

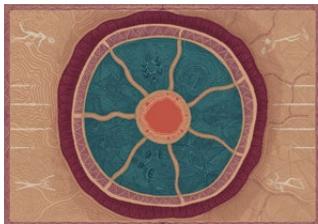
# SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL WELLBEING FRAMEWORK

FEBRUARY 2024

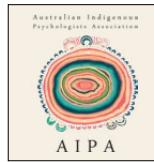


# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

In this Framework, we recognise both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Nations of Australia. We acknowledge and pay respect to the knowledge that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures are unique, all with their own languages, knowledge systems, beliefs, and histories. We recognise the collective terms they prefer also vary. With respectful consideration to these preferences, typically we will specify Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander Peoples when referring to First Nations Peoples in this Framework. From time to time, we use the term Indigenous. However, we note that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, this is not preferred. As such, we have only used this where we are referencing its use from another source, or it is the established use of the term, such as its use in "Indigenous Player Development Managers (IPDM's)". Where referring to individual Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people, we have endeavored to incorporate their preferences, including for example, reference to the Country they are connected to.



**Cover Artwork**  
Bawurra Yanay by Ngarbal/  
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Worrell (Wright)



This publication has been developed by a collective of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous people from the Australian Football League, academic and mental health sectors and representatives from AFL Clubs. Expert social, emotional and cultural wellbeing guidance was provided by the Australian Indigenous Psychology Association (AIPA).

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This Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Framework drew heavily upon original work led by Dr Graham Gee and colleagues<sup>1</sup>, which was then contextualised for Australian Rules football through the lived experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in the AFL. Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) is a holistic definition of health informed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives. It has been suggested that SEWB was first formally acknowledged in health policies in the 1970s and the wider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health literature. The work reported in this Framework is based on concepts in the health policy landmark reports, the specific recommendations for contextualisation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB work led by Graham Gee and colleagues, and the continuing cultural knowledge and practice applications that have been shared throughout the broader SEWB literature.

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF COUNTRY

The AFL acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work and play our game. We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging. We acknowledge we play our great game on this land and respect the cultures of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their contribution to our Nation and contribution to the game of Australian Rules Football. The AFL acknowledges the impacts of colonisation on the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and is committed to providing culturally responsive wellbeing services for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples players and staff.





## EXPERT SEWB ADVISORS

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# FOREWORD

## Dr Tanya Hosch

Executive General Manager  
Inclusion and Social Policy, AFL



Indigenous players have a long and proud history in our code, but over past decades have also suffered great harm to their wellbeing through their involvement in football. Change began in the 1990s when trailblazers such as Michael Long, Nicky Winmar, Gilbert McAdam and Michael McLean bravely brought long-standing on-field racism to the AFL's attention. The result was the first anti-racism rule in Australian sport, Rule 30, instituted by the AFL nearly 30 years ago. The Rule has since been strengthened and is now known as the Peek Rule, and is a beacon for the AFL's commitment to ban racism and other forms of vilification in our game. But rules and policies only take us so far. Led by the Social Policy and Inclusion team at AFL, a comprehensive suite of anti-racism commitments and actions are underway across the industry to improve safety and inclusion for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The AFL Commission and Executive is committed to improving safety and wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our game. Aligned with the vision for our game's growth, by 2030, footy in every home should be safe, celebrated, and inclusive. If Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, umpires, coaches and administrators are to truly thrive in our industry, on their own terms - not those of the Clubs or the AFL - a holistic system designed for their distinct needs is a must. I believe this Framework is a crucial part of a wider series of changes that will provide the foundation for the physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in our game. It is our responsibility to ensure it is successfully implemented across all Clubs and the AFL industry.



## Aunty Pat Turner

CEO NACCHO,  
AFL Indigenous Advisory Council

When we are considering wellbeing frameworks for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, we need to remember that our people have been learning and implementing cultural practices successfully, and had high functioning societies with sophisticated wellbeing practices, well before colonisation. This needs to be at the forefront when we are designing systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players - systems that truly acknowledge us as the First Peoples of this modern nation and which build on and recognise our strengths. SEWB is our foundation for physical, mental, and spiritual wellbeing. SEWB takes a holistic view of health. This Framework acknowledges, for the first time, the specific guidance on the importance of Social and Emotional Wellbeing and its determinants for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and people throughout the football Industry. The purpose of this Framework is to support the AFL Industry in contextualising SEWB for the AFL Industry and to provide guidance to AFL Clubs in strengthening SEWB.





# CONTENTS

<b>1</b>	<b>Background</b>	<b>Pg 8</b>
<b>2</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Pg 14</b>
<b>3</b>	<b>Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Players</b>	<b>Pg 15</b>
<b>4</b>	<b>Contributors</b>	<b>Pg 17</b>
<b>5</b>	<b>Indigenous Health Perspectives</b>	<b>Pg 20</b>
<b>6</b>	<b>Understanding Social Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)</b>	<b>Pg 21</b>
<b>7</b>	<b>Social Emotional Cultural Wellbeing Model for AFL</b>	<b>Pg 24</b>
<b>8</b>	<b>Our Strength</b>	<b>Pg 25</b>
<b>9</b>	<b>Our Strength in Practice</b>	<b>Pg 27</b>
<b>10</b>	<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Pg 29</b>
<b>11</b>	<b>References</b>	<b>Pg 30</b>
<b>12</b>	<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>Pg 31</b>
<b>13</b>	<b>Useful Links</b>	<b>Pg 32</b>
<b>14</b>	<b>Sources</b>	<b>Pg 33</b>



## 1. BACKGROUND

### Australian rules football has a long connection with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the remarkable contribution of First Nations players to the game.

