



Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Social and
Emotional Wellbeing, Mental Health and Suicide Prevention



Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline

**Towards Zero Suicide for
Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Communities**

Submission to Treasury

**Lifeline Australia &
Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia**

2020



Lifeline Australia

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1. POSITION STATEMENTS

a. Lifeline Australia

For over 57 years, Lifeline has been supporting Australians in their most difficult times.

With 41 centres in 60 locations across Australia, the service hosts national infrastructure to support the 13 11 14 crisis line, which now receives over 1 million calls per year. As a Registered Training Organisation, Lifeline Australia also offers accredited training for over 1,500 crisis supporters each year, qualifying them to listen without judgement and keep people safe. With a vision for an Australia free of suicide, Lifeline's centres in rural, regional and metropolitan areas work to respond to the local needs of their communities to help them become suicide safe. This infrastructure provides a unique opportunity to create a national team of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people delivering support services in urban, rural and regional areas to ensure nationwide coverage. Consistent with the recommendations emergent from the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention Strategy, this workforce can also function as gatekeepers that are equipped to identify individuals who may be struggling and assist them to prevention interventions.

To achieve an Australia free of suicide, the high rate of suicide affecting our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities must be a top priority.

At Lifeline we know from experience that common to all of us is the need for human connection. It is a sense of belonging that gives us the strength to hope.

Simultaneously we recognise that our First Nations Peoples' also experience a unique connection to culture and the concepts of healing. Culturally appropriate services, governed and led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are a fundamental requirement.

Through shared commitment and shared responsibility, Lifeline aims to work alongside Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia to provide the national infrastructure necessary to support the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community to create an effective national telephone helpline.



b. Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia

Established in March 2020, Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia is the new Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous) social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention peak body. It is governed and controlled by Indigenous experts and leaders working in these areas, promoting collective excellence in mental health care.

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia's vision is Indigenous leadership, excellence and presence across all parts of the Australian mental health system and the achievement of the highest attainable standard of social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention outcomes for Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous mental health and suicide prevention leaders have specifically called for an Indigenous phone help line, operated under Indigenous leadership and with Indigenous counsellors and mental health practitioners available 24/7. The time to close the Indigenous helpline gap is now. Indigenous people have long been challenged by mental health difficulties at higher rates than the general population. The current COVID-19 pandemic has only identified increasing needs in Indigenous communities.

In these times of COVID-19 isolation and lockdown measures community members in remote, rural and urban settings are very vulnerable and have limited access to professional support yet have elevated levels of anxiety, depression and cumulative trauma. Mental health experts estimate that the suicide rate might rise by up to 50% (Atkinson et al, 2020).

Prior to the coronavirus outbreak, the Centre for Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP) were working productively with Lifeline to that end, and produced a report "Wellbeing and Healing Through Connection and Culture" that identified the need for a dedicated Indigenous tele-counselling help line/service to support people when they require culturally safe mental and emotional wellbeing support (Dudgeon et al, 2020).



2. BACKGROUND

Lifeline Australia and **Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** are proud to present a proposal for the delivery of a dedicated national telephone helpline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Lifeline Australia and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia jointly recognise the central importance of self-determination: A national helpline for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities should be governed, developed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations.

While the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpline proposed here assumes service delivery and governance led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, it also assumes benefits of leveraging the technology, operational stability and clinical practice that supports the national 24/7 Lifeline Crisis Line (13 11 14) infrastructure.

There are significant efficiencies to be derived in utilising the existing infrastructure and capability within Lifeline.

With the rate of suicide among Australia's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community almost twice that of the broader population, leading Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers Professors Pat Dudgeon, Gracelyn Smallwood, and Roz Walker along with their team recommended as a priority the 'development of a national Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lifeline' to reduce barriers to accessing suicide prevention care and support (Dudgeon et al, 2020).

A helpline underpinned by Lifeline's digital support provision capabilities and designed, governed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will:

- ✓ Ensure 24/7 availability of culturally safe and responsive support for distress and suicidality regardless of geographic location;
- ✓ Overcome barriers to help-seeking via delivery through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff;
- ✓ Upskill and provide employment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpline staff;
- ✓ Increase suicide prevention gatekeeper capability through geographically dispersed communities: A virtual training and working model will enable regional and remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not only to staff the national service, but also to function as gatekeepers recognising difficulties in individuals and assisting them to seek help; the consultation process will assist to determine a range of models best suited to meeting the needs of Aboriginal; and Torres Strait Islander communities;
- ✓ Create learning opportunities for the broader 13 11 14 Lifeline service in culturally responsive mental health support for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- ✓ Create a basis for future expansion to text and chat channels; and
- ✓ Create an entry point to an ecosystem of culturally appropriate services.



