

Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary Health Network (HNECC PHN) – Taree and surrounding communities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Forum

25 February 2021



HealingFoundation
Strong Spirit • Strong Culture • Strong People

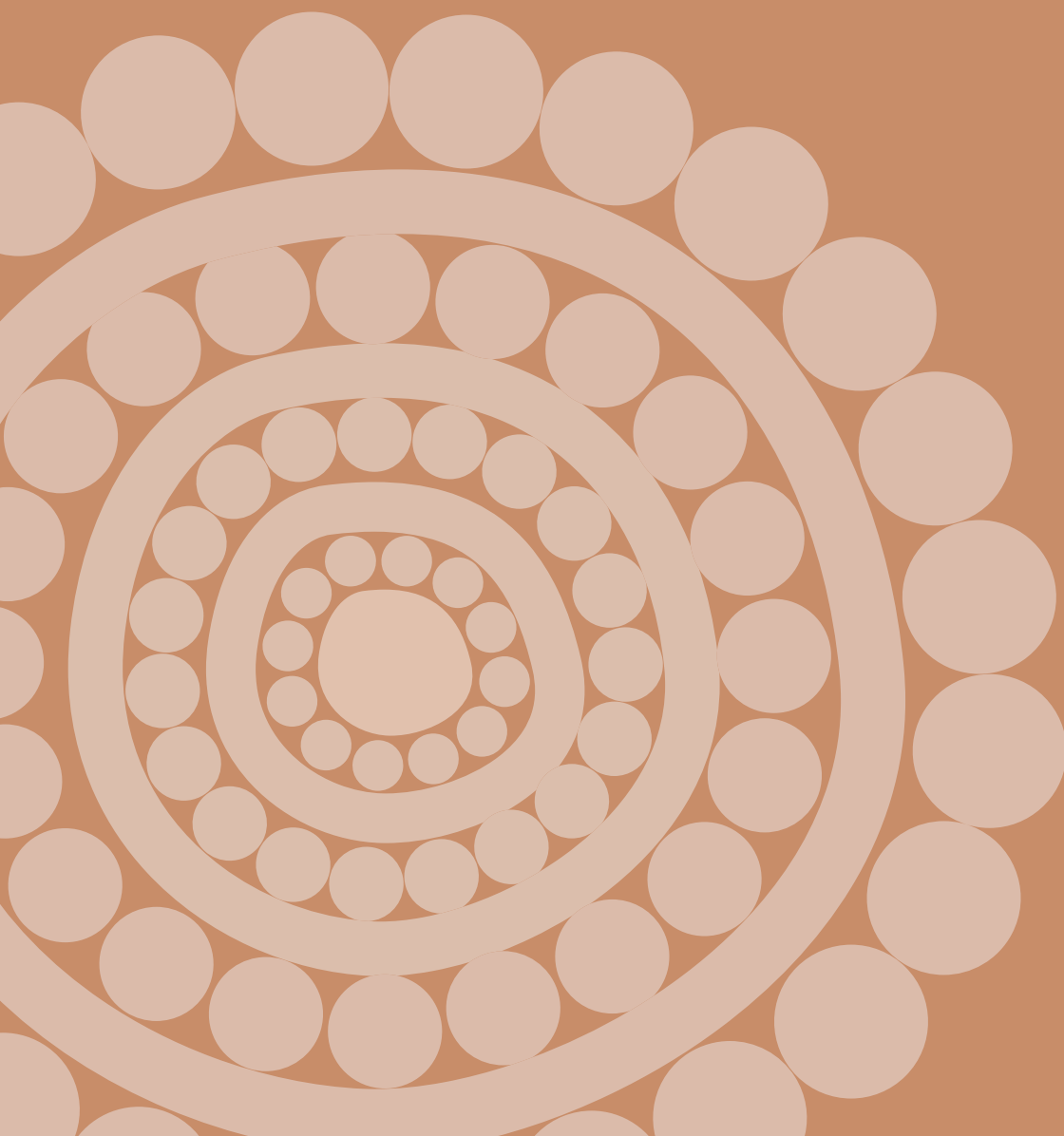
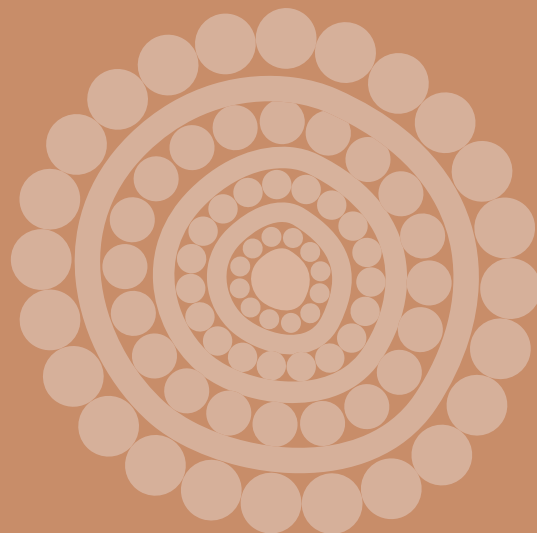
**PRIMARY
HEALTH
NETWORK**

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HUNTER NEW ENGLAND
AND CENTRAL COAST
An Australian Government Initiative

Hunter New England and Central Coast Primary
Health Network (HNECC PHN) Taree and surrounding
communities

**Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander Healing Forum**

25 February 2021



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Taree Community
Healing Forum
Report



1. Introduction

The Taree Community Healing Forum was the third of four forums to be delivered across New South Wales in 2020 and 2021 through a partnership between Hunter New England and Central Coast (HNECC) Primary Health Network (PHN) and The Healing Foundation. Initially planned for 2020, the forum was delayed due to New South Wales Government COVID-19 safety restrictions.

