



Fifth Biennial International Childhood Trauma Conference - Australian Childhood Foundation 17-22 Aug 2025

Ngagagee Ngulu Murrup Durra - Hear us, our voices, spirit and heart (Ngagagee project)

A/Prof Graham Gee on behalf of the Ngagagee services, practitioners and team

'Healing through Connection' Artist: Emma Bamblett





**Honouring Joe Tucci**

**Acknowledging Country**

**And survivors of child sexual abuse**

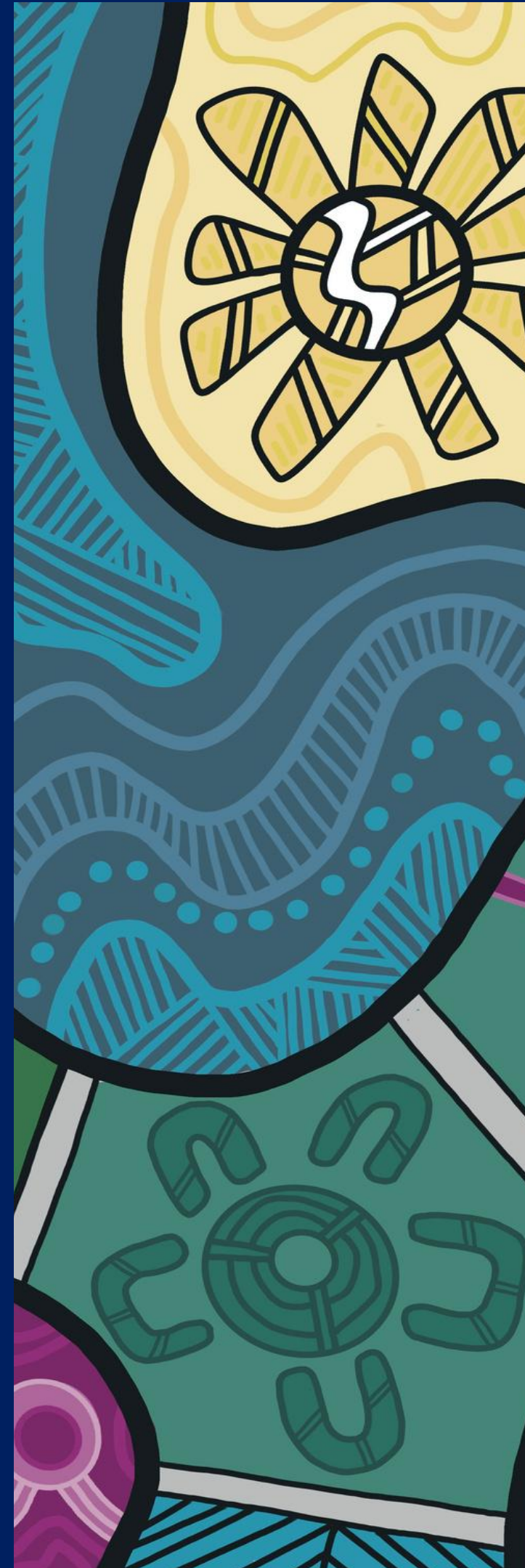




**Child sexual abuse can be a painful issue  
to talk about and listen to.**

**Please take care of you during this session.**

**Take a pause any time if you need to.**







Who are we? We are many and ‘We are Stronger Together’  
Six Victorian Aboriginal services, an Aboriginal lived experience, team,  
and researchers committed to healing child sexual abuse





# Our Elders' vision



## Why the Ngagagee project?

- 6 Victorian Aboriginal specialist healing teams established 2021
- Immediate workforce challenges – great complexity, encountering harmful systems, significant early losses of staff, working in silos.
- Without acting together, a risk of little to no Aboriginal specialist healing teams left to support survivors in our communities
- Came together in 2022, started to work together in mid-2023

## Two areas of focus

How can healing teams/workforce in this complex area be better supported

Greater understanding of the healing experiences and needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with a lived experience of child sexual abuse







**Child sexual abuse is everybody's business. It is a global human rights and public health issue with harmful impacts on individuals, families, and communities of all nations and cultures.**

- There is strong consensus among the Ngagagee partner organisations that child sexual abuse is NOT a part of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures.
- Child sexual abuse was part of the violence of colonisation for First Nations peoples across the world. This violence is linked to legacies of collective and intergenerational trauma.
- Elders, leaders, and community members from the Ngagagee project hold a strong belief that our communities need to lead the way in developing better understandings and approaches to hold systems and people who use sexual violence accountable.



