and mental health charity that has supported communities across Mackay, Whitsunday and Isaac since 2014. Best known for its annual fun run and wellness fair, the organisation uses community events, training, partnerships and awareness activities to reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking and strengthen community connection. Funds raised remain local and support free suicide prevention education, including LivingWorks SafeTALK and ASIST training, as well as community wellbeing initiatives and collaborations

such as Real Mates Talk. Having engaged thousands of participants and raised close to \$500,000 over more than a decade, Run For MI Life continues to build suicide-safe communities through education, connection and practical community action. See how Run for MI Life is connected to the *Real Mates Talk* case study on page 15.

Safe Harbour (crisis support space)

Lifespan **1** | NSPS **7.2B**

Safe Harbour is an alternative to the emergency department for people experiencing a mental health crisis, distress or suicidal thoughts.

ATSICHS Mackay

Lifespan **3** | NSPS **11.3**

This is a holistic health and wellbeing service for First Nations people in Mackay. See the case study on page 14.

Greater Whitsunday Council of Mayors Suicide Prevention Project

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **11.1A**

This project, funded by NQPHN, resulted in a number of recommendations, including establishing a universal after-care service in Mackay as well as SafeTALK training.

Mental fitness in sport (Unicorns)

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **6.2B**

Run by Marc Newman, a highly skilled critical care paramedic and coach, this project introduces school students, sporting groups and high-performance youth netball teams to concepts of resilience and mental health through the lens of enhancing physical health and sports. See the case study on page 16.

Add Nature Project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **2.1B**

This exercise physiology wellness program targets communities in the Pioneer Valley to raise awareness

of the importance of exercise to support mental health, particularly in relation to chronic pain and mobility, as well as provide a gentle introduction to nature.

Australian Street Aid

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **4** | NSPS **3.2E**

A social worker was employed by Chances House to provide frontline support to people experiencing primary homelessness in Mackay. The project strengthened the practical homelessness response in Mackay by establishing a healthcare program within the Chances House daytime drop-in model, including registered nurse support, health assessments, wound care, mental health support, hospital follow-up and case management linkages.

2026–2027 priority projects

Sports and youth project

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **6.2B**

In Isaac, sport provides a natural entry point for conversations about mental health among young people. Building on the TRISP-funded initiative, this project partners with rural sporting clubs to engage coaches and teenagers who may otherwise avoid difficult conversations. Activities include observing club sessions, gathering feedback and connecting families with appropriate services. Over the next 12 months, the project aims to strengthen relationships between community leaders and support agencies, and build young people's confidence to seek help.

Housing and homelessness project

NSPS **3.2E**

Mackay is experiencing a housing crisis, with limited rental and ownership options and more than 1500 people affected by homelessness. This project strengthens links between existing services, including Chances House, the Sleep Bus and Orange Sky, while establishing partnerships with the new Medicare Urgent Care Clinic and upcoming mental health centre. Over the coming year, this project will map available support and access points, reducing service gaps across health and housing support, as well as drug and alcohol services.

LGBTIQA+SB project

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **2.2E / 5.2I**

LGBTIQA+SB people in Mackay experience disproportionately high rates of distress, driven by discrimination and exclusion rather than identity itself. This project expands the region's 'Welcome Here' network, supports the return of Pride events and partners with local organisations to raise awareness among businesses. Planned actions include promoting pronoun use, nominating new 'Welcome Here' members and sharing training opportunities, guided throughout by people with lived experience.

Self and service project

NSPS **14.1A**

Health and support workers across the region frequently prioritise the wellbeing of others over their own, contributing to high rates of burnout. This project connects the health and emergency workforce, along with teachers, to peer networks and training, while addressing the stigma associated with employee assistance programs. The project will also support awareness of the new Medicare Mental Health Service, which is soon to open, with the aim of reducing workforce isolation.

Connection for protection project

NSPS **4.2A / 1.2F**

Research indicates that strong social connection reduces suicide risk, particularly in high-stress environments, yet services across Mackay, Isaac and the Whitsundays often operate in isolation. This project strengthens cross-sector links through regular face-to-face engagement, referral pathway discussions and information sharing, while maintaining flexibility to respond to community needs and emergencies, such as weather events. The aim is to build stronger partnerships and reinforce the protective factors that support suicide prevention across the region.