The aim of the healing forums is to increase access to First Nations community-identified approaches to improving the healing and wellbeing needs of HNECC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The forums aim to:

- Empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to identify and design local, culturally relevant approaches to meeting the healing and wellbeing needs of their community.
- Resource localised approaches to healing that are led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual needs, and also connection to culture, family and land.
- Integrate community healing programs with existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental health clinical services – including both Aboriginal Community Controlled and mainstream services – to ensure services holistically meet the clinical and cultural healing needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.
- Promote community development and meaningful partnerships to strengthen the sustainability, community governance and service delivery of community healing programs.

The Taree Community Healing Forum was co-designed by The Healing Foundation, the PHN and local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members, to ensure the forum agenda remained focused on local priority issues. Thank you to the Taree Forum Steering Committee members, including Hannah Earley, Michelle Wilkes, Jamie Matthews, Matt Dumas and Lynette Syron. Special thanks to Tannika Lewis for arranging the cultural performance by the Taree High School dancers.



2. About the Healing Forum

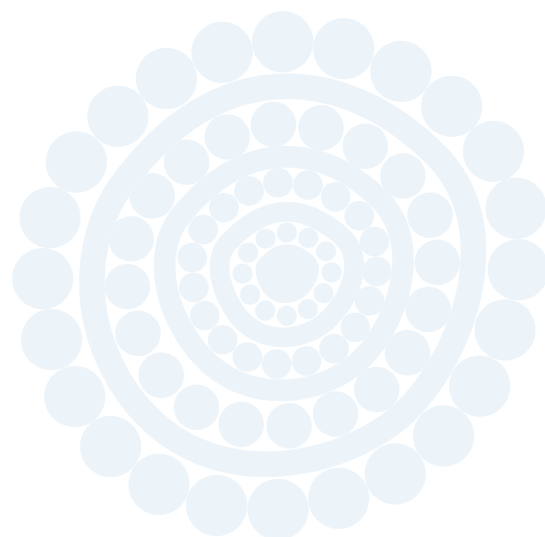
The Taree Community Healing Forum was held at the Manning Valley Race Club on Thursday 25 February 2021. The forum, facilitated by Lee Fagan and Jaylene Chevalier from The Healing Foundation, commenced with a Welcome to Country from Josh Woods in Biripi language. Lee explained how the forum was designed to empower the Taree Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to identify local, culturally relevant approaches to meeting the healing and wellbeing needs of their community, with the goal of PHN supporting locally driven healing approaches that address mental, emotional, physical and spiritual needs, as well as connection to family, culture, and land.

Participants were then welcomed by HNECC PHN CEO Richard Nankervis, and The Healing Foundation Deputy CEO Donna Burns. More than 70 people attended the forum, including many members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community as well as staff and managers from a range of local services. To set the scene for a conversation about healing, a video of local Elder Aunty Julie Black telling her story was played. Aunty Julie is a Barkindji woman who has called Taree home for a long time. Donna Burns presented Aunty Julie with a document capturing comments from people around the world who have been inspired by her story. You can watch Aunty Julie's story at <https://youtu.be/Osg9T7wCF1E>

Facilitators introduced a social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) support team who were there to support participants on the day, in a safe space that had been set up for anyone who needed time out. Thank you to Hannah Earley, who made beautiful cushions from Aboriginal fabrics for the wellbeing space. Thank you also to Jamil, Meggie, Bruce and Kerin for volunteering to provide SEWB support during the forum. A candle was lit in honour of those who have gone before us.

The forum agenda was structured around a number of breakout yarning circles, where community members shared insights with service providers around strengths and gaps in terms of services and supports for children and families in Taree and surrounding areas. Discussions centred around families, children and young people, and gaps in local health service provision.

Uncle Russ Saunders, Jay Davis and the Taree High School dancers performed a welcome dance and cleansing ceremony with musical accompaniment, and the dancers stayed to participate in yarning circles, sharing their insights as young people and future community leaders. Throughout the day, Josh and Lara created an artwork onsite to represent the significance of community coming together to share their vision for healing with local service providers. Key moments at the forum were documented by local young photographer Blake O'Connor.



3. About this report

This report was informed by analysis of notes taken at the healing forum during feedback from the yarning circles, and from the butcher's paper that was used to capture key input in those circles. Discussion was themed around participants' insights into the strengths as well as priority support needs for children and families in Taree and surrounding areas. The forum concluded with a discussion about service gaps in Taree, and community perspectives on how these gaps should be addressed. The report is structured around the key themes that emerged during discussions, and a summary of community-identified solutions to address service gaps that undermine healing.



4. Key themes emerging from the discussion: children and families

The first two yarning circles of the day were themed around issues experienced by families and children. Circles were guided by the following discussion questions:

- What are the issues for our families? What are we seeing and what are we not seeing?
- What are the support needs of our kids? What do our services need to do differently to keep kids safe?

The following is a summary of key themes that emerged from analysis of input from the yarning circles.

Culture and country

Analysis of discussion from the forum highlighted that pride in culture is thriving in and around Taree and emphasised the significance of culture and country to local families.

Participants discussed many ways that local families engage with culture, including:

- Participating in dance and hunting at Saltwater Freshwater camps.
- Cultural walks with Elders, who teach about bush tucker and medicine plants.
- Language being revived in most schools in the area.

While some participants voiced concern about families being culturally disconnected, noting some families don't know their story, others shared stories of kinship cultural practice and responsibility still being maintained. The cultural performance by the Taree High School dancers, with Uncle Russ and Jay Davis, was just one example of the revitalisation of culture on Biripi country. It was suggested that some children, particularly those in contact with Juvenile Justice, do not show respect for Elders, and that Elders have a key role to play in connecting children and young people with culture. Feedback from yarning circles emphasised the need for service providers to recognise the importance of culture and country when providing services for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

Racism

Another common theme across the yarning circles was the ongoing prevalence and impacts of racism, with one group reporting back 'Racism affects our families in every way'. Elders reflected on growing up with racism and discrimination in schools, shops, and across the community. In a yarning circle, young people conveyed that they continue to face systemic racism in schools, from peers and some teachers, in stores, on transport, and when seeking employment.