## Our standpoint and messages to counter false narratives about our communities



### The Australian Child Maltreatment Study

National prevalence and associated health outcomes of child abuse and neglect

*The Australian Child Maltreatment Study* identified that



More than 1 in 3 girls



Almost 1 in 5 boys

have experienced sexual abuse before the age of 18

**(Haslam et al 2023)**





# How to bring multiple Aboriginal services together?

## Through Culture

Holding gatherings to co-create personal and culturally safe spaces  
to build relationships, trust, connection and yarning





**Experiencing Blak Joy!**  
**Cultural games**  
**to strengthen spirit and joy**





**And when we feel connected.... then we circle up and talk about difficult matters of the heart**



## **Examples of Yarning Circle Discussions**

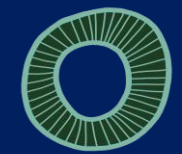
- What types of cultural and therapeutic practices support healing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander survivors? what's working and what isn't?
- What elements of care and support are unique to Aboriginal healing services?

**In 2 years - 4 cultural gatherings, 30 yarning circles, 35 practitioners and managers connecting and sharing knowledge**

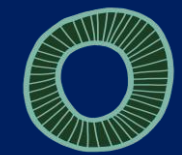


# The Ngagagee Communities of Practice

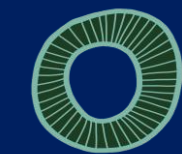
Supportive and restorative spaces to share and reflect together on meaningful experiences connected with the work around healing from child sexual abuse.



2023, 2024, 2025



34 participants and 40 sessions so far




Evaluation completed, in write up






# The evaluation - 'Becoming a community of Care'

A stylized illustration of an Aboriginal person, likely a practitioner, wearing a purple and red patterned garment. They are positioned on the left side of the slide, with a speech bubble coming from them.

*"It's given me the confidence to actually do cultural healing... being allowed to actually do cultural healing, in my way... I just feel a lot safer now to be able to do that"*

(Aboriginal practitioner)

A stylized illustration of a non-Aboriginal person, likely a practitioner, wearing a purple and red patterned garment. They are positioned on the right side of the slide, with a speech bubble coming from them.

*"I'm [non-Aboriginal]... so I always have that at the back of my mind, whether... am I doing right? ...I don't want to do any harm to anybody, you know? ... This is the only space I've got where I can [ask those questions]"*

(Non-Aboriginal practitioner)

## Strengthening workforce capacity to provide culturally safe support

The Community of Practice offered a safe space to experience Aboriginal ways of knowing, being, and doing, honouring Elders and their wisdom, nurturing community relationships, and creating an environment for deep listening and validation. These aspects of the Community of Practice were valued by both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal participants.



