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## Young, Strong & Deadly - helping to Close the Gap

Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people still face unequal health outcomes. On average, Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people die more than 10 years younger than other Australians.

National Close the Gap Day, on 21 March, highlights this issue and provides Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians the opportunity to come together to share information and to support the work that aims to achieve Indigenous health equality.

Wentworth Healthcare, provider of the Nepean Blue Mountains Primary Health Network (NBMPHN), has a strong history of collaborating with Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander communities in the region to identify gaps in services relating to health and taking action to close those gaps.

One program funded through NBMPHN helping to bridge the gap is the *Young, Strong & Deadly* program, delivered by the Blue Mountains Aboriginal and Culture Resource Centre.

*Young, Strong & Deadly* is an early intervention mental health and addiction prevention program for young Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander people between 13-28 years of age. Delivered primarily through schools, the program is designed to strengthen young people's connection to country and cultural identity, creating a positive sense-of-self and community. This creates a sense of belonging that increases their personal resilience and decreases their risks of mental illness and addiction.

According to Wentworth Healthcare CEO, Lizz Reay, research supports this program's foundation. "There is a strong link between the connection to culture and a positive sense of identity. Being in touch with culture can have a protective factor that helps to decrease the impact of stressful life events and experiences," she said.

"In this program, learning from Elders allows these young people to draw on long-held wisdom and to reconnect to the strengths of cultural knowledge," she continued.

"As this program is based in culture, it not only makes a difference to the young people involved, but has positive effects for the broader community through these young people," she said.

Wayne Cornish, Manager of Blue Mountains Aboriginal and Culture Resource Centre says that connecting to country and culture is strong place for young people to centre themselves and to nurture well-being.

"In the program we talk about connecting to culture and their own self-worth. We teach traditional stories, go through morals like looking after land and looking after each other. This cultural foundation creates a safe space for us to talk about issues like anxiety, depression, suicide prevention and addiction," he said.

"I love seeing the change in the young people we work with. I love seeing them smile and express who they are. I love seeing the positive impacts this program can have on a young person's life," he said.

When program participants were asked what the program has given them, one young person said, “It’s made me feel a lot more-stronger about myself, my identity, who I am as a person. It’s meant reconnecting with my family and ancestral heritage.”

“It’s good for us, because we get to get out there and impart some knowledge on the younger kids. I guess that’s how we retain our culture, isn’t it? From generation to generation.” – Young adult\* participant.

Blue Mountains Aboriginal and Culture Resource Centre welcomes referrals and inquiries on 4782 6569 or via their website [www.acrc.org.au](http://www.acrc.org.au).

NBMPHN and Blue Mountains Aboriginal and Culture Resource Centre created [a video to highlight the Young, Strong & Deadly program](#).

*\*Participant name not used to protect their identity.*

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The Nepean Blue Mountains PHN is a program run by Wentworth Healthcare – a not for profit organisation which works to improve health for the communities of Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury, Lithgow and Penrith.

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