Older participants also explained that systemic racism prevented them from gaining employment, and forum participants disclosed experiences of racism in local services, including the hospital. Institutional racism was cited as a factor in child removal and poor school engagement, with concerns that some institutions are too quick to blame an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander parent rather than the system. Some community members observed that while they still see racism and segregation, they have also noticed more non-Indigenous people wanting to be allies and working towards reconciliation.

Trauma, grief and loss

A number of participants at the forum discussed the impacts of trauma, grief and loss on families, with concerns raised about the wellbeing of community members dealing with repeated loss.

Forum participants raised concerns about the lack of service support for people dealing with grief, loss and trauma. A key gap was identified in support for mothers whose babies pass away, with them being placed in a general ward at the hospital. It was suggested that healing from trauma was necessary in order to reduce the misuse of alcohol and other drugs, and that drug and alcohol workers need to understand how substance misuse manifests from trauma.

There is also a need to support children and young people to understand and talk about emotions, with concerns that young men in particular are 'bottling up trauma', as they think it's not manly to show feelings. Some participants indicated there are many local healing stories, suggesting that healing from trauma can occur through yarning, through learning language, and through culture.

Mental health

There was some crossover in discussion about trauma and mental health. Some social and emotional wellbeing support programs for young people were identified, including the Feeling Deadly, Not Shame program, Mind Matters, and the Headspace drop-in centre. However, input at the forum suggests there is not adequate mental health support, with concerns raised about the lack of supports for young men, in particular.

It was noted that people aged 25 years and younger make up the largest group who present to hospital emergency, but they are 'not willing to wait'. Forum participants identified the importance of better understanding the reasons for these presentations. Young people themselves identified the need for improved mental health support, and advised that they need adults to check in on them on a daily basis ('We want you to walk with us').

Older participants at the forum also suggested the need for everyone to check in on each other and to see that kids and families are okay. Concerns were also raised about barriers to mental health support for the broader community, with a gap identified since the departure of a local psychiatrist and a perceived lack of specialist services.



Suicide

Concerns about high rates of suicide were also raised in yarnning circles, with participants linking suicide with poor mental health. The Manning Suicide Prevention Network was identified as one local initiative established to support suicide prevention, but discussion suggested the need for more strategies to raise awareness and to encourage people in the community to check in on one another, especially young people.

Out-of-home care and child protection

There were a number of concerns raised about what some participants referred to as the 'out-of-home care industry', with particular concern about the lack of cultural safety for the high number of children in care and child protection.

Community members voiced that culture and identity is lost when children are placed with non-Indigenous families, suggesting the need for closer monitoring of compliance with kinship care policies. The financial burden of kinship care was also raised as a concern, suggesting there is not adequate financial support for carers.

Forum participants identified a perceived lack of understanding among workers in the child protection system of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents rear their children. There was also a view shared that child protection workers see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children through a deficit-based lens, with little recognition that the system is actually failing them. Some participants believe that carers rely on medicating children to control them rather than dealing with the underlying issues. The need for genuine trauma-aware and healing-informed care for children was emphasised, with forum participants highlighting the importance of working with children from 0 to 3 years of age.

Forum participants identified a number of gaps in the childcare system, including the lack of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare coordinators for children in residential care in Forster. A critical gap in supports to transition young people aged 18 to 25 years from care to the community was also identified, as was the need for building community capacity to understand and navigate the child protection system.

Family and lateral violence

Violence was identified as a key factor that is impacting families in Taree. Feedback suggests that family violence is triggered by trauma and that sometimes violence is hidden, suggesting that neither victims nor perpetrators are getting support.

Violence was identified as a factor in the removal of children and high rates of incarceration. Forum participants raised concerns that children are exposed to family violence but there is no intervention to support them to manage their emotions and anger.

Lateral violence was also identified as a concern within the broader community, with a suggestion that the Land Council should hold events that aim to bring different family groups together. It was alleged that lateral violence impacts employment and service outcomes, with some family groups that control key services not demonstrating equity in employment or equitable service access.

Education

Concerns about young people disengaged from school, and a lack of cultural safety in schools were also raised in discussions throughout the day, including by young people themselves.

Non-attendance at school was identified as a concern and attributed to a failure of schools to keep young people engaged. Forum participants also expressed concerns about the number of school expulsions and suspensions, and the absence of support for children and young people excluded from school. School expulsion was described as a 'pipeline' to incarceration.

Some forum participants conveyed that, overall, schools have improved their workforce and cultural capacity. Young people spoke positively about the support they received from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leaders in school, as well as some other staff, but they felt that many teachers do not understand or encourage them. They suggested that teachers need to listen to them and learn about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning, as well as family and community.



While young people spoke positively about dance, language, and other cultural education, they suggested that support for culture in schools needs to be wider, and inclusive of language studies, cultural activities, connection to services, and opportunities for Indigenous and non-Indigenous students.

Other participants at the forum identified the need for better cultural awareness in schools and better support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people in schools. There was positive feedback on the former Aboriginal Student Support and Parental Awareness (ASSPA) program, that was run by parents but has since been disbanded. It provided a breakfast club, camps, a homework centre and a clothing pool. While young people's experience of racism is outlined above, older people at the forum raised concerns that young people are also subject to bullying and racism at school and via social media, where they are also subject to sexting pressures.

Housing and homelessness

Housing and homelessness were identified as big challenges for families and young people, along with poor-quality community housing: many people are living in overcrowded and poorly maintained homes. Forum participants indicated a chronic shortage of housing options in Taree. There is a growing number of young people and others couch surfing, and a growing homeless population. Forum participants identified a lack of youth support accommodation, with some participants reflecting that the former group home model worked well.