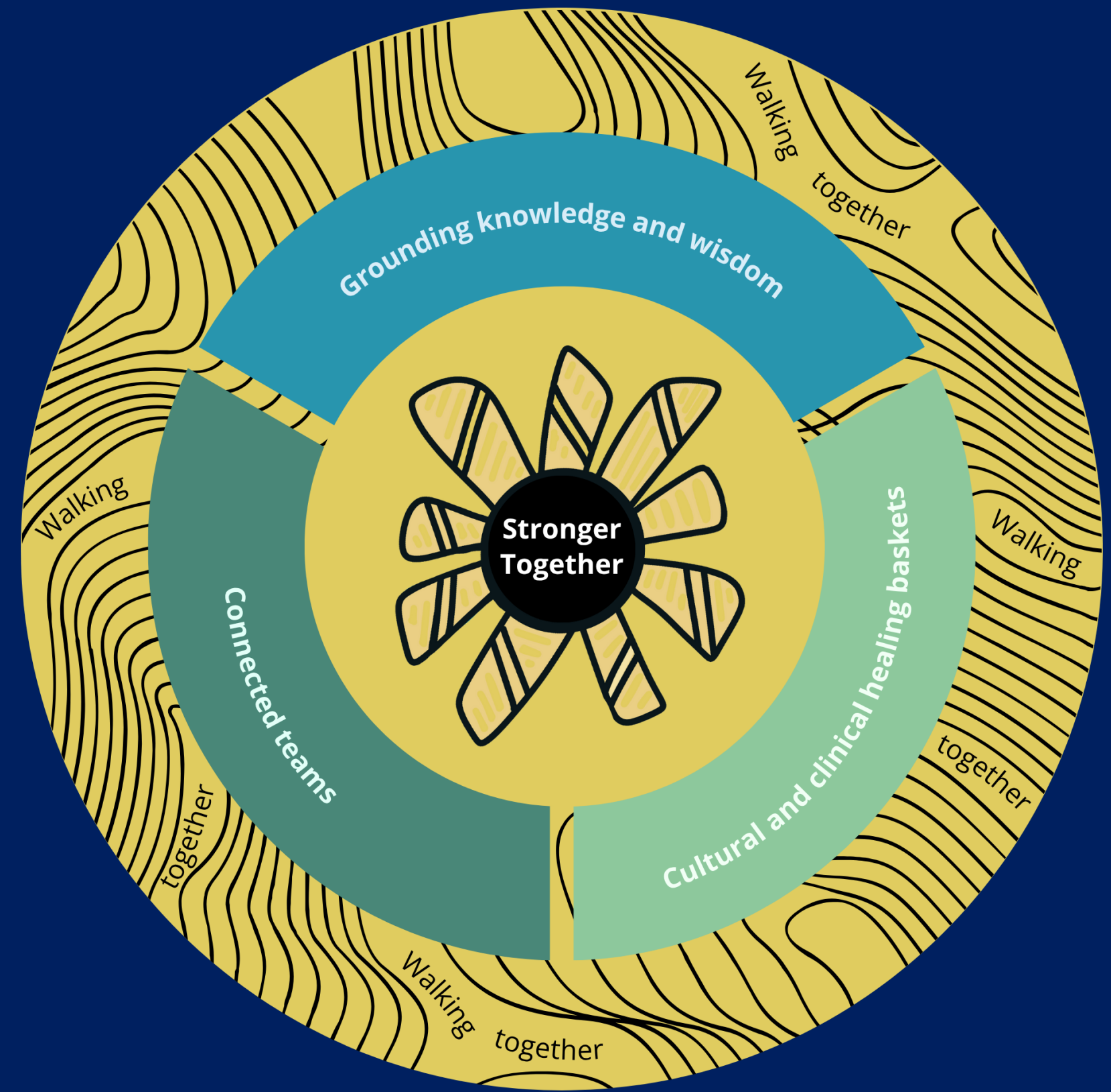


## What have we learnt from Aboriginal healing services and teams?

They share a **core set of cultural, social, political and community values and actions** necessary to respond to child sexual abuse and the ongoing harms of colonization.

Three shared or common elements across:

- Grounding knowledge and wisdom
- Cultural and therapeutic healing baskets
- Connected teams



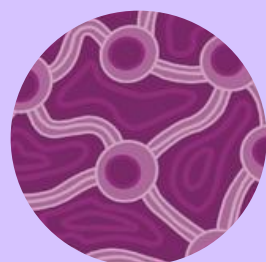




**Aboriginal specialist healing Services – A common vision is to develop whole of community responses that hold the system and people in our communities who use sexual violence accountable.**



**Grounding Aboriginal knowledge and wisdom - e.g. working with animals and totems to support children in processes of disclosure, ceremony, artefact making and other cultural activities to support healing and strengthen connections to kinships systems, culture, Country, ancestors, body mind and emotions.**



**Connected Teams – A skilled and supported workforce that values connected partnerships e.g., resourcing Elders involved in this work who often play critical roles in mediating family conflict, a protective role for survivors, cultural anchors that resist systems levels structures that re-traumatise.**



**Cultural and therapeutic healing baskets - Healing services and teams privilege culture and healing as the foundation for practice. At the same time, they also value therapeutic knowledge as complementary.**



## Scoping review underway

### Mapping what is out there. Some strong, consistent themes

- Listening to and learning from First Nations people with lived experience should inform healing models (Black, Frederico & Bamblett 2022)
- Abuse of Aboriginal children's rights shaped by racism, colonisation and patriarchy (McGlade, 2012)
- Healing programs for survivors work best on Country, with Elders, ceremony and cultural activities (Black, Frederico & Bamblett, 2019)
- Justice systems misunderstand rape as an interpersonal event. It is linked to hierarchical power and control, and must include relationships to tribal sovereignty and self-determination (Deer, 2025)