The legacy of First Nations Players is celebrated each year in the AFL Sir Doug Nicholls Rounds and AFLW Indigenous Rounds. Sir Doug Nicholls Round is a highlight of the football calendar and the celebrations recognise unforgettable moments and contributions of past and present Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander footballers and umpires who have paved the way for other Indigenous people in the game. These Indigenous rounds give the fans and people in the industry the opportunity to celebrate, acknowledge and thank Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, volunteers, administrators, coaches, umpires and fans, past and present, for their contributions to the football community.

In many ways the game has celebrated and benefitted from the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. But this has not always been reciprocated. The prolonged boozing of Adam Goodes sparked a national debate about racism in Australia. The AFL formally apologised to Goodes for not taking greater action to defend him against fan abuse. In early 2021, Collingwood released the Do Better Report which detailed the ongoing race issues at that Club and in late 2022, the AFL created an independent panel to look into historical matters relating to racism at Hawthorn Football Club.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players have led the league and Clubs on ways to protect Indigenous players from racism. On field racism first came to national prominence when Nicky Winmar responded to racism from the stands by raising his guernsey and pointing at his chest in 1993. His stand against racism is now immortalised in a statue at Optus Stadium. Michael Long's stance against racial abuse saw the introduction of the AFL's Vilification Rule. The rule, the first in Australian sport to address vilification, was introduced (as Rule 30) in 1995 in the aftermath of Michael Long experiencing racial abuse during the Anzac Day game. Originally designed to combat on-field abuse relating to race, colour and religion, the rule was amended in 2013 to incorporate vilification relating to disability, appearance and sexuality. Rule 35 - now re-named the Peek Rule at the request of Michael Long - applies to both the AFL and AFLW competitions as well as being adopted by community leagues around the country and is integral to the zero tolerance to racism and making the game safe and inclusive for everyone. Since the beginning of the 2023 season the AFL has issued 17 lifetime bans for fans who have been found guilty of racial vilification after investigation from the AFL Integrity Unit. The impacts of racism are recognised as having a continued and profound impact on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, umpires and the wider football community. Upholding zero tolerance to racism is an integral to protecting wellbeing among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, volunteers, administrators, coaches, umpires and fans.



## THE NEED FOR A SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL WELLBEING FRAMEWORK FOR THE AFL

The protection and strengthening of wellbeing is a primary focus area for the AFL Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2024-2027. It is recognised that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts of wellbeing differ in many ways to Western concepts of mental health, thus any initiatives to strengthen wellbeing must be informed by the views and experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples in Australian football.

Developing cultural models of mental health and wellbeing has been at the forefront of the world leading work of Professor Helen Milroy, a descendent of the Palkyu people of the Pilbara region in Western Australia. Professor Helen Milroy is Australia's first Indigenous psychiatrist and a world leader in Indigenous and child mental health. Her work has been described in *The Lancet* as creating a bridge between Aboriginal and mainstream mental health understandings through the development of cultural models of care and healing alongside western psychiatric concepts. In 2019, the AFL appointed Professor Helen Milroy as its first Indigenous commissioner. Professor Milroy's work demonstrates the need for a Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Framework for the AFL Industry (See Figure 1) which provides guidance on a distinct model of wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, umpires, coaches and administrators.

## A BRIEF HISTORY OF SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB), as a concept, can be traced throughout key historical health policies and literature. As discussed by Gee and colleagues<sup>1</sup>, it has been suggested that the term first formally emerged with the establishment of Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisations in the 1970s in response to the need for health defined through Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspective. SEWB was subsequently utilised in the first National Aboriginal Health Strategy (1989) which adopted a definition of health that included social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of whole communities. SEWB has continued to be central in landmark health policy strategies and reports including the *Ways Forward National Consultancy Report on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Mental Health*<sup>7</sup>, the 2004-2009 National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing<sup>8</sup>, and the subsequent 2017-2023 National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing<sup>11</sup>. As highlighted by Dr Graham Gee and colleagues, most of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander SEWB literature draws upon these previous health policy works. It has been recommended that working within a SEWB framework requires the contextualising of the principles and determinants within the individual setting<sup>1</sup>. The work reported in this Framework is informed by these landmark reports, the specific recommendations for contextualisation in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social and Emotional Wellbeing work led by Dr Graham Gee and colleagues, and the continuing cultural knowledge and practice applications that have been shared throughout the broader SEWB literature.



**FIGURE 1: Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing model for the AFL (detail) adapted from Gee et al., (2014).**

SEWB recognises the self as inseparable from family and community. Connection and balance across the seven domains strengthens wellbeing and cultivates a strong and positive cultural identity. Achieving balance between the seven interrelated domains of SEWB is a source of wellbeing.