Detention and incarceration

Concerns were raised about the large number of young people going into detention, and about the over-representation of adults in prison. As mentioned above, there is a view that poor support for children excluded from and disengaging from school is a key contributing factor to juvenile detention. It was suggested

that police and the justice system need to collaborate with Elders to explore solutions other than detention for young people, with a focus on integrated support. Local leaders need to be involved in facilitating change. There are monthly Police and community meetings that could potentially facilitate this, but forum participants suggested these should include health service providers (who currently don't participate).

A number of yarning groups emphasised the need for a focus on pre- and post-detention supports, including alternatives before entering the system, as well as supports for young people and adults transitioning from detention and incarceration back to community. It was noted that up to \$250,000 can be spent keeping a child in detention, but that money could be better spent on a community healing centre. A key concern voiced was the perceived lack of health support for young people exiting Acmena Youth Justice Centre with complex health issues, as well as a lack of focus on supporting them to return to school. Forum participants also observed that the forms and processes for children exiting detention are complicated.

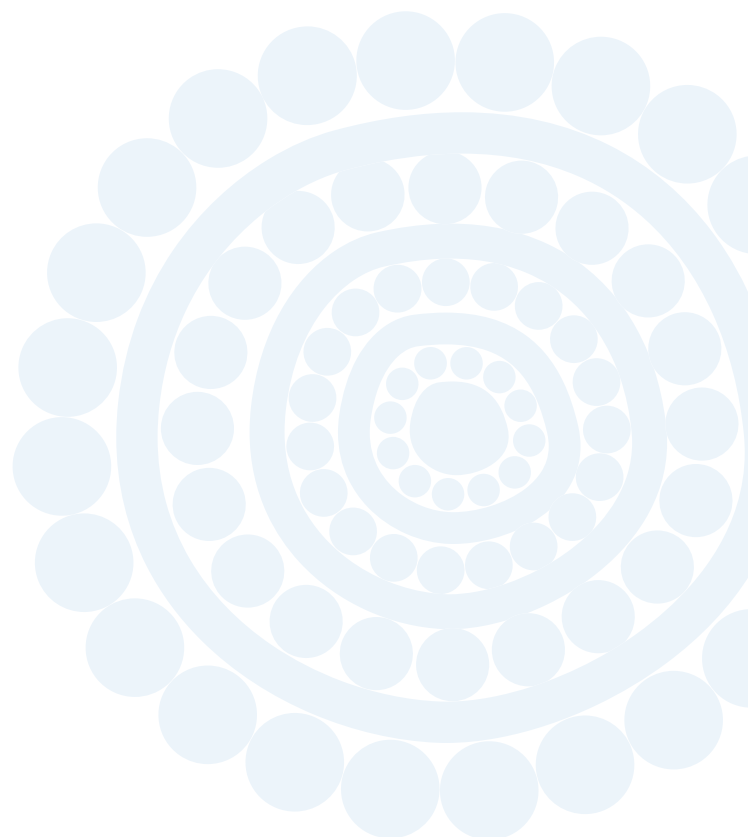
Alcohol and other drug misuse

High levels of alcohol and other drug misuse were raised by a number of forum participants as a key factor that was undermining the wellbeing of families. Participants conveyed a perception that alcohol and drug misuse was symptomatic of untreated trauma in the community. Drug and alcohol use was referenced as a factor in a number of other negative social outcomes, including child neglect, family violence, mental illness and suicide. Concerns were raised that people in the criminal justice system are set up to fail, with Corrections ordering clients to undertake rehabilitation when there are no rehab options in the region.

Family and community resilience

Despite the many challenges outlined above that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in Taree face, feedback from yarning circles emphasised the importance of acknowledging how strong families are. Community members talked about the incredible support and care within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families, and service providers spoke of very positive engagement of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families in parenting and family programs.

A number of yarning circles highlighted the importance of culture and country in ongoing work to support and strengthen families and community. There was also recognition of the resilience of the broader community of Taree, with service providers observing how well the community has come together to keep everyone safe during the COVID-19 pandemic.





5. Key themes emerging from discussion: What are the gaps in service provision?

Shortage of specialist health services

Participants in yarning circles identified a number of gaps in terms of mental health supports in Taree. Service providers stated that since the local psychiatrist relocated, the only available service costs community members \$150 and has a waiting list. Forum participants suggested it is not uncommon for community members to wait six to 12 months for an appointment with specialist services, such as psychologists and occupational therapists.

There were concerns that the large number of young people aged up to 25 years who attend the Emergency Department at the hospital but leave without seeing a doctor indicates a need for increased mental health support. Participants reported a shortage of allied health services and inadequate resources, with one specialist worker allocated to support clients across a region in some instances.

Structural barriers

A number of barriers to accessing health services were identified, including:

- Concerns that the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) has transitioned from a community to a mainstream service model.
- A lack of transport to access key health services.
- Services limited to daytime, with no crisis support at night.
- Intake processes that are perceived to be 'bound up in red tape'.
- A lack of referrals of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients to some services, with input suggesting referrals of First Nations peoples to palliative care are significantly below the average for the broader population.
- A perception that there are too many non-Indigenous gatekeepers undermining service delivery to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.
- Staff shortages at the hospital that result in significant delays and cause many people aged 25 and younger to leave without getting medical support.

Lack of awareness of services and how to access them

A number of forum participants suggested people in the community don't understand what services are available and how to access them. Feedback also suggests a perception that intake and referrals processes are cumbersome and discourage some people from pursuing health support.

The lack of transport for people to access services exacerbates the problem, with many people feeling shame that they have no means of attending an appointment. It was suggested that intake processes need to be supported by a checklist to ensure people have access to transport and to explain the need to call if unable to make an appointment. Services were also encouraged to contact people who fail to attend health appointments, and to encourage them to reschedule.