Further details on these priority projects, including progress reports, are online.



So we support people where we can, whether that's directly or through our programs.

SUZIE



CASE STUDY

Eight-week program strengthens community wellbeing

At the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service (ATSICHS) Mackay, suicide prevention is approached through connection, culture and continuity of care.

Their program delivers in ways that meet people where they are.

Suzie Penny, a drug and alcohol counsellor with the service, works across both counselling and community education. While much of her role focuses on alcohol and other drug support, suicide prevention is an embedded part of the organisation's broader social and emotional wellbeing model.

"We're a small team, but we see a lot of need," Suzie says. "So we support people where we can, whether that's directly or through our programs."

Operating across the Mackay region and extending to surrounding communities including Bowen and Sarina, ATSICHS Mackay delivers a range of services that respond to complex and interconnected challenges. Central to this is an 8-week wellbeing program run through the organisation's social and emotional wellbeing unit.

Each week, the program focuses on a different topic, from mental health and healthy relationships through to broader life skills. Suicide prevention is addressed as part of a wider conversation around wellbeing and resilience. The structure allows participants to engage in a safe, supportive environment over time, building trust and openness.

Complementing this are dedicated women's and men's groups, where external specialists are often invited to facilitate discussions on sensitive topics, including suicide awareness and prevention.

By embedding suicide prevention within a holistic, culturally informed framework, ATSICHS Mackay is helping communities build the knowledge, confidence and connection needed to support one another, long before crisis point.



It's about being present.



CASE STUDY

Meeting people where they are

For Real Mates Talk, the key to suicide prevention is simple: go to where the conversations need to happen.

Launched in 2020, the initiative emerged directly from local suicide prevention planning in Mackay, shaped by a confronting reality and a growing awareness of the disproportionate impact suicide has on men across the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday region.

With around 2-thirds to 3-quarters of people who die by suicide being men, community members recognised a need for approaches that would resonate in everyday settings and make conversations about mental health feel more accessible.

Real Mates Talk was established to create practical opportunities for connection, encouraging people to check in on one another, strengthen community belonging and increase confidence to seek support when needed. Real Mates Talk deliberately uses familiar, relatable experiences to make conversations about mental health more accessible.

Drawing on everyday examples from home, work and recreation, the initiative encourages people to think about wellbeing in practical terms. Just as tools and equipment require regular maintenance, care and attention to remain reliable and effective, people also benefit from ongoing self-care, connection and support. These simple analogies help create a shared understanding that looking after mental wellbeing is a normal and important part of everyday life. By removing formality and meeting people through familiar interests, these interactions help reduce stigma and create safe pathways for meaningful conversations about mental health and suicide prevention.

Community events play an important role in this approach. Familiar objects, interactive displays and shared interests provide natural entry points for conversation, creating opportunities for people to connect without pressure or expectation. What often begins as a casual discussion about a hobby, workplace experience or area of interest can evolve into meaningful conversations about wellbeing, life challenges, support and the value of caring for ourselves and each other. Through these everyday interactions, Real Mates Talk helps create environments where conversations about mental health feel safe, relevant and approachable.

The initiative has evolved over time and is now proudly auspiced by Run For MI Life, allowing it to build on strong community foundations while maintaining its grassroots identity. Through this partnership, Real Mates Talk continues to grow its network of volunteers, ambassadors, supporters and community partners across the Mackay, Isaac and Whitsunday region.

Together they promote practical conversations, community connection, suicide prevention awareness and pathways to support. What attendees and volunteers consistently report is the value of simple human connection. People appreciate having a welcoming and non-judgemental space where conversations can happen naturally. Many interactions are not crisis conversations at all. Instead, they are opportunities to check in, build relationships, share information and strengthen the sense of belonging that helps protect wellbeing.

It's about being present.



We talk about mental and physical fitness in the context of building their performance in sport.

MARC

CASE STUDY

Prevention beats intervention

For critical care paramedic and expert coach Marc Newman, suicide prevention starts by not talking about it at all.

His program to youth through schools, sporting clubs and elite netball focuses on mental and physical fitness—and, in doing so, is helping to build protective resilience.

“We talk about mental and physical fitness in the context of building their performance in sport,” he said.