LINK TO  
PROTOCOL  
PAPER

International Journal of  
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Protocol

### A Systematic Scoping Review of Indigenous People's Experience of Healing and Recovery from Child Sexual Abuse

Jordan Gibbs <sup>1,2,\*</sup>, Helen Milroy <sup>3</sup>, Stella Mulder <sup>1</sup>, Carlina Black <sup>1</sup>, Catherine Lloyd-Johnsen <sup>1,4,5</sup>, Stephanie Brown <sup>1</sup> and Graham Gee <sup>1,6</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Intergenerational Health Group, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne 3052, Australia; stella.mulder@mcri.edu.au (S.M.); carlina.black@mcri.edu.au (C.B.); cat.lloydjohnsen@mcri.edu.au (C.L.-J.); stephanie.brown@mcri.edu.au (S.B.); graham.gee@mcri.edu.au (G.G.)  
<sup>2</sup> Department of Psychological Sciences, Swinburne University of Technology, Hawthorn 3122, Australia  
<sup>3</sup> Division of Psychiatry, Faculty of Health and Medical Sciences, University of Western Australia, Perth 6009, Australia; helen.milroy@uwa.edu.au  
<sup>4</sup> Department of Paediatrics, University of Melbourne, Melbourne 3052, Australia  
<sup>5</sup> Centre for Community Child Health, Royal Children's Hospital, Murdoch Children's Research Institute, Melbourne 3052, Australia  
<sup>6</sup> School of Psychological Sciences, University of Melbourne, Melbourne 3000, Australia  
\* Correspondence: jordan.gibbs@mcri.edu.au

**Abstract:** Child sexual abuse is a form of violence that occurs across nations and cultures. Collective efforts are being made to address this issue within many Indigenous communities. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have expressed the need for cultural models of healing child sexual abuse. A preliminary exploration of the relevant literature shows a lack of synthesis with regard to the current evidence base. This protocol outlines the methods and background for a scoping review that aims to explore and collate the broad scope of literature related to healing from child sexual abuse within an Indigenous context. The proposed review utilises a 'population, concept, and context structure' from the Joanna Briggs Institute to explore the broad scope of the literature within a scoping review framework. The target population is Indigenous survivors of child sexual abuse, including Indigenous populations from six distinct regions: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples from Australia; Māori peoples from Aotearoa (New Zealand); First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples from Canada; Native American peoples from North America; Native peoples from Alaska; and the Sámi peoples of the Sápmi region in Northern Europe. The concept within the review is healing from an Indigenous perspective, which includes a broad range of processes related to both recovery and personal growth. The contexts explored within this review are any context in which healing from child sexual abuse can occur. This may include processes related to disclosure and accessing services, specific interventions or programs for survivors of child sexual abuse, as well as broader non-specific healing programs and personal experiences of healing without intervention. The scoping review will use search strings with broad inclusion and exclusion criteria to capture the potential breadth of perspectives. The search will be conducted across several academic databases and will also include an extensive search for grey literature. This protocol establishes the proposed benefits of this scoping review.

**Keywords:** protocol; scoping review; Indigenous; healing; child sexual abuse

check for updates

**Citation:** Gibbs, J.; Milroy, H.; Mulder, S.; Black, C.; Lloyd-Johnsen, C.; Brown, S.; Gee, G. A Systematic Scoping Review of Indigenous People's Experience of Healing and Recovery from Child Sexual Abuse. *Int. J. Environ. Res. Public Health* **2024**, *21*, 311. <https://doi.org/10.3390/ijerph21030311>