## DETERMINANTS OF SOCIAL, EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL WELLBEING

The field of Indigenous psychology has highlighted the unique determinants of the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples<sup>1-5</sup>. Determinants of wellbeing include social and emotional strengths drawn from healthy communities, families and culture<sup>1,4</sup>. The social, political and historical determinants of wellbeing include the devastating impact of colonisation, assimilation, racism, trauma, poverty and social exclusion<sup>1,3,4</sup>. These determinants have resulted in disconnection from kinship systems, spiritual and cultural practices. There is a direct relationship between lived and intergenerational trauma and the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities<sup>5</sup>. Intergenerational trauma is trauma that recurs across generations, is shared collectively, and is continuously compounded<sup>6</sup>. Although the Australian rules football Industry has been proactive in addressing issues of on-field vilification in recent times, the ongoing impacts of racism, colonisation and intergenerational trauma are recognised as having a continued and profound impact on the wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players, umpires and the wider football community. Racism continues to be a significant challenge within the AFL industry. The AFL, guided by the direction and with the support of AIPA, is resolute in its commitment to eradicating it.

## CULTURE AS STRENGTH AND HEALING

Connection to culture is a protective factor for health and wellbeing, as culture creates strength for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. It does this by allowing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to know deeply ancestry, kinship and land - put simply, who they are and where they belong. In collectivist societies, this contributes to thriving and harmony and creates nurturing for Country and the people that belong to it. "Country is a timeless core of culture that supports meaning-making, purpose, self-esteem and resilience. To Indigenous peoples, Country is seen as the source and creator of life, and provides kinship, morality and ethics<sup>14</sup>." Thus, caring for the land serves to nurture and protect Indigenous culture and families into the future. This is the reason why culture becomes an important element to the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players. Culture as a determinant of health originates from and promotes a 'strengths-based' perspective. When we see culture in this light and this context, it then becomes a platform for building resilience<sup>12</sup> and restoring balance and healing.

**"IT'S IMPORTANT TO EMPOWER INDIGENOUS PLAYERS IN MANAGING THEIR COMMUNITY EXPECTATIONS, CULTURAL OBLIGATIONS, AND THE COMPETING DEMANDS OF PERFORMING WELL IN AN ELITE SPORTING ENVIRONMENT. IT CAN BE HARD, PARTICULARLY FOR THOSE LIVING OFF COUNTRY"**

**- JARROD HARBROW, INDIGENOUS PROGRAMS LEAD GOLD COAST SUNS**



### **AFL INDIGENOUS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS**

The introduction of Indigenous Player Development Managers (IPDMs) at all Clubs was mandated in 2022 to ensure every Club had a senior Indigenous member of the football department who was responsible for sustaining a connection to culture for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Players. The IPDM role is responsible for facilitating the holistic development and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Players on the Clubs' AFL and AFLW playing lists. The IPDM role exists to support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Players with their cultural identity, non-athletic and off-field endeavours and to facilitate their cultural, vocational, educational, health, and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) needs.

The IPDMs play a critical role in every Clubs' cultural safety, responsiveness and capability. They create connections to culture and strengthen and maintain players' cultural identity. They promote an Indigenous players' voice in Club decision-making and collaborate with internal and external stakeholders to ensure culturally appropriate support systems and cultural practices are in place.

### **INDIGENOUS PLAYER DEVELOPMENT MANAGERS' COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

The AFL appointed a Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead role in 2022 to support and facilitate the SEWB practices of the IPDMs and provide the AFL with leadership in SEWB. The establishment of the IPDM Community of Practice (CoP) commenced in June 2022 to provide an opportunity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices, perspectives, knowledge systems, practices and cultural wisdom to be honoured. The CoP is facilitated by the AFL Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead and the Indigenous and Social Policy Manager. The CoP is a trusted and supportive Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It represents a voice to further Indigenous perspectives and contributes to the broader Industry's cultural responsibility.

### **GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF THE COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE**

A CoP is a group of people with a common role and interest who come together to share and learn from each other to fulfil individual and group goals. It is a closed group to ensure those who share common challenges and learnings in their role can safely learn and grow their practice from others who have a shared experience. This CoP aims to focus on sharing best practices and creating new knowledge to advance Indigenous Player development and wellbeing. CoP methods with the IPDMs have included cultural knowledge and learning circles, yarning circles, facilitated education sessions and Indigenous led discussions.



**Topics explored in these community of practices include:**

- Developing a solid CoP base for the IPDM to promote practice and change in the Clubs
- Social Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing information, education and resources
- Sharing strategies and techniques on how best to support Indigenous players planning to transition into and/or out of AFL system
- Supporting the social emotional and cultural wellbeing of players who have been racially vilified
- Minimising online abuse of players
- Supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players' partners and families
- Supporting players and staff after the release of Hawthorn Football Club report
- Discussing the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander position on the 26th of January
- Sharing information on systemic racism (hosted at All Stars Summit)
- Soft Cap education and information relating to the IPDM role and responsibilities
- Supporting IPDM SEWB in the lead up and outcome of the 2023 referendum
- Supporting SEWB of Indigenous players and their partners in lead up and outcome of the 2023 referendum
- Discussing Clubs responses in the lead up and outcome of 2023 referendum
- Connection, networking and a support base amongst the IPDMs

In August 2023 peer-to-peer Indigenous Learning Circles were introduced, which run in conjunction with the CoP. The purpose is to facilitate platforms of learning and development between IPDM's.