“So it has nothing to do with suicide prevention or mental health, and that’s one reason why it works so well.”

Before becoming a clinician for 10 years with the Australian Army, Marc (pictured above) had been a trainer in his parents’ gym and studied sports medicine.

When he separated from the Army, he realised he could combine the skills into a topic he was passionate about—mental health and suicide prevention—while keeping his coaching and clinical skills alive.

He now works directly with elite athletes within Netball Queensland, the National Rugby League and the Broncos and Cowboys NRL clubs.

As a person with lived experience of PTSD, Marc said he was painfully aware of the need for effective early intervention.

“A lot of my mates had been to Iraq and Afghanistan, and most of those guys are now on pensions and not doing terribly well,” he said.

“All up, I think I’ve lost 11 mates to suicide.”

The genesis for his Unicorns program, which is funded by the Northern Queensland PHN, was in the Covid years, when many of Marc’s student athletes were struggling with the isolation of lockdowns. With a friend, he developed the Pandemic PE program, which later became Unicorns.

Unicorns has been delivered in Middelmount, with plans for future dates in Clermont and Moranbah. Marc also ran a similar program at Sarina State High School.

Marc said true prevention truly matters.

“The work I do is all about prevention,” he said.

“It’s about giving people the tools they need long before they actually need them—if they ever need them at all.”



Townsville District SPCAP



Like the Townsville Hospital and Health Service, the Townsville SPCAP covers island, coastal and mining regions, from Home Hill to Ingham, and then west to Charters Towers, Hughenden and Richmond.

It covers Hinchinbrook, Burdekin, Palm Island, Townsville, Charters Towers, Flinders and Richmond councils.

A Burdekin SPCAP also ran in 2018–2023 from NQPHN funding.

Past and current projects

The Resilience Project (North Queensland Cowboys)

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **5.1B**

The North Queensland Cowboys and The Resilience Project have partnered since 2019 to deliver mental health and wellbeing programs, focusing on emotional literacy through the core pillars of gratitude, empathy and mindfulness. A 2023 Cowboys evaluation article reported that the program had been delivered to more than 100 schools across northern Queensland since 2018, reaching approximately 31,000 students through presentations and curriculum delivery. More broadly, the program has reached approximately 35,000 students, parents and teachers across north and far north Queensland.

Nywaigi Youth Council Youth Healing Project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **4.1A** **11.3A**

Auspiced by the Mungalla Aboriginal Corporation for Business, this project supports culturally grounded healing camps on Country for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants. Activities such as Connection to Country, Elder Yarns, cultural education and mental health workshops are intended to build resilience, strengthen identity and support early intervention for people experiencing disconnection, distress, substance use, family violence or mental health challenges. The initiative is community-led, with Nywaigi leaders, Elders, local community members and partners contributing to the design and delivery of culturally safe experiences.

Homefront Café veteran engagement project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **6.1E / 9.2A**

This created an accessible, low-barrier community hub—a coffee trailer hub at PCYC Townsville—to support the wellbeing, social connection and community participation of veterans and ex-service personnel in Townsville. An estimated 123 veterans engaged with peer support, community activities and partnerships like Wounded Heroes Australia. The project has now evolved into a sustainable, veteran-driven community asset.

Play Matters—Australia's Dads Play initiative

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

NSPS **5.1A / 5.1B / 5.2A**

This project supports current and former Australian Defence Force fathers and their young children through structured, play-based connection. It is designed to strengthen father-child relationships, build parenting confidence, and increase community connectedness. Delivered through weekly facilitated sessions in

Townsville and pop-up events in Cairns, the program helped fathers to build social connections, strengthen parenting capability, access local services, and support their children's development and school readiness. The model also promotes long-term sustainability through volunteer leadership development and connections to broader community supports and Play Matters resources.

Townsville Suicide Prevention Network

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 12

The network runs numerous initiatives to reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking behaviour and foster meaningful community involvement. See the case study on page 21.

Townsville Indigenous Men's Health Alliance (TIMA)

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 7.3A 4.1A

Five Townsville men's groups joined forces to create TIMA in September 2025. TIMA then hosted the Regional Indigenous Men's Conference and engaged with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities throughout North Queensland and as far south as Bundaberg. From this engagement, TIMA developed a model that conceptualises Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's wellbeing as emerging from the interaction between identity, cultural systems, relational practices, enabling environments and broader structural conditions. The model launched in July 2026.