3. THE CHALLENGE



The suicide rate for our First Australians remains distressingly high. The rate of death by suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people remains close to twice the rate for non-Indigenous Australians.

– Christine Morgan Prime Minister’s National Suicide Prevention Adviser (25th September, 2019)

- **The most recent ABS Cause of Death data (2020) presents the following deeply disturbing figures relating to the death by suicide of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:**

- Suicide is the leading cause of death for Indigenous children aged between 5 and 17
- Over the five years from 2015 to 2019, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children accounted for approximately half of all child suicide deaths, and yet represent just ~3% of Australia’s child population.

- **Deaths by intentional self-harm occur at approximately twice the rate among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples compared to non-Indigenous Australians:**

- In 2019, the standardised death rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was 27.1 deaths per 100,000 persons. This means that within that year, suicide accounted for 5.7% of all deaths of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as compared with 2.0% of suicide deaths in non-Indigenous Australians.

- **Compared to non-Indigenous suicide, deaths by suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities are skewed towards a younger cohort**

- In 2019, the median age at death for suicide in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander persons was 29.8 years, compared with 43.9 years in the non-Indigenous population.



In small little towns, people know everyone’s business, so having a private place to go to get help would be really good. An Aboriginal service feels more approachable, because they get your circumstances.

– Young person accessing Youth Off The Streets Indigenous Program, Macquarie Fields (November, 2019)



Having the option to speak to our own mob, who understands our experiences and the complex issues that are impacting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults and youth. It’s about being given the opportunity to access specific Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 24/7 phone-line and a 12-hour text and chat service. Generally, our people know what their issues are and how to fix them but, they lack resources. This tool would no doubt be of benefit to our mob.

– Denise Hampton, Yalini Kumpa Aboriginal Suicide Prevention Network Broken Hill (October, 2020)



4. THE SOLUTION

The partnership between **Lifeline Australia** and **Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring together authentic collaboration between those with the cultural knowledge, expertise and connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those with the infrastructure and experience in helpline delivery on a national level.

Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia's unique membership profile as a leadership body in social and emotional wellbeing, mental health and suicide prevention:

- ✓ National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Leadership in Mental Health (NATSILMH)
- ✓ The Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (CBPATSISP)
- ✓ National Indigenous Critical Response Service (NICRS)
- ✓ The Australian Indigenous Psychologists Association (AIPA)
- ✓ Australian Indigenous Doctor's Association (AIDA)
- ✓ Indigenous Allied Health Australia
- ✓ The National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation (NACCHO)

Lifeline Australia's unique infrastructure capabilities:

Lifeline Australia is in the unique position to support the development of a new helpline that is underpinned by existing infrastructure, proven capability, and an embedded community network across Australia.

A national telephone helpline has the advantage of being accessible to people across varying demographics including age, family status, and urban, rural or remote locations.

Provision of the service is in line with key policy developments including the Productivity Commission Mental Health report, with its focus on delivery by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Productivity Commission, 2020).

- ✓ Lifeline operates on the philosophy that it is through connection to people and purpose that we find strength to hope.
- ✓ Building suicide safe communities: 41 centre network in 60 locations.
- ✓ Crisis Supporters qualified to listen without judgement and keep people safe in the moment and plan for their safety beyond the call.
- ✓ Lifeline's current co-designed framework can provide a baseline for best practice in co-design and baseline skill requirements to deliver excellent crisis support.
- ✓ Existing and accountable national crisis support and suicide prevention experience, capability and infrastructure.
- ✓ Expertise to build robust and ongoing service evaluation framework to identify benefits delivered and promote continuous improvement.
- ✓ Expertise and infrastructure to recruit and qualify Crisis Supporters.
- ✓ 24/7 service delivery with associated technical and clinical supports in place.
- ✓ Marketing & Communications expertise to support a community led service awareness campaign.



Based on recommendations for the empowerment of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders:

The Productivity Commission has put forward a draft recommendation to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to prevent suicide by calling for organisations that are controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to be considered preferred providers. Strong connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with culture and control over services is associated with reductions in suicide risk and improved social and emotional wellbeing in some communities (Productivity Commission, 2020).

In the report *“Wellbeing & Healing through Connection and Culture”*; Professors Pat Dudgeon, Gracelyn Smallwood, Roz Walker and their team of respected researchers recommended as key priority Action Area 3: *“The recruitment, training, secure and long-term employment of an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lifeline workforce.”*

These principles are central to the current proposal.

