

7 August 2017 | For immediate release

Miwatj Mental Health Program leading the way in remote Australia

Mental Health professionals gathered at the Garma Festival in East Arnhem Land yesterday to discuss social and emotional wellbeing and mental health, with a particular focus on the success of the Miwatj Mental Health Program.

The Miwatj Mental Health Program is a Yolŋu-led program based in Galiwin'ku on Elcho Island and is administered by the Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation, a Yolŋu community controlled Health Organisation.

The Program is leading in the treatment and management of Indigenous mental health. The Mental Health Team works collaboratively with families and the community to provide tailored care to individuals suffering from mental illness.

The Program is an integral part of the community in Galiwin'ku, and the team's outreach program allows people to be treated in their homes where they feel most connected and at ease.

The concept of health in the Yolŋu culture involves not only the body, mind and spirit being in balance, but also a sense of equilibrium with family and community.

Chief Health Officer of the Miwatj Health Aboriginal Corporation Dr Lucas de Toca says the program operates on three streams, but the most important aspect is that it is managed and controlled by Yolŋu peoples.

"It is a community based program operating over a continuum of stepped care for all levels of mental illness. We operate three streams, including a therapeutic stream with counselling, a social and cultural stream with traditional approaches to care including family involvement, and a medical stream to deal with acute care and ensure patients with mental health issues receive the appropriate medical care," said Dr de Toca.

"The three streams function in a coordinated fashion, interlinked through the work of aboriginal health practitioners who are extremely competent both in the medical as well as in the social and cultural aspects of providing care for patients."

"We are in one of the most remote locations in Australia, but are still able to deliver a high quality and best practice model, following the recommendations of the Mental Health Commission as well as using traditional methods of healing and care."

Mental Health Australia CEO Frank Quinlan, who has been visiting the Miwatj Mental Health Program for a number of years, was joined by Rarrtjiwuy Herdman and Djamaḷaka Dhamarrandji to discuss the success of the program and broader issues of social and emotional wellbeing at the Garma Festival.



“The Miwatj Mental Health Program is a huge success and we can all learn from its strengths - local people making local decisions about the care, services and needs of the people in their community,” said Mr Quinlan.

“This is remote country, and to see a service go from strength-to-strength in recent years, with tangible results, is a real success story for community mental health. Certainly a program that could be adapted and used elsewhere in remote and rural Australia.”

To find out more about the **Miwatj Mental Health Program** <http://miwatj.com.au/what-we-do/clinical-services/>

Media Contact: Lachlan Searle 0488 076 088