The AFL Social Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Framework development was led by the AFL SEWB Lead, with the support of Indigenous mental health and SEWB experts, to ensure the systems supporting the IPDMs work were informed and guided by Indigenous knowledge and practices.

**"CREATING STRONG CONNECTIONS WITH OUR LOCAL ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY IS EXTREMELY IMPORTANT FOR OUR CLUB AND OUR INDIGENOUS PLAYERS"**

**- MALCOLM LYNCH,  
MANAGER, INDIGENOUS  
INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY, GWS**

## 2. **PURPOSE**

The Social Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing Framework and model for the AFL Industry (see Figure 1) was developed to guide all Club and Industry members on the importance of social emotional and cultural wellbeing for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and staff.

**The intention for this Framework is to:**

- Introduce a Social Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing model contextualised for the AFL - Our Strength
- Guide the design, development and implementation of social emotional and cultural wellbeing support systems for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players
- Guide and support healthcare and wellbeing staff in delivering culturally responsive services to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players
- Guide the social emotional and cultural wellbeing practice of Indigenous Player Development Managers (IPDMs)

### 3. ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER PLAYERS

The AFL Players' Indigenous Map, created each year, proudly displays the cultural diversity across AFL and AFLW. The map aims to educate the football community and wider public on the various language and cultural groups of Indigenous AFL and AFLW Players. View the 2023 and 2024 maps.

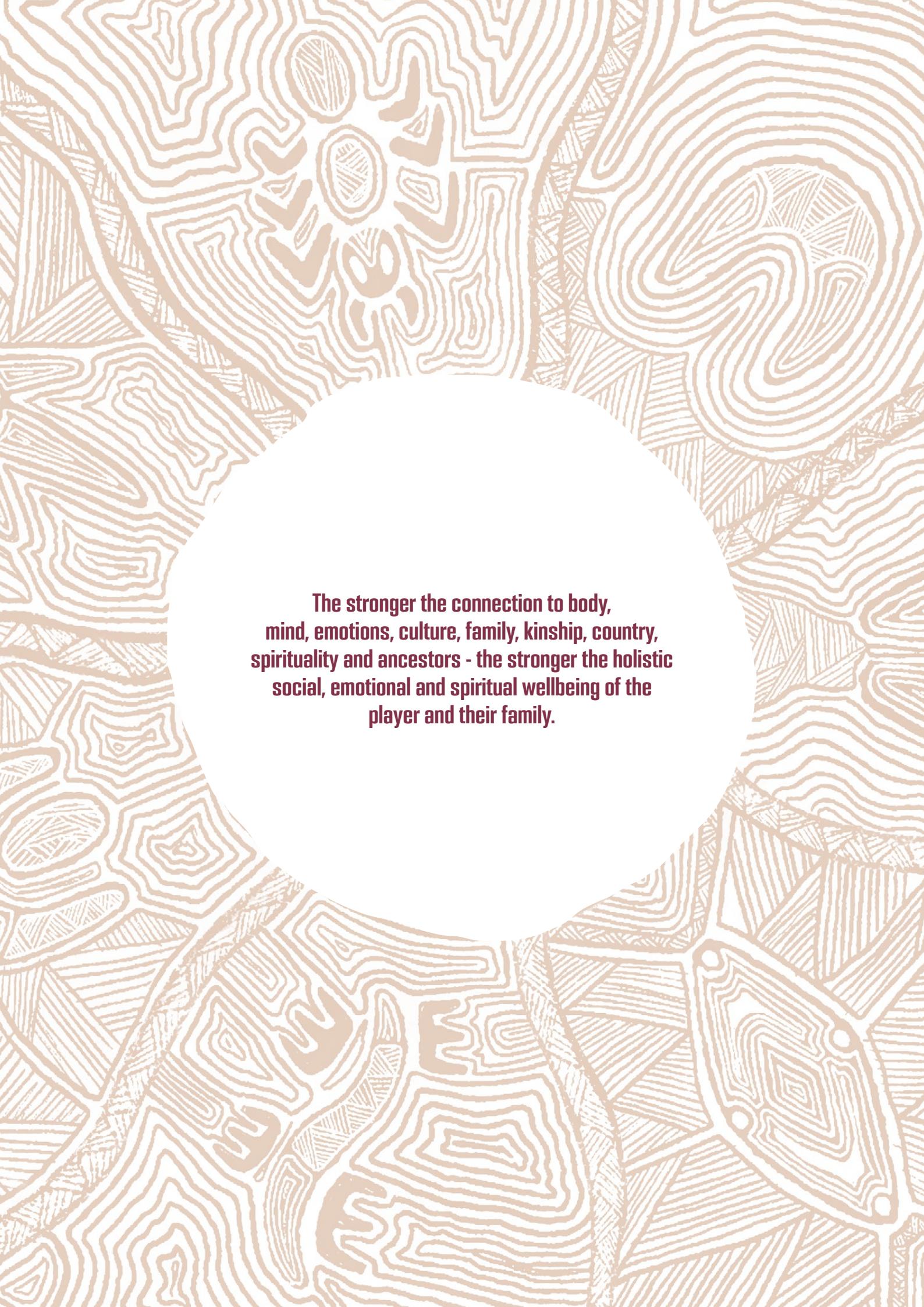
<https://www.aflplayers.com.au/resources/afl-players-indigenous-map-2023>