This work aligns with the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy; Priorities for Suicide Prevention: A First Nations Lived Experience Collective Statement* (2026); and the *Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Declaration Implementation Framework and Plan*.

The Oasis Townsville

Lifespan 4 | NSPS 10.1C

The Townsville SPCAP supported the work of The Oasis, a home base for the veteran community in Townsville, before its closure. See the case study on page 22–23.

StandBy (National Postvention Service)

Lifespan 9

The StandBy program provides support to anyone who has been bereaved or impacted by suicide, including families and friends, witnesses and first responders.

Thirrili (National Postvention Service)

Lifespan 9

Thirrili supports Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in the aftermath of suicide or other fatal critical incidents, and works with communities to build positive lives free from the impacts of suicide.

Women Veterans Network Australia

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 10.1C

This is a stretch and release program for female veterans, aimed at improving mental and physical health and creating long-term social networks.

Care for Carers

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 10.1C

This project offers free workshops, free follow-up and a place for people to feel safe and connected while they learn strategies to increase their self-care and mental wellbeing.

Birth trauma and perinatal wellbeing project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 6 | NSPS 5.1A / 5.2A

This project recognises that birth trauma and perinatal depression are suicide risk factors, and creates an educational hub around this recognition.

Stigma reduction campaign

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 8 | NSPS 6.1B

This project took the form of a youth peer-led campaign across combined schools in Charters Towers.

Media awareness training

Lifespan 8 | NSPS 6.1B

Educating the media on safe language around suicide is part of the Lifespan model. Everymind undertook this training in the Townsville area.

2026–2027 priority projects

Palm Island systems-level initiative

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 11.2A, 11.3A

Palm Island faces significant challenges related to isolation and disadvantage, including housing insecurity and intergenerational trauma. This project builds on established community-led suicide prevention work, engaging Elders and local leaders, and organisations such as the Palm Island Community Company and PCYC, to refresh Train-the-Trainer workshops and expand culturally safe postvention supports. This initiative will also explore renewed interest in re-establishing the island's Suicide Prevention Network.

Rural and remote capacity-building project

Lifespan 6 7 | NSPS 1.2F / 4.2A

Rural communities face distinct pressures, including isolation, financial stress and the impact of major weather events. Hinchinbrook has identified a need for greater confidence in discussing mental health. This project supports local facilitators and connects community groups to funded training, while strengthening partnerships with the Hinchinbrook Shire Council and Service Provider Network. Lessons from this pilot will inform capacity building across other rural communities in the region.

Pre- and post-custody suicide prevention and community capacity initiative

Lifespan 4 | NSPS 5.2D

The transition from custody represents a period of heightened vulnerability, often marked by housing instability and disrupted family connections. This project strengthens coordination between corrections and health services, alongside community organisations such as Sisters Inside and Transform Lives, with particular attention to First Nations communities. The project focuses on mapping existing supports and improving workforce understanding of post-release risk to establish clearer referral pathways region-wide.

Townsville Youth Wellbeing Action Collaborative

Lifespan 4 | NSPS 1.2A / 1.2C 8.2C

Young people in Townsville face housing instability, rising costs and disrupted schooling, and have reported that youth services are often difficult to access. This project positions young people at the centre of the response, partnering with community organisations to co-design a Youth Round Table and refresh the CORES youth suicide prevention workshop. The project aims to embed lived experience voices in decision-making and improve coordination across youth wellbeing services.

Strengthening systems and community capacity: backbone work of SPCAP

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 11.3A

Across Townsville, Hinchinbrook, Palm Island, Burdekin, Charters Towers, Richmond and Flinders, SPCAP performs a coordinating role that connects services and translates national suicide prevention strategy into local action. This includes reducing duplication, embedding lived experience and maintaining communication through newsletters and regional platforms. The project also supports shared data and evidence to guide decision-making, with the aim of strengthening trust between sectors and delivering coordinated outcomes region-wide.

Further details on these priority projects, including progress reports, are online.



We want people to know what services are available and feel comfortable reaching out.