Australia’s first culturally-responsive National Helpline led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people:

The partnership between Lifeline Australia and Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia will ensure Australia’s first culturally-responsive national helpline is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and created through deep consultation and collaboration with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. Informed by the recommendations made by the researchers from the Centre of Best Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Suicide Prevention (Dudgeon et al, 2020), the partners aim to provide the infrastructure to support the development of a culturally responsive national helpline service that is designed and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and is confidential and accessible to people from varying demographics no matter what their age, where they are located, or who they know working in the mental health field.



Both **Lifeline Australia** and **Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** are committed to forming a national helpline service that upholds the following attributes:

1. The helpline specifically for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will be designed, led and delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
2. The helpline will reflect the cultural and historical factors contributing to the understanding and experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mental wellbeing and suicide.
3. The helpline will create employment opportunities and enhance community expertise in suicide prevention and resilience by building a national helpline workforce staffed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
4. The helpline will be operated by a team of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
5. The helpline will work with a highly engaged Advisory Committee composed of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who are subject matter experts.

A central tenet of this partnership is the commitment to a helpline workforce that is led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people which was another key recommendation in the *“Wellbeing & Healing through Connection and Culture”* report.

Cultural safety and appropriateness are known to influence service uptake by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Farrelly, 2008; Price & Dalgleish, 2013). A national helpline delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis supporters would create the strongest possible message of cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing distress and suicidality.

5. PROPOSED OPERATING MODEL AND STRUCTURE

Together, **Lifeline Australia** and **Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** are committed to the establishment of an **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline** that is delivered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline will benefit from leveraging the scale, infrastructure and stability of the national 24/7 Lifeline-phone service capability, whilst being governed and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline model includes the following attributes:

- A fully paid employment model staffed entirely by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.
- Oversight and governance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpline provided by a dedicated Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group.
- A training and working model that will see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people skilled with the capability to be gatekeepers embedded throughout geographically dispersed communities.
- A co-designed Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander crisis support framework that leverages Lifeline's existing best practice in co-design and crisis supporter skill requirements.
- The management of service demand surge will be enabled by over-flow to Lifeline 13 11 14 if required.
- Broadly accessible to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: The service will be designed to maximise applicability to a wide range of demographics and support will be offered on a national level removing barriers to accessing preventative interventions locally.
- Lifeline recommends 24/7 availability for this critical service. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline workforce availability at all hours will ensure culturally safe and engaging crisis support will be available whenever its required, and creates parity with the existing Lifeline phone crisis support (13 11 14) offering.
- The development of a culturally appropriate and safe future ecosystem of service providers where help seekers could potentially be referred.

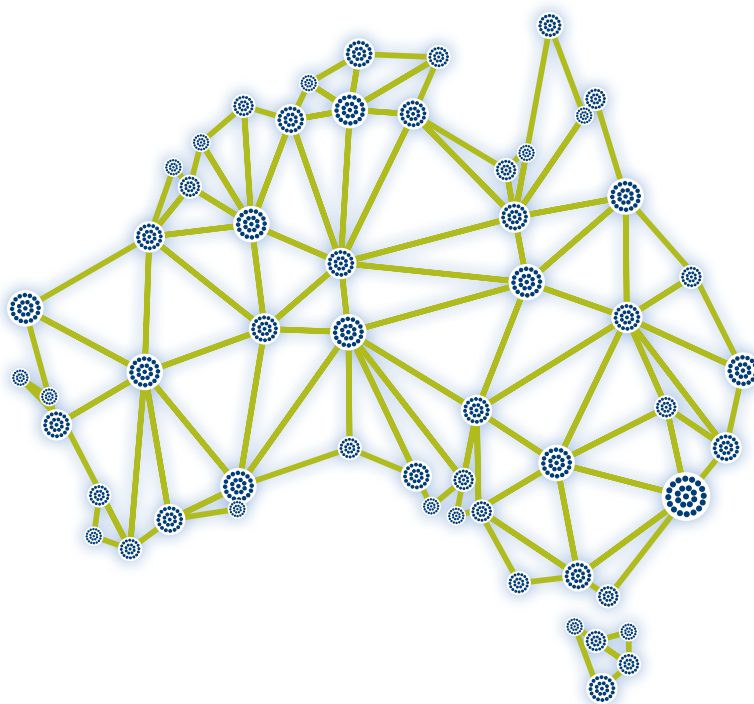




Figure 1: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander helpline – **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delivery and governance** supported by **Lifeline’s infrastructure and stability.**