<https://www.aflplayers.com.au/app/uploads/2024/05/Indigenous-Player-Map-Update-2024-scaled.jpg>

**"I AM ABLE TO EDUCATE THE CLUB AND REALLY SUPPORT THESE PLAYERS IN MAKING THE BEST DECISIONS FOR THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES"**

- IPDM





**The stronger the connection to body,  
mind, emotions, culture, family, kinship, country,  
spirituality and ancestors - the stronger the holistic  
social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the  
player and their family.**



## 4. CONTRIBUTORS

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## 5. INDIGENOUS HEALTH PERSPECTIVES

The National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Mental Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing 2017-2023<sup>6</sup> (which was informed by the 1995 Ways Forward Report<sup>8</sup> and the 2004 SEWB Framework<sup>7</sup>) contains nine guiding principles that emphasise the holistic and whole-of-life view of health held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. (See table 1)

TABLE 1: NINE INDIGENOUS HEALTH PRINCIPLES

<b>Health as Holistic</b>	Holistic health encompasses physical, spiritual, cultural, emotional and social wellbeing of the individual, family and community. The self is inseparable from, and embedded within, family and community.
<b>The Right to Self Determination</b>	Self determination relates to empowerment and the fundamental right for people to shape their own lives. Without self determination, Indigenous peoples are unable to overcome the impacts of colonisation and dispossession.
<b>The Need for Cultural Understanding</b>	The whole Club should aspire to being culturally responsive and safe. By participating in cultural awareness training and celebration events such as Sir Doug Nichols Rounds and NAIDOC week, the Club contributes to strengthening the overall SEWB of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players.
<b>The Impact of History in Trauma and Loss</b>	Intergenerational trauma and compounding grief and loss due to colonisation has shaped Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' wellbeing through the social determinants of wellbeing.
<b>Recognition of Human Rights</b>	Human rights recognise the inherent value of each person, regardless of background, where we live, what we look like, what we think or what we believe. They are based on principles of dignity, equality and mutual respect, which are shared across cultures, religions and philosophies. They are about being treated fairly, treating others fairly and having the ability to make genuine choices in our daily lives.
<b>The Impact of Racism and Stigma</b>	It is widely understood that racism and stigma negatively impact mental health and wellbeing for Indigenous peoples. The impacts of racism are intergenerational and result in trauma.
<b>Recognition of the Centrality of Kinship</b>	Connections to family and kinship are central to the functioning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies, culture, customs, language and laws.
<b>Recognition of Cultural Diversity</b>	Australia has over 250 Indigenous nations that are of different and distinct culture, customs, languages and laws. It is important to acknowledge Indigenous players from different cultural groups have their own, unique experiences of social and emotional wellbeing.
<b>Recognition of Aboriginal Strengths</b>	Recognition of strength, resilience, knowledge and positive cultural practices that have survived thousands of years are a source of strength for Indigenous people!

# 6. UNDERSTANDING SOCIAL AND EMOTIONAL WELLBEING

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) is the foundation of holistic health for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The holistic view incorporates the physical, social, emotional, and cultural wellbeing of individuals and their communities. SEWB acknowledges cultural groups and individuals have their own, unique experiences of social and emotional wellbeing<sup>8</sup>.

## SEWB RECOGNISES:

- › Health is holistic, involving spiritual, social, emotional, cultural, physical and mental wellbeing
- › Connection to land, sea, culture and spirituality all influence wellbeing
- › Social, historical and political factors that contribute to racism also affect wellbeing.

## THE SEWB MODEL

The SEWB model of social emotional wellbeing has seven interrelated domains. (see Figure 2)

SEWB views the self as inseparable from family and community. The self is surrounded by seven interrelated domains that are sources of wellbeing. Strong connection to and balance across the seven domains supports wellbeing and a strong and positive Indigenous person's identity. Disruptions in these connections are likely to result in impacts on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' social emotional and cultural wellbeing. For children and young people, the SEWB approach ensures healthy growth and development, from birth to adulthood. (See Figure 2).



**"TO HELP ASSIST YOUNG FIRST NATIONS PLAYERS TRANSITION INTO OUR CLUB, I CONNECT THEM WITH PROGRAMS WITHIN OUR LOCAL COMMUNITIES AT REDFERN AND LA PEROUSE. THIS HELPS TO BUILD SUPPORT NETWORKS OUTSIDE OF THE CLUB AND STAYING CONNECTED TO CULTURE AND COMMUNITY"**

**- JARRED HODGES,  
IDPM AT SYDNEY SWANS**

Figure 2: SEWB Diagram adapted from Gee et al., (2014).

