



Suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children a national disgrace

15 October 2021

The Catholic Church's peak social services group, Catholic Social Services Australia, has described findings in a recent ABS report detailing suicide deaths in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children as a national disgrace.

The report, *Causes of Death, Australia*, released late last month found that during the period 2016-2020 suicide was the leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged between five and 17.

It also found almost one-third (31.9%) of deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was due to suicide.

Francis Sullivan, Chair of CSSA, said today the findings from the Australian Bureau of Statistic report were an indictment on our entire community.

"Indigenous people are telling us what the problem is and we need to listen," Mr Sullivan said.

"While causes of Indigenous suicide share some similarities to rest of the population including untreated mental illness, trauma from childhood abuse and substance abuse, Indigenous people also suffer the devastation caused by loss of land and culture, trans-generational trauma, racism, and social exclusion.

"One approach that appears to be working for CSSA agencies is ensuring a high proportion of Indigenous people are employed and trained to work in Indigenous communities.

"At CatholicCare Wilcannia-Forbes for instance, 35% of the social services workforce are Indigenous, and they are represented at all levels of management. This genuine commitment to facilitating Indigenous solutions to indigenous issues is invaluable, and needs to be replicated across the board.

"There are no simple solutions to the trauma caused by over 230 years of colonisation, but what is clear that white solutions to Indigenous issues have failed long enough," Mr Sullivan said.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics report also found:

- In 2020 suicide was the 5th leading cause of death for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to 13th for non-Indigenous people.
- In 2020 the median age for suicides was 31.3 years for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people compared to 45.2 years for non-Indigenous people.
- In the two 5 year periods between 2011-15 and 2016-20 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people had a suicide rate double that of non-Indigenous people.