Inadequate alcohol and other drug recovery services

A number of yarning circle participants voiced concern about the lack of local support services and programs to address alcohol and other drug misuse in the community. It was noted there is no local detox facility or rehabilitation service, with reports that community members have to go as far as Brewarrina to access rehabilitation. Community members conveyed a perception that services lack awareness of intergenerational trauma and the use of alcohol and other drugs as self-medication. It was also suggested there is little by way of drug education in the community, or other services targeting alcohol and other drug misuse.

Siloed services

There were many concerns raised about the lack of communication, information sharing and collaboration across services. Forum participants said there appeared to be no coordination between doctors and health workers, no information sharing about health between Justice Health and the AMS, or between the Department of Communities and Justice and community service providers. This raised concerns that people had to retell their

story. Forum participants also noted that there appeared to be a lack of coordination of referral pathways.

Support for Elders and respite

The lack of support for Elders in the community was raised, with the lack of affordable respite identified as a priority to be addressed. Support for Elders groups was suggested as a means of engaging with Elders to understand and address their support needs.

Lack of men's health services and programs

A number of forum participants identified the absence of specialist services and programs for men. There was an identified need to support men across a range of issues, including social and emotional wellbeing, and substance misuse and behaviour change. Spaces where men can role model for younger men are also needed, with community members suggesting a need to build men's leadership capacity.

Sexuality and sexual health

A number of participants identified gaps in education and services for young people and a need for education about sexual health and sexuality. It was observed that there are many young families and teenage pregnancies, and concerns were raised about young people and sexual health.

A young participant suggested schools need to be more encouraging of young people of all sexualities. Community members identified the need for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific LGBTIQ+ services, suggesting there is a perception of a lack of confidentiality if people disclose personal information to services. There was also an identified need to connect young men to positive role models who demonstrate respectful relationships.

6. Key themes emerging from discussion: What are the solutions to address the identified gaps in service support in Taree?

A community healing space

There were a number of suggestions for a community-led healing space or hub that could provide:

- A centralised space that offers cultural activities, cultural awareness, language classes, safety support and a community meeting place.
- A space where Elders and community leaders could engage with families, children, men and women, to provide cultural connection, role modelling and support.
- A space where Elders, men's, women's, and youth groups could meet.
- A safe place for community agencies to provide outreach support.

Community governance

Forum participants identified a number of opportunities to strengthen community governance and connection. It was suggested that community representative groups could also ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices are heard in the design and delivery of services; for example, as a means of connecting with Elders to invite them to participate in schools, to facilitate men acting as role models for younger men, and to promote strategies such as 'checking in' with young people. Priorities identified include:

- Support for the establishment of an Elders Committee.
- Support to establish a men's group and more groups for women.
- Establishment of a youth group or some other means to ensure that young people's voices are heard in the community and by service providers.

Opportunities to connect with culture and country

In addition to the discussions about a cultural healing centre, forum participants suggested many ways for community to benefit from increased access to cultural knowledge, activities, and experiences on country. Suggestions to strengthen cultural connection and identity for children and young people include:

- Increasing opportunities for Elders to engage in school programs and share stories.
- Facilitating access to positive role models for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.
- Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support workers in schools.
- Increasing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural programs in schools for all students.
- More activities, groups, and opportunities for children and young people, including activities and social programs for kids on country.

There were also suggestions for strategies to strengthen cultural connection for the broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community, including:

- The establishment of Elders, men's and women's group to provide opportunities for connection.
- Events and family days on country.
- Digital recording of Elders' stories.
- Community events that foster connection between different family groups.

Support for children and families

Forum participants made a number of suggestions to improve family wellbeing, including:

- A stronger focus on children's wellbeing in the first 1,000 days of childhood, including connecting them with culture and education in early life, and building parenting capacity and confidence.
- Services asking Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents what support they want, listening to them and giving them choices.
- Recognising the importance of country and considering delivering programs for families on country.
- Valuing the knowledge of Elders and including them in programs for children and families.
- Wraparound support services to build confidence in parenting.
- Cultural mentoring for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.
- Improving access to neurological assessments for fetal alcohol spectrum disorder (FASD) and other issues.
- Providing cultural connection for individuals and families who may be disconnected and not know their identity.
- Services working with families need to respect self-determination and consent – allowing families participation and equality in decision-making.
- Education for child protection workers and out-of-home carers to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship, culture, and parenting practices.
- Recruiting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare workers and other First Nations workers to support children in out-of-home care.
- Provision of one dedicated worker to support children in child protection by coordinating integrated support and preventing them having to retell their stories.
- Establishing a mechanism to monitor compliance with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander child placement principals, and to monitor kinship care.
- Encouraging community members to check-in on other families to see if they're okay.
- Increasing access to respite for Elders.
- Sexual health programs for young people, exploring education about sexual health, sexuality, pregnancy, sexting etc.



A focus on cultural safety in services

Community members made a number of recommendations to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services:

- An increase in the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managers and decision-makers in local health services.
- Empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-makers in health services.
- The active involvement of community in the co-design and implementation of services for their families.
- Investment in building the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service providers.
- An increase in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, to ensure the percentage of Indigenous staff reflects the percentage of Indigenous clients.
- Recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assistants to support early intervention.
- Ongoing locally approved cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous health workers.
- Facilitating access to 'truth telling' so that health workers hear the stories of Elders and other community members.
- Cultural mentorship for first responders in all services.
- Flexible programs and services that are delivered in places where people feel safe.
- Recruitment of cultural mentors for non-Indigenous staff.
- Recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.
- Longer term funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs instead of non-recurrent 'pilot' programs.
- Recruitment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander client support worker to engage with clients (particularly up to age 25) who present at the hospital.