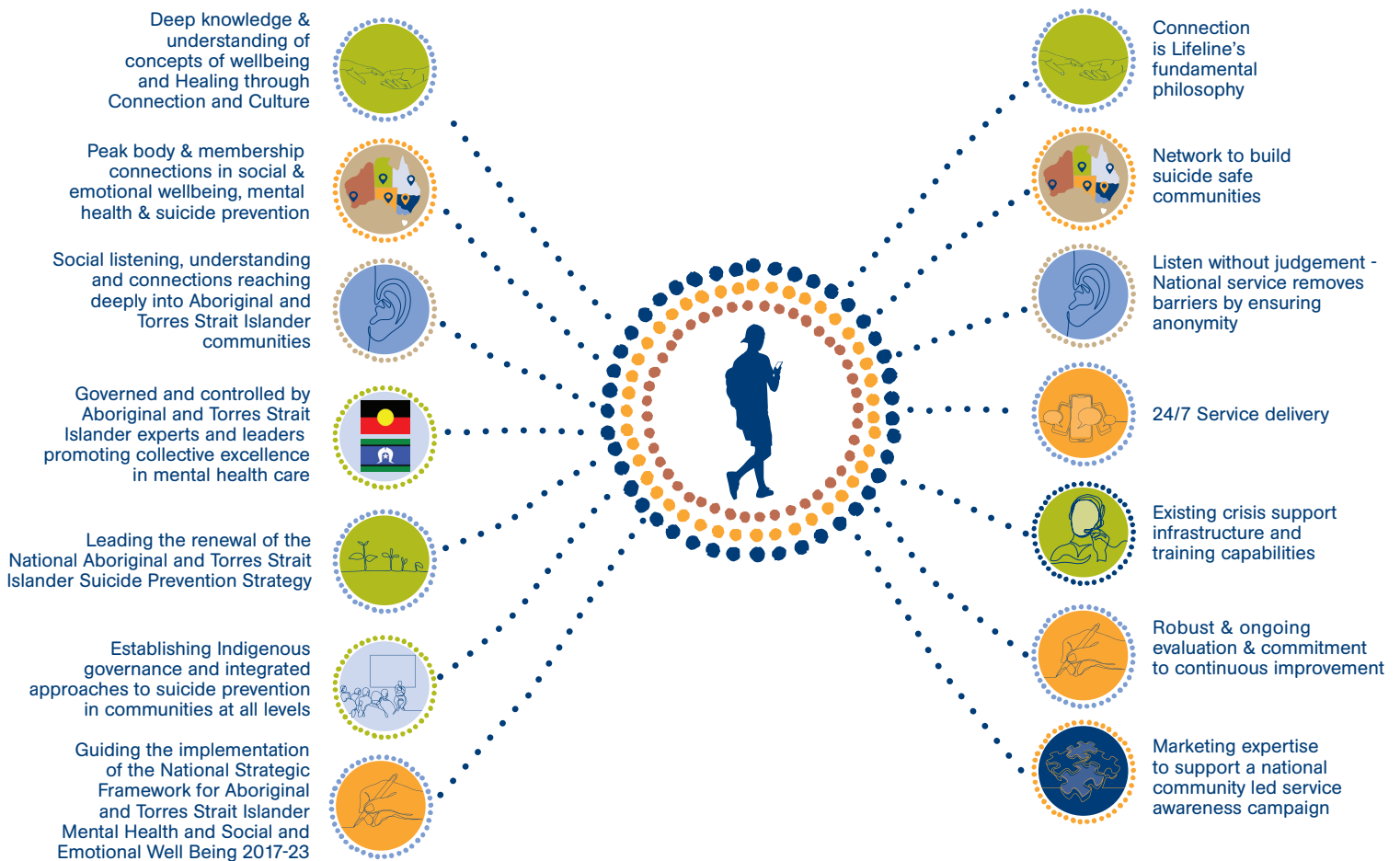
6. WHY THIS PARTNERSHIP?

The partnership between **Lifeline Australia** and **Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia** provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring together authentic collaboration between those with the cultural knowledge,

expertise and connection within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and those with the infrastructure and experience in delivering effective, 24/7 support on a national level.