MICHELLE

CASE STUDY

Building connection to save lives in Townsville

In Townsville, a grassroots approach to suicide prevention is gaining renewed momentum through the work of Michelle Ramm, President of the Townsville Suicide Prevention Network (TSPN).

Operating as a volunteer-led organisation, TSPN exists to address what is seen as a critical gap in the community.

“Our focus is really creating connection and awareness,” Michelle (pictured above), explains. “We want people to know what services are available and feel comfortable reaching out.”

While the network has existed for more than 15 years, it has undergone a significant transformation over the past 2 years. Recently incorporated as an independent entity, TSPN has been rebuilt with a clear purpose and stronger community presence. This renewal has enabled the organisation to establish its own branding, website and outreach materials, marking a new chapter in its evolution.

Based in Townsville and serving the local community, TSPN delivers its impact through visibility and engagement. The network participates in community events, hosts networking opportunities, and is preparing to launch both a city-wide suicide prevention conference and an annual awareness walk. These initiatives aim to reduce stigma, encourage help-seeking behaviour and foster meaningful community involvement.

Importantly, TSPN is also focused on strengthening its membership base. The organisation is looking to shift people from being passive supporters to active participants who are engaged in the cause.

As new suicide prevention frameworks emerge, TSPN demonstrates how local, community-driven efforts can play a vital role by connecting people, raising awareness and ultimately helping to save lives.



The one thing that we know for sure," she says, "is that connection saves lives. That's it, bottom line."

LEITH



CASE STUDY

Turning lived experience into a strategic asset

For independent consultant Leith Milton–Short, suicide prevention is a professional focus and a deeply personal mission.

With nearly a decade working in the veteran wellbeing space, including Oasis Townsville, and close to 30 years of lived experience with mental health challenges, she brings a uniquely balanced perspective to the sector.

"The one thing that we know for sure," she says, "is that connection saves lives. That's it, bottom line."

Leigh (pictured above, second from the right) recently established a social enterprise focused on bridging the gap between strategy and real-world impact. Her work centres on helping organisations better understand and embed lived experience as "a strategic asset".

"We use big words like psychosocial safety," she explains, "but what does that actually mean? How do we translate that into something practical for people, for businesses, for communities?"

Her approach is grounded in simplicity. "It's about taking all of the strategy and bringing it back down to very real, practical terms," she says. "What does this mean for someone who's struggling? And what does it mean for the people around them?"

Leigh works with organisations to build internal capability and focus on fundamentals like communication, role clarity and relationships. She also connects them with individuals who have lived experience. These voices are brought into workplaces and community settings to share their stories in relatable ways.

"People need to see someone who looks like them, sounds like them and has been through something similar," she says. "That's what creates real connection."

Her model also reinvests in those contributors, creating what she describes as a "circular impact" where lived experience leads to opportunity, capability and employment pathways.

At its core, her philosophy is clear. "This isn't about reinventing the wheel. It's about linking all the spokes together."



Operation COMPASS was one of 13 National Suicide Prevention Trial sites across Australia and demonstrated the value of veteran-led wellbeing support. The initiative influenced the development of a peer workforce model that has since grown through Open Arms and DVA programs, supporting more than 70 veteran and ex-ADF peer workers nationwide. Building on this foundation, The **Oasis** Townsville emerged through the evolution of Operation COMPASS and has continued to contribute to the Townsville SPCAP as a key community initiative. The Oasis helped inspire a national network of veteran and family wellbeing hubs, with these collective innovations contributing to the establishment of 16 centres across Australia.



Oasis



Operation COMPASS



Cairns District SPCAP



The Cairns and Hinterland SPCAP echoes the geographic area covered by the Cairns and Hinterland Hospital and Health Service.

The region covers an area of 142,900 sq km—from the Cassowary Coast in the south through Cairns and Yarrabah to Douglas Shire in the north, and out through Mareeba and the Tablelands to Croydon in the west.

This encompasses the Cairns City, Yarrabah, Cassowary Coast, Croydon, Etheridge, Tablelands Region, Mareeba and Douglas local government areas.

The SPCAPs of Cairns and Hinterland, and Torres and Cape, frequently run suicide prevention projects in common.

Past and current projects

CALD Suicide Prevention project and framework

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **6.2B**

Following a number of suicides within the Bhutanese community in Cairns, a bespoke community action plan to prevent suicide has now been developed via Centacare FNQ.