Enhancements to the health service sector

A number of suggestions were made to improve accessibility and capacity of the health service sector, including:

- Extending operating hours of the AMS and other primary health services into the evening to reduce the reliance on emergency and crisis response.
- Coordination of transport to improve access to health services.
- Mapping and promotion of the range of different health support services and programs and how community members can connect with them.
- Improved communication and referral pathways between services (e.g. from AMS to antenatal services for expectant mums; between alcohol and other drugs services and mental health services; between AMS and the broader public health system).
- Increased access to mental health services, particularly for young people.
- Better access to bulk-billed allied health services.
- Engagement of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support worker to engage with clients aged up to 25 years who attend the Emergency Department at hospital but are at risk of leaving without diagnosis or treatment.
- Funding of culturally appropriate suicide-prevention services.
- Funding and promotion of specialist confidential support services for the LGBTIQ+ community.

Improved health service accountability

Forum participants identified a number of ways in which health service providers and funding bodies could improve transparency and accountability to the community, including:

- Engaging Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation in consultation processes, to inform the design and delivery of services and programs and the distribution of funding ('ask Mob on the ground what's going on, stop making decisions in towers').
- Greater empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managers to decide how funding for Indigenous services is allocated.
- Funding bodies should build a requirement for evidence of local cultural awareness into the funding agreements for service providers.
- Funding bodies should stop awarding funding to non-Indigenous services who then turn to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services to provide the clients with cultural safety.
- Increased investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services and recruitment, and professional development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.
- Ensuring strategies are in place to prevent and reduce racism and to support community members who experience racism from health service providers.
- A strategy to improve awareness of and compliance with privacy and confidentiality requirements among Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations.
- Ensuring access to long-term flexible funding.
- Not overly relying on digital service platforms.
- Equitable and appropriate employment strategies.

Improved youth service and support

In addition to providing opportunities to strengthen cultural connection in the community, there were a number of suggestions to strengthen the service system that supports young people:

- A number of participants identified the need for a youth service, with concerns about the safety of young people on the streets late at night.
- There's a need for funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific youth programs.
- There is an opportunity to embed more supports for young people into schools, via the presence of Elders (possibly an Elder-in-Residence program) and health workers.
- Ways for Elders to participate in the education of children as well need to be identified.
- The community could work with schools to review the available supports and develop solutions to address high rates of 'at-home' suspensions.
- Yarning circles in schools could be considered, to encourage young people to discuss important issues.
- Schools, youth services, health services, and men's and women's groups should support young people to deal with emotions and talk about problems.
- A support worker to engage with young people who have received three police cautions to intervene before they go into detention should be considered.
- Community members should be encouraged to regularly check-in with young people (e.g. 'RU OK?').
- Access to culturally informed, trauma-aware and healing-informed mental health services for young people should be increased.

Improved access to safe housing

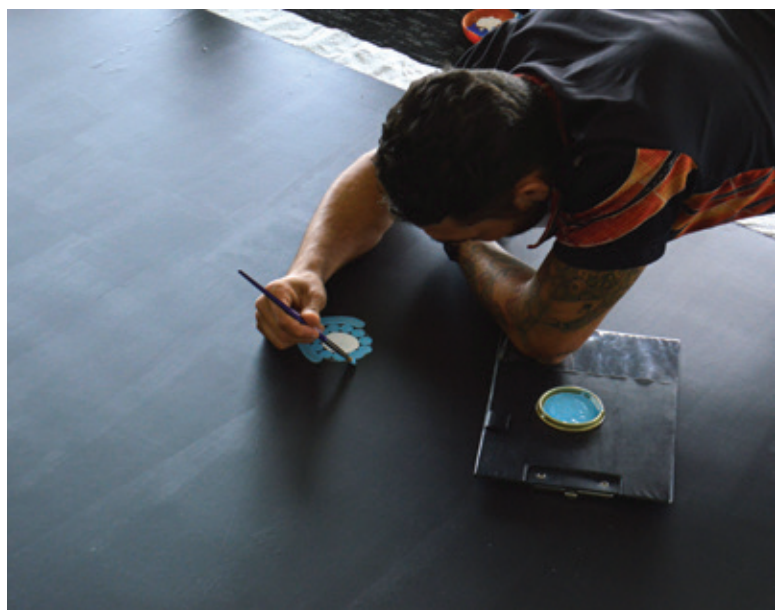
Forum participants identified the need for a strategy to:

- Increase access to secure appropriate accommodation, especially for families impacted by family violence, young families and other young people.
- Increase access to emergency accommodation.
- Provide support to assist people with completing paperwork to access emergency and other housing.

Recovery and reintegration

Across the yarning circles, the need for local alcohol and other drug rehabilitation was emphasised, along with strategies to support reintegration for people exiting out-of-home care, juvenile detention and prison. Recommendations include:

- A culturally appropriate, trauma-aware and healing-informed detox and residential rehabilitation facility in Taree.
- Introduction of yarning circles into prisons to support men and women to access healing support before release.
- Reintegration support for young people between 18–25 who are transitioning from out-of-home care back to community.
- Support for young people at risk of entering detention and for those exiting detention and returning to community.
- Post-release throughcare for men and women returning to community from prison, including access to housing, mental health services, alcohol and other drug support and employment pathways.
- Community mentors for men and women reintegrating post-release, to provide access to positive role models.



7. Conclusion – reflections on the day

To conclude the forum, the facilitators asked participants to form a circle and invited them to share a word that summed up their feelings about the experience of coming together for the forum. One-word reflections from forum participants included:







Taree Community Healing Forum Action Plan

The Taree Community Healing forum was the third of four forums to be delivered across New South Wales in 2020/21 through a partnership between Hunter New England and Central Coast (HNECC) Primary Health Network (PHN) and The Healing Foundation. The aim of the healing forums is to increase access to First Nations community-identified approaches to improving the healing and wellbeing needs of HNECC Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The actions recommended by community in the Taree Community Healing Forum Report have been summarised in the following action plan.