SEWB recognises the self as inseparable from family and community. Connection and balance across the seven domains strengthens wellbeing and a strong and positive cultural identity.

**TABLE 2: THE SEVEN DOMAINS OF SEWB**

<b>CONNECTION TO...Body</b>	Physical health; feeling strong and healthy and able to physically participate as fully as possible in life.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Mind and Emotions</b>	Mental health; the ability to manage thoughts and feelings. Maintaining positive mental, cognitive, emotional and psychological wellbeing is fundamental to an individual's overall health.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Family &amp; Kinship</b>	These connections are central to the functioning of Indigenous Australian societies. Strong family and kinship systems can provide a sense of belonging, identity, security, and stability for Indigenous people.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Community</b>	Providing opportunities for individuals and families to connect with each other, support each other and work together.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Culture</b>	Maintaining a secure sense of cultural identity by participating in practices associated with cultural rights and responsibilities.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Country</b>	Helping to 'underpin identity and a sense of belonging'. Country refers to an area in which Indigenous people have a traditional or spiritual association. Country is viewed as a living entity that provides nourishment for the body, mind and spirit.
<b>CONNECTION TO...Spirituality &amp; Ancestors</b>	Providing 'a sense of purpose and meaning'. The mental health and emotional wellbeing of Indigenous Australians can be influenced by their relationship with traditional beliefs and metaphysical worldviews.

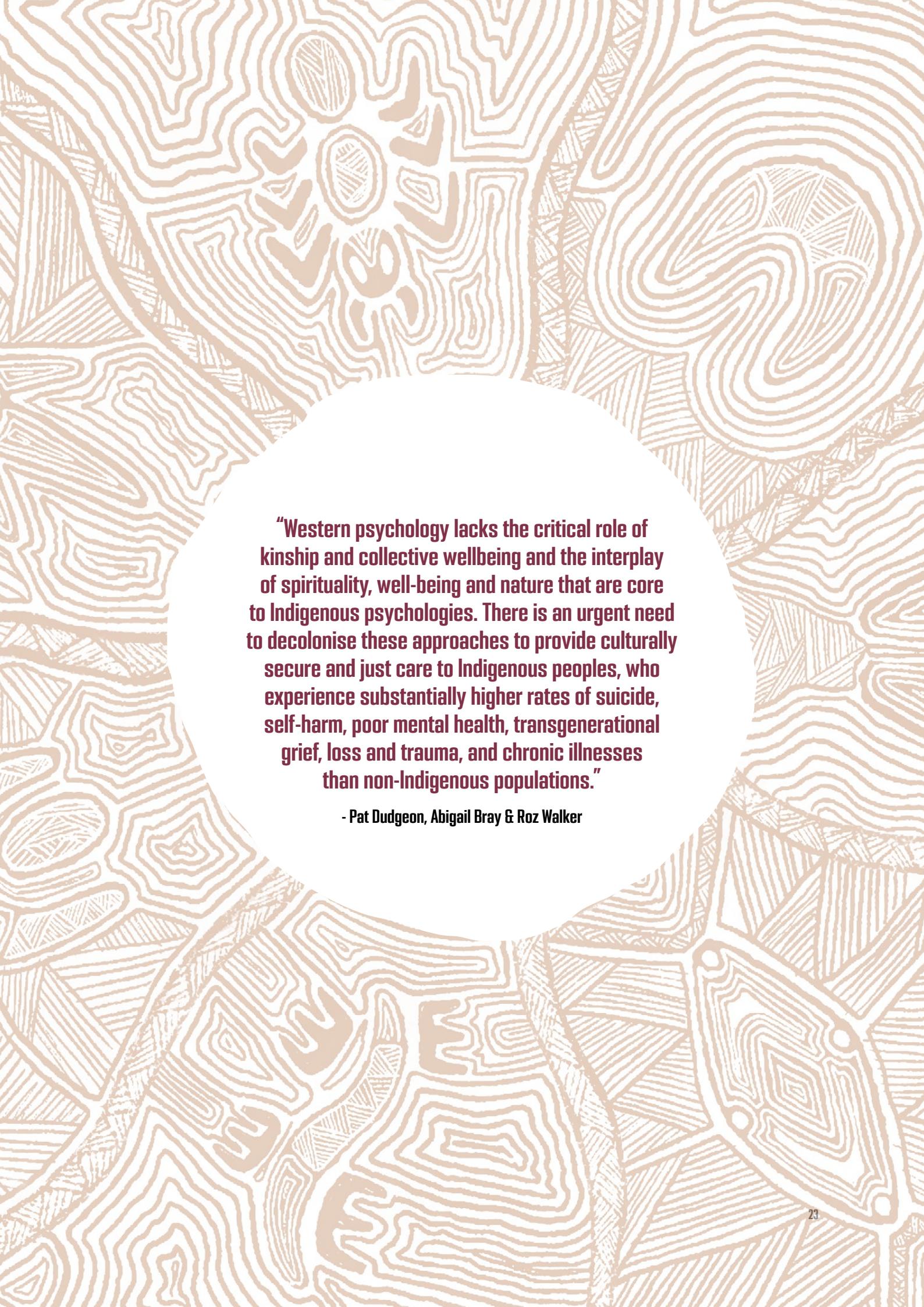
SEWB connections are always considered within broader social, cultural, political and historical contexts. The social, political and historical determinants of wellbeing, depicted in the outside ring, include the devastating impact of colonisation, assimilation, racism, trauma, poverty and social exclusion. Importantly, these social determinants do not occur in isolation, but rather impact SEWB concurrently and cumulatively<sup>10</sup>.