Kunjur First Nations Men's Collective

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **7.3A** **4.1A**

The collective is a culturally safe, community-led support group founded by Badu Island man, Bernard Sabadi. It provides a dedicated space for Indigenous men, elders, and boys older than 12 years to yarn, heal, and reconnect with their culture through weekly circles, mentoring and 'on country' school programs.

Play Matters—Australia's Dads Play initiative

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **5.1A / 5.1B / 5.2A**

This project supports current and former Australian Defence Force fathers and their young children through structured, play-based connection. It is designed to strengthen father-child relationships, build parenting confidence and increase community connectedness. Delivered through weekly facilitated sessions in Townsville and pop-up events in Cairns, the program helps fathers to build social connections, strengthen parenting capability, access local services, and support their children's development and school readiness.

The model also promotes long-term sustainability through volunteer leadership development and connections to broader community supports and Play Matters resources.

Tapestry of Yarns—From the Other Side project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 8 | NSPS 6.1B

This creative storytelling and podcast project by the Arts Nexus Hub in Atherton brings together people with lived experience of mental health challenges and creative practitioners to share stories of music, visual arts, writing, performance, craft and other forms of creative expression. Through high-quality podcast production, marketing and community engagement, the project aims to amplify regional voices and promote conversations about wellbeing in accessible and non-clinical ways.

Thriving Beyond Pain project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan 3 9 | NSPS 2.2B / 2.2G

This Thriving Lives Co project supports adults living with persistent or chronic pain to better understand pain and build practical strategies for self-management. It recognises the close relationship between physical pain, emotional wellbeing, social participation and suicide risk, and provides structured support that addresses the whole person. The use of telehealth and flexible delivery supports access for people in regional, rural and remote communities who may otherwise face barriers to specialist pain support.

Roses in the Ocean

Lifespan 6 | NSPS 12.2

The SPCAP partnered with Roses in the Ocean to bring TouchPoints training as an offering to the region. Through this work, 3 collaborative members with lived experience were trained to facilitate these training sessions.

Violence and suicide

Lifespan 4 | NSPS 1.1B / 1.2A / 2.2F / 5.2B

The Cairns and Torres SPCAPs are working with the domestic and family violence sector to explore the link between DFV and suicide. Across Cairns and Torres regions, this work has included running training sessions and workshops to help DFV workers feel resourced to respond to suicide in their settings. This project aligns with the Queensland Government's suicide prevention framework for working with people affected by domestic and family violence.

Equanimity Exchange

Lifespan 4 | NSPS 3.2 / 3.2D 13.1

The SPCAP designed a resource for frontline employment services workers that gives tools and questions that can be used for people who may be experiencing distress that does not escalate the situation unnecessarily (such as calling 000).

Life Promotion and Suicide Prevention Collaborative

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 11.3A

A movement for change, this is a network of more than 400 members across the Cairns, Hinterland, Cape and Torres regions. It enables fresh, creative thinking by drawing together leaders, decision-makers and community members who have a passion for suicide prevention.

First Nations Collaborative

Lifespan 7 | NSPS 11.3A

First Nations Collaborative meetings are held bimonthly and are an opportunity for First Nations people to work together on culture, leadership and systems. The First Nations Collaborative, which has approximately 100 members across the Cairns, Hinterland, Cape and Torres regions, touches on topics relevant to the socio-economic determinants of health (SEDs).

The Fire Project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **6.1E**

The Fire Project is a long-running successful project focused on offering targeted community support to First Nations youth. Recent growth of the program included more targeted support, with more community touch points to reach more local young people.

Tis the 'Tism Project

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **2.2D / 4.2A / 4.2B**

This is a group for neurodivergent youth in the Atherton Tablelands to help participants improve self-care and overcome bullying and stigma. It is supported by social workers with lived experience.

Wheels of Wellness (Wow)

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **3** | NSPS **2.1A / 2.2F / 3.2E** **9.2A** **13.1**

This program provides mental health social work support to the Cairns homeless community through the Wheels of Wellness mobile clinical service.

Distress Brief Support Initiative

Lifespan **4** **6** | NSPS **6.2B**

Mareeba and Tablelands are part of a national Distress Brief Support trial, a community-based initiative that offers short-term support for people experiencing everyday challenges. It is a non-clinical intervention to provide connection, reassurance and help through 2 services: community engagement points (for immediate support and information within the community) and a wellness team, which provides brief, practical support to help people manage challenges early.