1. A community healing space

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
1. There was a need identified for a centralised hub that offers cultural activities, language classes, cultural awareness, safety support, and a community meeting place.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider options to support the establishment of a multipurpose community-led healing space.			
2. There was a need identified for a space where Elders and community leaders could engage with families, children, men, and women to provide cultural connection, role modelling and support.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider options to support the establishment of a multipurpose community-led healing space.			
3. There was a need identified for a space where Elders, men's, women's and youth groups could meet.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider options to support the establishment of a multipurpose community-led healing space.			
4. There was a need identified for a safe place where community agencies could provide outreach services and support.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider options to support the establishment of a multipurpose community-led healing space.			

2. Community governance

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
5. The potential benefits of establishing an Elders committee were identified, including strengthening of community governance and providing a means to facilitate the participation of Elders as cultural mentors in schools and programs.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider how to support the establishment of an Elders committee.			
6. There was a need identified to establish a men's group and more groups for women to provide cultural connection and opportunities for mentoring young people, including young parents.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider how to support the establishment of a men's group and more groups for women.			
7. Forum participants, including young people themselves, identified the need for a mechanism for young people's voices to be heard in community and by service providers.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider how to support the establishment of a youth group or some other means to ensure that young people's voices are heard in the community and by service providers.			

3. Opportunities to connect with culture and country

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
8. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to local schools (and other youth service providers) to note community recommendation to explore opportunities to increase the participation of Elders in schools and other programs for young people.			
9. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other services to explore opportunities to facilitate access to positive male role models for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men.			
10. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to local schools to note community recommendation to increase the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support workers in schools.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
11. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to local schools to note community recommendation to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural programs in schools for all students.			
12. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and other local services to provide more activities, groups and opportunities for children and young people, including activities and social programs for kids on country.			
13. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and other local services to conduct events and family days on country, including events that foster connection between different family groups.			
14. Forum participants emphasised the need for services to acknowledge the importance of culture and country and to consider opportunities to strengthen connection to culture and country in programs and services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party (and perhaps Aboriginal Affairs) to note community recommendation to conduct a project to digitally record Elders' stories to preserve them.			

4. Support for children and families

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
15. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Family and Children's Services (FACS) and family health services to note community recommendation for increased access to programs that support children in the first 1,000 days of childhood, including early-life cultural and educational programs, and programs to build parenting capacity and confidence.			
16. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and family services to ask Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents what support they want, listen to them, and give them choices – allow families participation in decision-making.			
17. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and family services to consider delivering programs for families on country.			
18. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to note community recommendation that Elders be included in programs for children and families.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
19. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to note community recommendation for wraparound support services that build confidence in parenting.			
20. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and family programs to facilitate cultural mentoring for young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents.			
21. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health and family services to increase access to neurological assessments for FASD and other issues.			
22. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Mental health and other services to explore opportunities to facilitate cultural connection for individuals and families who may be disconnected and not know their identity.			
23. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to note community recommendation that child protection workers be educated to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander kinship, culture and parenting practices.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
24. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to note community recommendation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander healthcare workers and other workers to be recruited to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care.			
25. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to note community recommendation that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children in out-of-home care be allocated one dedicated worker to coordinate integrated support (and prevent them having to retell their stories).			
26. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to consider making representation to FACS to establish a mechanism to monitor local compliance with the Aboriginal Child Placement principals and to monitor kinship care.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
27. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Local health services to consider strategy to encourage local community members to check in on the wellbeing of other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families.			
28. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN to forward healing forum report to health agency responsible for increasing access to affordable respite for Elders.			
29. Forum participants identified the importance of strategies to improve the wellbeing of children and families.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to increase access to sexual health programs for young people, exploring education about sexual health, sexuality, pregnancy, sexting etc.			

5. A focus on cultural safety in services

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
30. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to increase the recruitment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managers in local health services.			
31. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to identify a strategy to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision-makers in health services.			
32. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to actively involve community members in the co-design and implementation of services for their families.			
33. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funders to invest in capacity-building for local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service providers.			
34. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to establish targets to increase the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health workers, to reflect the percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
35. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assistants to support early intervention.			
36. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to implement ongoing locally approved cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous health workers.			
37. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to facilitate access to truth telling so that health workers hear the stories of Elders and other community members.			
38. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to establish cultural mentorship for first responders in all health services.			
39. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to deliver flexible services and programs in places where people feel culturally safe.			
40. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services to recruit cultural mentors for non-Indigenous staff.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
41. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health services and other services to recruit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander support staff for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.			
42. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other funding bodies to support longer-term funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander programs instead of non-recurrent 'pilot' programs.			
43. Forum participants identified a number of strategies to strengthen cultural safety among local health services and other services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Base Hospital to consider community recommendation to recruit an Aboriginal client support worker to engage with clients (particularly aged up to 25 years) who present at the hospital Emergency Department but are at risk of not waiting for treatment.			

6. Enhancements to the health service sector

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
44. A number of suggestions were made to improve accessibility and capacity of the local health service sector.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to the Aboriginal Medical Service (AMS) and other primary health service providers to consider the community recommendation to extend the operating hours of their services into the evening to reduce the reliance on emergency and crisis response.			
45. A number of suggestions were made to improve accessibility and capacity of the local health service sector.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies to consider options to coordinate transport with health services to improve access.			
46. Forum participants suggested many community members don't know what health services are available or how to access them.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funders to map and promote the range of different health support services and programs and how community members can access them.			
47. Forum participants indicated a lack of collaboration and communication between services was undermining potential referral pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funders to explore mechanisms to improve communication and referral pathways between health services (e.g. from AMS to antenatal and other health, between mental health and AOD).			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
48. Forum participants, including young people themselves, indicated that increased mental health support for young people was a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN to work with community to increase access to culturally safe, trauma-aware, healing-informed mental health services for young people.			
49. A number of suggestions were made to improve accessibility and capacity of the local health service sector.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies to explore options to fund a culturally appropriate suicide-prevention service in Taree.			
50. It was suggested that concerns about maintenance of confidentiality was a barrier to health services for the LGBTIQ+ community.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies to explore options to fund and promote specialist confidential LGBTIQ+ health support in Taree.			