### **SOCIAL EMOTIONAL AND CULTURAL WELLBEING AND MENTAL ILL-HEALTH**

Social, emotional and cultural wellbeing problems are distinct from mental ill-health and mental illness, although they can interact and influence each other<sup>11</sup>. People can experience both good social emotional and cultural wellbeing and simultaneously experience mental illness. People with mental health problems or mental illness can be healthy and live and function at a high level, yet continue to have social, emotional and cultural wellbeing needs.

The 2004 SEWB Framework describes an interactive relationship between SEWB and mental health, where the two may influence each other and where a person can experience relatively good SEWB and yet still experience mental health problems, or vice-versa<sup>12</sup>. As described in the literature, SEWB problems include a wide range of issues including grief, loss, trauma, abuse, violence, substance misuse, physical health problems, child development problems, cultural dislocation, racism and social disadvantage and while mental health problems may include crisis reactions, anxiety, states, depression, post-traumatic stress, self-harm, and psychosis<sup>13</sup>.

Many of the issues identified as SEWB problems, such as abuse, violence, racism and social disadvantage are also well-established risk factors for various mental health disorders<sup>13</sup>.



**"Western psychology lacks the critical role of kinship and collective wellbeing and the interplay of spirituality, well-being and nature that are core to Indigenous psychologies. There is an urgent need to decolonise these approaches to provide culturally secure and just care to Indigenous peoples, who experience substantially higher rates of suicide, self-harm, poor mental health, transgenerational grief, loss and trauma, and chronic illnesses than non-Indigenous populations."**

**- Pat Dudgeon, Abigail Bray & Roz Walker**

## 7. SOCIAL EMOTIONAL CULTURAL WELLBEING MODEL FOR AFL

### How was the social emotional and cultural wellbeing model designed for the AFL context?

The Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing model for the AFL Industry - Our Strength (see Figure 3) - was designed through a process that honoured cultural knowledge and Indigenous leadership practices.

Gee, Dudgeon and colleagues' SEWB model<sup>9</sup> is the basis for Our Strength. AIPA Psychologist Vanessa Edwige ran a workshop on Gee et al's model for all Indigenous Player Development Managers (IPDMs) at a gathering in 2022. The gathering was facilitated by the AFL Social and Emotional Wellbeing Practice Lead and cultural knowledge was shared by AIPA on the SEWB model and Indigenous health perspectives. Gee et al's SEWB model was contextualised through a co-design process with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Industry with ongoing guidance from AIPA to develop Our Strength - a Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing for the AFL Industry context. Our Strength was continuously reviewed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contributors in the industry, as well as expert Indigenous academics in the SEWB field, throughout a 12 month period. Ongoing knowledge circles were held with IPDMs where feedback and further consultation was provided in an evolving cycle to fit the model to the Australian football context. IPDMs were invited to provide further consultation on practice examples that illuminated the model in the Club context when supporting players.

Opportunities for feedback from AFL Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander staff were facilitated, and the model was presented to the Indigenous Advisory Council for the AFL and the AFL Industry Mental Health and Wellbeing Steering committee members including Michael Mitchell and Professor Helen Milroy (Chair).

We acknowledge and honour the collaboration and self-determination of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experts from across Industries who have generously shared their cultural knowledge and expertise, culminating in the creation of Our Strength.

#### INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP AS A GUIDING PRINCIPLE

*"First Nations perspectives of empowerment, healing and leadership are necessary to combat the social inequality of First Nations people in contemporary society. First Nations-led strategies are key social determinants that influence health, mental health and social and emotional wellbeing."*

There is little dispute about the ongoing devastating impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In this narrative often the incredible resilience, struggle for equity, equality and cultural recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples has been left out. What has also been missing is the celebration of the oldest surviving culture in the world where the sophisticated knowledge systems allowed people to adapt to the harsh challenges of the Australian continent's environment over the last estimated 50,000 - 120,000 years<sup>3</sup>.

## 8. OUR STRENGTH

A Social, Emotional, and Cultural Wellbeing model for the AFL industry - Our Strength - was developed through a process that honoured cultural knowledge and Indigenous leadership practices.

Our Strength depicts the strength of the individual centred at the core of the model (see Figure 3). The stronger the connection to each segment of the model - body, mind and emotions, culture, family and kinship, country, spirituality and ancestors, the stronger the holistic social, emotional and spiritual wellbeing of the player and their family (See Table 3).