2026–2027 priority projects

Louder youth voices

NSPS **5.1B**

Young people in the Atherton Tablelands, particularly those from low socio-economic backgrounds, have reported high levels of distress with limited opportunities to be heard. This project identifies young people willing to share their experiences, exploring key issues through workshops and interviews to shape a common agenda for change. The second half of the year focuses on prototyping responses based on this consultation, aiming to develop youth-led solutions.

Understanding links between gambling and suicide

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **2.2J**

Gambling is identified as an individual risk factor within the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, though it has received limited regional attention to date. This new project builds relationships with stakeholders such as Uniting Care and Anglicare to examine the intersection between gambling and suicide risk. The intended output is a publicly available resource explaining these links, supported by Collaborative members equipped to raise the issue in prevention conversations.

Prioritising LGBTIQ+SB communities

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **2.2E / 5.2I**

LGBTIQ+SB communities are identified as a priority population within the National Suicide Prevention Strategy, though this focus has not previously received dedicated attention within the Collaborative. This new project builds relationships with relevant stakeholders to examine how suicide risk presents specifically within LGBTIQ+SB communities in the region. The intended output is a public resource explaining these links, supported by Collaborative members equipped to discuss the issue with confidence.

Continuous communication

Lifespan 8 | NSPS 6.1B

Effective collaboration depends on consistent information sharing. This project maintains connection across the Cairns, Hinterland, Torres and Cape footprint through weekly social media updates, a monthly newsletter, direct email communication and regular in-person engagement, including focus groups and information sessions. This combination of digital and face-to-face contact underpins the Collaborative's broader approach to shared learning and sustained engagement across the region.

Resources for DFV

Lifespan 4 9 | NSPS 1.1B / 1.2A / 2.2F / 5.2B

The National Suicide Prevention Strategy identifies DFV as a recommended focus area under safety and security. This continuing initiative builds on existing relationships with stakeholders, including the Cairns Collective for Domestic and Family Violence, refining prototypes developed through earlier workshops with frontline workers. The intended output is a resource explaining the link between family violence and suicide risk, supported by confident Collaborative contributors.

Further details on these priority projects, including progress reports, are online.





Torres and Cape SPCAP



The Torres and Cape SPCAP matches the Torres and Cape Hospital and Health Service area.

It is a vast geographical area with many remote, rural and island communities. Navigating this area requires a clear lens on past and present history, systems of oppression and an understanding of the nuances of discrete communities.

The region stretches from Wujal Wujal, on the coast north of Port Douglas, to Kowanyama in the west and then north past the tip of the cape to many discrete island communities that make up the Torres Strait.

It covers the shire councils of Aurukun, Cook, Hope Vale, Kowanyama, Lockhart River, Mapoon, Napranum, Pormpuraaw, Torres and Wujal Wujal, alongside the Northern Peninsula Area Regional Council, Weipa Town Authority and the Torres Strait Island Regional Council.

Since July 2026, NQPHN has funded specific suicide prevention pilots in the Napranum and Mapoon local government areas.



Past and current projects

Talk about it Tuesday

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **7** | NSPS **6.1E / 9.3A**

Talk About It Tuesday is a grassroots suicide prevention initiative started by 2 mothers in Far North Queensland who each lost a son to suicide. Funding was awarded in 2025 to establish 3 women's wellbeing camps, aimed at supporting women from all backgrounds across the Cape York region. See the case study on page 30.

Dare to Dream project (delivered by JUTE)

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **5** | NSPS **6.1A / 6.1E**

The company tours Cape York communities with its Dare to Dream theatre production and offers in-school workshop residencies to promote early intervention and support networks for at-risk young people. The program includes theatre-based activities that help young people to build skills that will benefit their health and wellbeing.

Northern Peninsula Area Men's Alliance

Recipient of a Northern Queensland PHN community wellness grant

Lifespan **6** **7** | NSPS **5.2**

This group provides community engagement and education, develops pathways to mental health and crisis supports, and training for facilitators within the network.