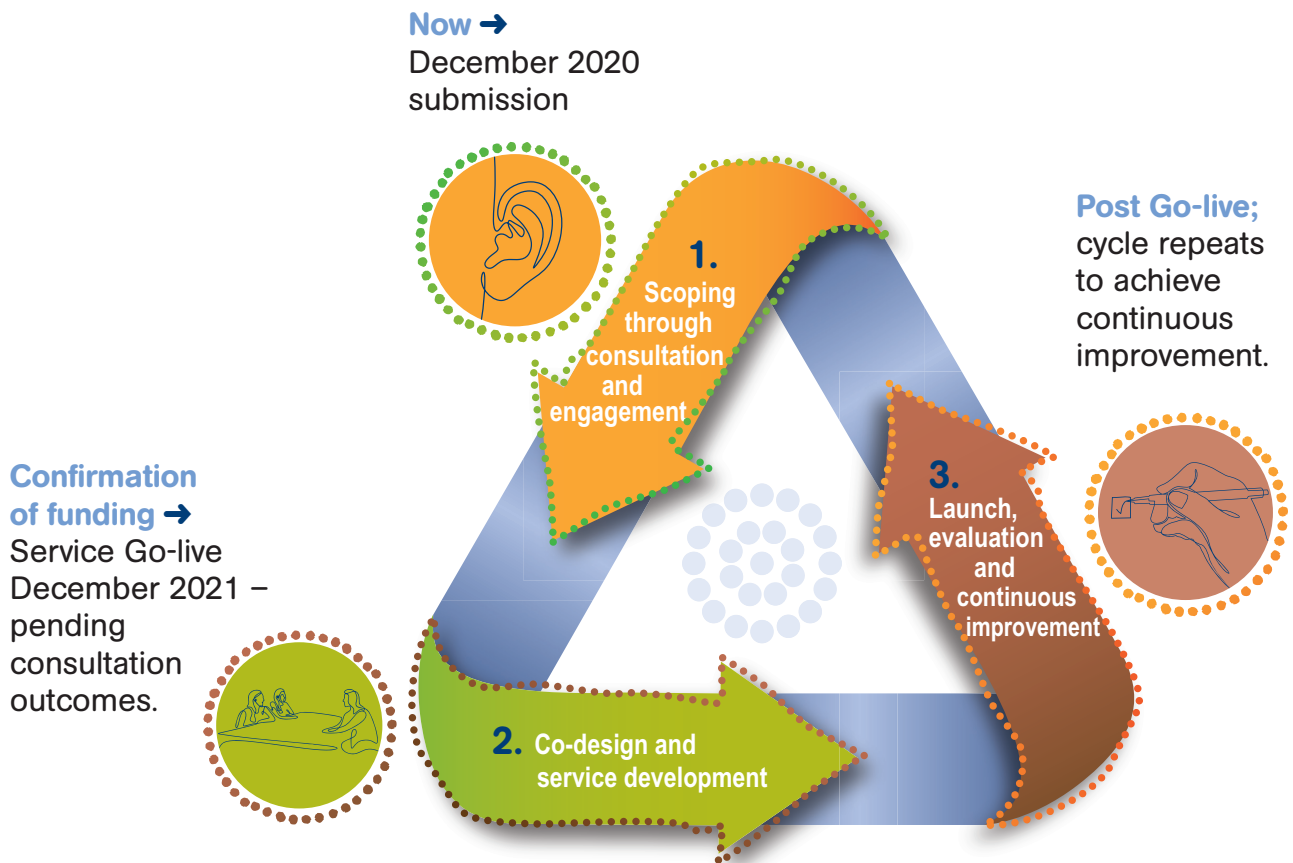


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7. SERVICE PHASES

Consultation cycle will continue throughout the life of the service.



8. FUNDING REQUEST

Delivery of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline – a service staffed and governed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people – represents a unique and fundamentally game-changing opportunity to engage Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experiencing distress. It is a key element in supporting social and emotional wellbeing, and in moving ‘towards zero suicide’ in Australia.

Notably, the value of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline in preventing deaths to suicide extends beyond the key benefits of engaging people in distress and suicidal crisis. Compounding benefits are related to:

- Embedding a workforce of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people trained in responding to distress and suicidality in communities across Australia.
- The development of pathways for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workers to transition into the mental health profession.
- Building resilience within communities and mental health first aid skills.
- Providing employment opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with associated reductions in risk of death by suicide.
- Providing an entry point to an ecosystem of culturally appropriate services.

The following investment would enable delivery of the entire scope of the service described within this submission. Lifeline submits that the investment request is resultingly reduced relative to the investment required for a stand-alone service.

	FY22 \$	FY23 \$	FY24 \$	Total Submission Request \$
Implementation & Staff Training	1,139,720	485,700	405,130	
Operating Cost	2,236,030	3,929,430	4,394,080	
Promotion and Community Engagement	1,685,110	1,040,740	835,690	
Service Evaluation & Enhancement	336,000	356,670	356,730	
Submission Request	5,396,860	5,762,540	5,991,630	17,151,030

Table 1. Presents the funding requested across the period FY21-FY23 to successfully launch and deliver the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Helpline with **24/7 hours of operation**.



9. REFERENCES

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