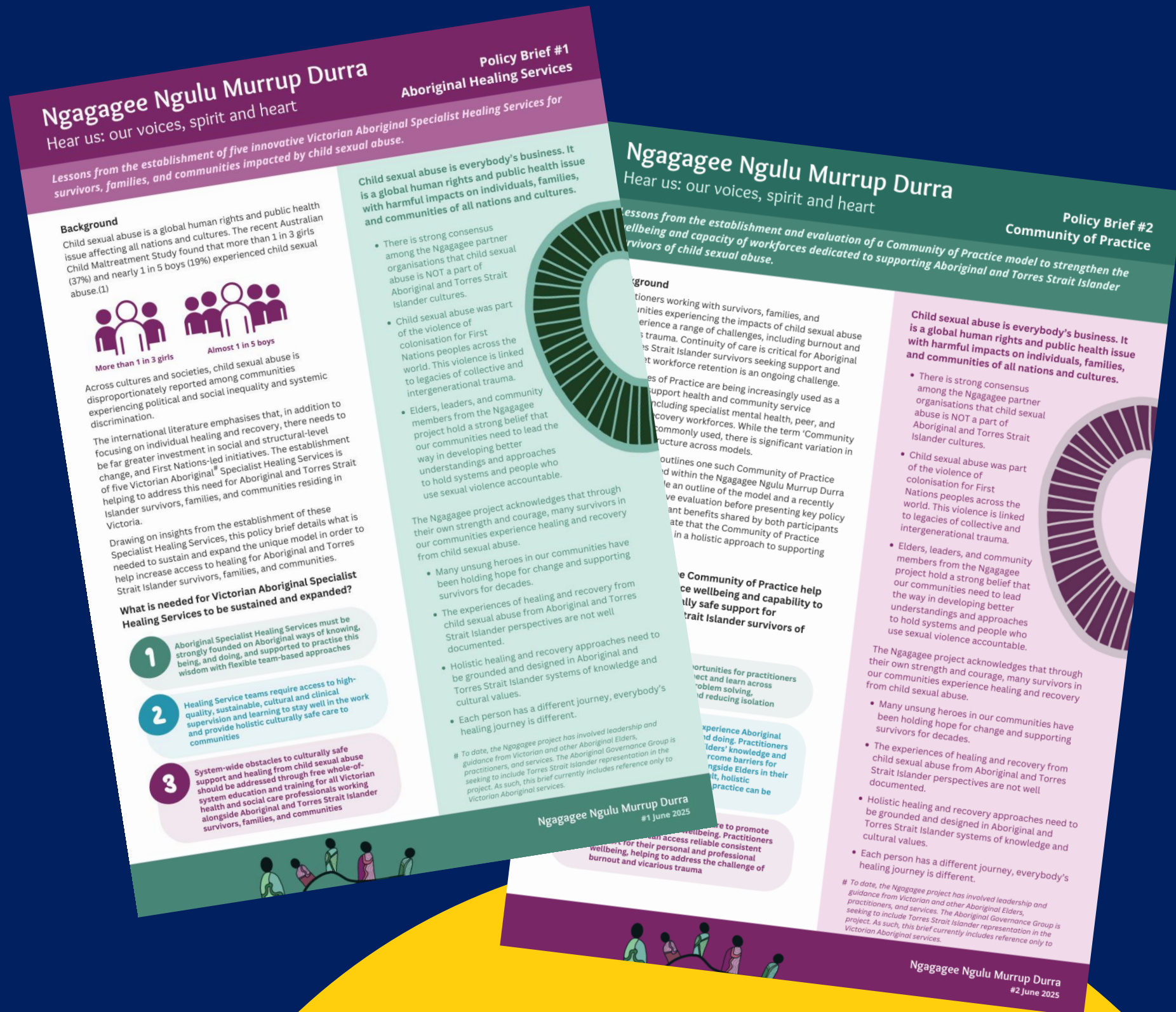
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# Knowledge to practice





# Ways forward for the Ngagagee project?

- The Ngagagee Lived Experience Leadership team are exploring safe ways to engage other survivors and create communities of support.
- Currently co-designing possibilities of trialling online survivor peer support groups that may help survivors who are experiencing isolation and/or barriers to accessing services or healing programs.

Thank you to the Ngagagee Aboriginal Governance Group,  
Lived Experience Leadership team, services partners,  
workforce participants, funding partners, and the research team.



Australian Government  
National Health and  
Medical Research Council

N H M R C



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MELBOURNE





Thank You

Take care and travel safely home  
to your loved ones this afternoon.

You can find us at [ngagagee.au](http://ngagagee.au)  
[ggee@unimelb.edu.au](mailto:ggee@unimelb.edu.au)