Postvention

NSPS **5.2 F / 11.3A / 13.4A**

In the Torres and Cape district, postvention—support for individuals, families and communities post-suicide—is being delivered through established and trusted community services. The community-driven and -owned approach means known and trusted faces are the ones to provide essential support, not external health services, with additional capability building provided through the SPCAP.

Universal after-care

Lifespan   | NSPS 

Indigenous communities throughout the Torres and Cape region are at the centre of design in introducing universal after-care—tailored, nonclinical care for people who have experienced a suicidal crisis or attempted suicide. The service will be delivered through community organisations, preserving the Indigenous systems of kinship, culture and faith and respecting the community need for continuity of service and known providers.

2026–2027 priority projects

First Nations Collaborative

Lifespan  | NSPS  

Established by community members in 2024, the First Nations Collaborative brings First Nations people together to address a changing suicide prevention service landscape. The initiative facilitates shared problem-solving on issues identified by First Nations people, drawing on evidence and strategic learning. Over the coming year, 4 collaborative events will be held, including a dedicated gathering on Thursday Island delivered with the Mura Kosker Neighbourhood Centre, alongside CORES capacity-building training.

Life Promotion and Suicide Prevention Collaborative—Aurukun

Lifespan  | NSPS 

This new initiative responds to Aurukun's status as a First Nations and rural and remote priority community. The approach is deliberately developmental, led by council and community members rather than fixed external timelines. Activities include identifying key stakeholders, delivering a face-to-face visit with CORES training, and providing ongoing coaching to assess appetite for a local collaborative. Success involves improved access to capacity-building training and a shared understanding of suicide prevention.

Life Promotion and Suicide Prevention Collaborative—Mapoon, Napranum and Pormpuraaw

Lifespan  | NSPS 

Following an invitation from the Mayor of Mapoon, this new project extends the Collaborative on the Move approach to Mapoon, Napranum and Pormpuraaw, recognised as First Nations and rural and remote priority areas. As with the Aurukun initiative, the approach is community-led and developmental, complementing existing Culture Care Connect engagement. Activities include stakeholder identification and face-to-face visits, with the aim of building locally grounded suicide prevention approaches.

Referral reform

Lifespan  | NSPS 

Effective suicide prevention depends on services operating cohesively, with system level coordination identified as a key objective within the National Suicide Prevention Strategy. This continuing initiative examines current referral pain points and explores the concept of services acting as systems navigators, supported by 2 dedicated reform workshops during the year. The intended outcome is a practical resource that improves how people navigate available support services.

Implementing 'The Kowie Way'

Lifespan  | NSPS 

In Kowanyama, the Women's Group and Rangers Group have developed 'the Kowie Way', a suicide prevention community action plan grounded in local knowledge and lived experience. This continuing initiative supports implementation of the plan, partnering closely with council and community groups rather than directing from outside. Activities include a face-to-face visit and ongoing coaching through to June, aiming to embed the plan for long-term community benefit.

Further details on these priority projects, including progress reports, are online.



33

If we can help even a couple of people, it's worth it.

JACKIE

CASE STUDY

Turning grief into connection in FNQ

In Far North Queensland, a grassroots support group is helping people navigate the aftermath of suicide by providing them with “permission to talk”.

Founded in 2022, Talk About It Tuesday began with a simple but powerful idea. “You kind of got the feeling people got tired of you talking about it,” says co-founder Jackie Perry. “But they really did need to talk about it.”

The group was born from shared loss. After losing her son, Jackie found comfort in a friend who had experienced the same grief. “She just drove in that night and sat with me... it was such a great comfort to be with someone who understood.”

What started as a small Facebook group has since grown into a community-driven initiative supporting people across remote regions north of Coen. Its purpose is both simple and vital: “Connecting people to others who’ve been through the experience,” Jackie explains, while also recognising that those left behind are often at increased risk themselves.

Beyond peer support, the group delivers practical workshops focused on rebuilding self-worth, which is regarded as an essential component of prevention. “Suicide is the extreme outcome of self-criticism,” Perry says. “What we try to do is build people back up... help them be a little kinder to themselves.”

Community backing has amplified the group’s reach, from local fundraising to partnerships with industry supporting mental health awareness.

“We just wanted to start a tiny support group,” Jackie reflects. “If we can help even a couple of people, it’s worth it.”



