

44th APS Annual Conference **DARWIN**



MEDIA RELEASE

30 September – 4 October 2009

Darwin Convention Centre, Northern Territory

Embargoed to: 30 September 2009

Psychology conference: Indigenous mental health key media opportunities

'Closing the Gap' on Aboriginal mental health, the impact of hearing loss on the cycle of disadvantage and celebrating Indigenous psychology are just some of the Indigenous psychology topics to be addressed at this year's 44th Australian Psychological Society's Annual Conference at the Darwin Convention Centre (30 September to 4 October 2009).

Closing the gap on Aboriginal mental health

Australia's existing health system is failing to meet the mental health needs of Aboriginal people, according to psychologist, Dr Louise Roufiel.

Dr Roufiel said the needs of Aboriginal Australians are going unrecognised because traditional western mental health services don't match the Aboriginal understanding of mental health.

"Aboriginal people have a much more holistic understanding of health, including the social, spiritual and emotional wellbeing of the person," said Dr Roufiel. "It's important to treat the physical and mental health issues as a whole, particularly in remote communities."

"When we have so few mental health workers on the ground, it's vital that primary health workers are properly trained and adequately supported to provide culturally appropriate, quality mental health care for Aboriginal people."

Dr Roufiel is presenting at this year's 44th APS Annual Conference and will draw on findings from a number of projects showing new ways of closing the gap on Aboriginal mental health.

Hearing loss, wellbeing and the cycle of disadvantage

Hearing loss in remote Indigenous communities can impact on anxiety and depression levels, social relationships, self-confidence and work performance.

"Permanent hearing problems in adults is often the result of childhood middle-ear disease and is contributing to the cycle of Indigenous disadvantage," said psychologist, Dr Damien Howard, who specialises in hearing loss in Indigenous communities.

"One of our studies into the impact of hearing loss in the workplace, found 60 per cent of Indigenous workers had a hearing problem - many previously undetected - which contributed significantly to higher levels of anxiety and lower levels of emotional wellbeing," said Dr Howard.

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“The workers with a hearing loss had more trouble learning tasks, understanding instructions and working independently and their non-Indigenous supervisors often thought they had limited work skills. One way to address this is for Indigenous employees to work in teams – those without hearing problems can then help others to understand.

“The impact of hearing loss on education, employment, and health outcomes is largely underestimated. We need to address the impact of hearing loss as an important factor in stopping the cycle of Indigenous disadvantage.”

Dr Howard will discuss the wide spread social implications of hearing loss at this year’s 44th APS Annual Conference.

Celebrating Indigenous psychologists

This week marks the anniversary of Australia’s first ever peak body for Indigenous psychologists – the Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA).

Associate Professor Pat Dudgeon, Indigenous psychologist and founding member of AIPA, said there is considerable positive activity happening in the area of Indigenous mental health across urban, rural and remote communities.

“In the spirit of self-determination, a working party of 18 Indigenous psychologists formed to guide the direction of the Australian Psychological Society’s Indigenous mental health awareness and help-seeking project,” said Dr Dudgeon.

“This was a significant event because it was the first time a group of Indigenous psychologists came together in one room and it led to the historic formation of AIPA. We now have 40 members.

“Key activities for AIPA in the past year include initiating and co-hosting a successful national roundtable on research in racism toward Indigenous Australians and developing a number of models and frameworks for Indigenous and non-Indigenous psychologists and undergraduates.”

AIPA aims to increase the number of Indigenous psychologists in Australia, as well as ensure Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have access to high quality mental health services.

Associate Professor Pat Dudgeon is presenting at this year’s 44th APS Annual Conference.

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Mental health and wellbeing services needed in Indigenous communities

Fifty-thousand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people do not have access to any form of mental health service in their community, according to an Australian Psychological Society (APS) study.

Study author and psychologist, Kerrie Kelly, said the APS research mapped out where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities were located in relation to mental health care services.

“Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in remote areas do not have access to the same services that are available in rural and urban Australia. Currently, only those with serious mental illness receive treatment, and this is infrequent since it relies on fly-in, fly-out psychiatric services from a regional centre,” said Ms Kelly.

“Common mental health problems, including anxiety and depression, could be addressed before the person hits crisis point, if Aboriginal medical centres were better resourced to meet the social, emotional and mental health needs of those living in Aboriginal communities.

“The suicide rate for Indigenous men and women is three to five times that for non-Indigenous men and women respectively,” said Ms Kelly.

“Not only does this raise concerns about the safety and quality of mental health services for Indigenous Australians, it also raises issues around encouraging help-seeking. We can’t encourage people to use psychological services, if there is no appropriate service available.”

Ms Kelly is presenting as part of a symposium at this year’s 44th APS Annual Conference.

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To coordinate an interview, please contact: Elaine Grant on 0412 683 068 or Ellise McLoughlan on 0428 445 097.

About the 44th APS Annual Conference:

This year’s Conference will be held at the Darwin Convention Centre from 30 September to 4 October 2009. The Conference will bring together prominent psychologists, practitioners and researchers to explore topical issues including: psychological responses to disaster, emotional intelligence, Indigenous mental health and wellbeing, women in management, body image and youth substance abuse issues.

About Australian Psychological Society:

The Australian Psychological Society (APS) is the peak professional body for Australian psychologists. With more than 17,500 members and 40 branches across the country, the APS is the largest of all non-medical health professionals’ associations in Australia.

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