7. Improved health service accountability

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
51. Forum participants suggested a number of ideas to improve transparency and accountability among health service providers in Taree.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies to invite community input into service design and delivery and the allocation of health funding.			
52. Forum participants conveyed concerns that non-Indigenous 'gatekeepers' disempowered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander decision makers in health service delivery.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander managers to decide how funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services is allocated.			
53. Forum participants voiced frustration with funding for services going to non-Indigenous organisations who rely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to provide cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health funding bodies should include a requirement of evidence of local cultural awareness and capacity into funding agreements for health service providers.			
54. Forum participants voiced frustration with funding for services going to non-Indigenous organisations who rely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to provide cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health funding bodies should increase investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander services.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
55. Forum participants voiced frustration with funding for services going to non-Indigenous organisations who rely on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service providers to provide cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health funding bodies and health service providers should increase investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recruitment and professional development of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce.			
55. Forum participants reported community members experiencing racism in health services.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health funding bodies and health service providers should promote policies regarding racism and convey processes for community members to report experiences of racism from health service providers.			
56. It was suggested that concerns about maintenance of confidentiality was a barrier to health services for the LGBTIQ+ community.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health funding bodies to improve awareness of and compliance with confidentiality requirements among Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations (ACCHOs).			
57. Forum participants suggested a number of ideas to improve transparency and accountability among health service providers in Taree.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Health service providers to be careful to not become overly reliant on digital platforms to promote health information and support.			

8. Improved youth service and support

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
58. Forum participants identified strengthening the service system that supports young people as a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to make representation to FACS, Council, NGOs, and local health services, to explore options to establish a youth service, with a view to supporting young people on the streets at night.			
59. Forum participants identified strengthening the service system that supports young people as a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other funding bodies to increase funding for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander specific youth programs.			
60. Forum participants identified strengthening the service system that supports young people as a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health service providers to explore opportunities to embed better wellbeing support for young people in schools with participation of Elders.			
61. Forum participants identified strengthening the service system that supports young people as a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Manning Aboriginal Community Working Party to identify ways for community to work with schools to review available supports and reduce 'at-home' suspensions.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
62. Forum participants identified strengthening the service system that supports young people as a priority.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to schools to consider yarning circles in schools for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to discuss important issues (with Elders and/or health workers).			
63. Forum participants shared concerns that young people are living with trauma and bottling up their emotions.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health service providers to explore a strategy to encourage schools, health service providers, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community Elders and leaders to support young people to deal with emotions and talk about problems.			
64. Forum participants shared concerns that young people are living with trauma and bottling up their emotions.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Youth mental health services to work with community to implement a campaign to encourage community members to regularly check-in with young people.			
65. The lack of early intervention to prevent young people entering juvenile detention was identified as a critical gap.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Juvenile Justice to see recommendation to explore options for a support worker or program to intervene with young people who have received three Police cautions to prevent them proceeding to detention.			

9. Improved access to safe housing

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
66. Forum participants raised concerns about increasing levels of homelessness and couch surfing, especially among young people and young families. A shortage of housing and poor-quality housing were identified as key concerns.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS, Aboriginal Housing and community housing providers to convey reported need to increase access to secure, appropriate accommodation, especially for families impacted by family violence, young families and other young people.			
67. Forum participants raised concerns about increasing levels of homelessness and couch surfing, including a lack of emergency accommodation.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS, Aboriginal Housing and community housing providers to convey reported need to increase access to emergency accommodation.			
68. Forum participants indicated that paperwork and processes to access emergency and ongoing housing are a further barrier to safe accommodation for Taree community members.	25/02/21	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS, Aboriginal Housing and community housing providers to convey reported need for support clients having to complete paperwork to access emergency and ongoing accommodation.			

10. Recovery and reintegration

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
69. The lack of alcohol and other drug rehabilitation options was commonly identified by forum participants.	25/02/2021	ACTION: PHN and other health services to consider the need for a culturally appropriate, trauma-aware, healing-informed detox and residential rehabilitation facility in Taree.			
70. Community members identified a significant gap in throughcare support for men and women reintegrating into community post-release from prison.	25/02/2021	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Corrections NSW to consider recommendation for yarning circles in prisons to support men and women to access healing support prior to release from custody.			
71. Community members identified a significant gap in throughcare support for men and women reintegrating into community post-release from prison.	25/02/21	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Corrections NSW to consider suggestion they work with PHN and other services to explore post-release throughcare for men and women returning to community from prison, including access to housing, mental health services, alcohol and other drug support and employment pathways.			

Action Description	Date raised	Action and progress notes	Expected completion date	Actual completion date	Status
72. Community members identified a significant gap in throughcare support for men and women reintegrating into community post-release from prison.	25/02/21	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Corrections NSW to consider suggestion of community mentors to provide positive role models and support for men and women reintegrating post-release.			
73. Community members identified a lack of support for young people aged 18–25 years old returning to community from out-of-home care.	25/02/21	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to FACS to consider options to provide support for young people returning to community from out-of-home care.			
74. Community members identified a significant gap in throughcare support for young people reintegrating into community after release from detention.	25/02/21	ACTION: Forward healing forum report to Juvenile Justice to see recommendation for support for young people returning to Taree community after release from detention.			



HealingFoundation

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NETWORK

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An Australian Government Initiative