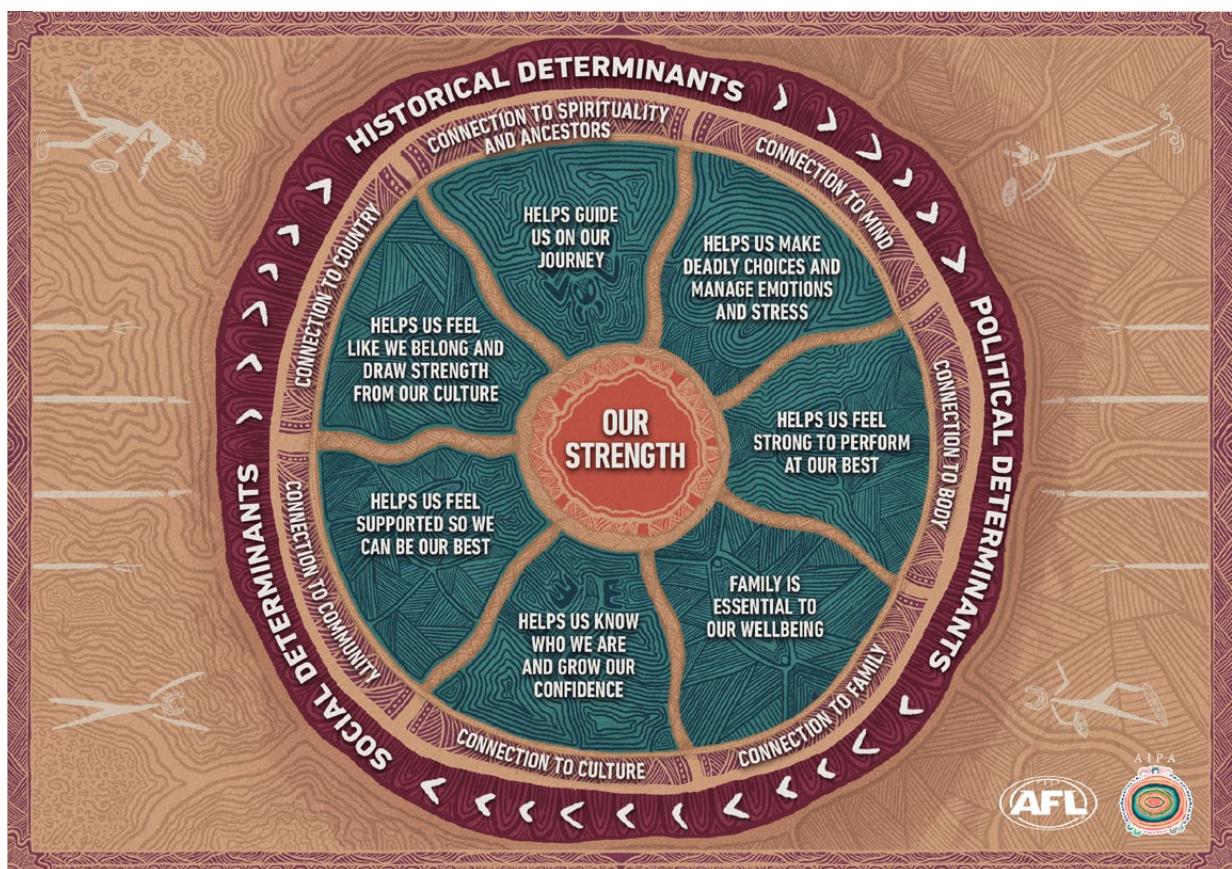


Figure 3: Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing model for the AFL adapted from Gee et al., (2014).



TABLE 3: THE SEVEN DOMAINS FOR SEWB CONTEXTUALISED FOR AFL

	STRONGEST CONNECTION IMPACT	WEAKEST CONNECTION IMPACT
<b>CONNECTION TO...Body</b>	Culturally responsive high performance and medical services ensure we feel physically strong to perform at our best	Weaker connection to our body can lead to poor physical health, social and emotional wellbeing and impact performance
<b>CONNECTION TO...Mind and Emotions</b>	Stronger connection to mind and emotions helps us maintain positive mental, spiritual, and emotional wellbeing. Includes strong self-esteem, motivation and control	Lack of connection to mind can impact our ability to manage stress or worry, disrupt a sense of safety or security, sleep and general wellbeing
<b>CONNECTION TO...Family &amp; Kinship</b>	Stronger connection to family is essential for wellbeing and to meet reciprocal kinship and cultural obligations. Family provides essential support for our cultural identity	Weaker connection to family can have negative impacts on our cultural ties and wellbeing
<b>CONNECTION TO...Community</b>	Stronger connection to Club community and broader local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contribute to strong support networks	Weaker connection to Club community and broader local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities contribute to family feuding, lack of support, isolation
<b>CONNECTION TO...Culture</b>	Stronger connection and participation in cultural activities and practice helps build healthy and secure relationships to our cultural heritage	Weaker connection to culture due to colonisation can lead to insecure sense of cultural identity and disconnection from cultural values, practices
<b>CONNECTION TO...Country</b>	Stronger connection to country enriches our sense of belonging and spiritual wellbeing	Weaker connection to country can negatively impact wellbeing and our sense of identity and belonging
<b>CONNECTION TO...Spirituality &amp; Ancestors</b>	Stronger connection to spirituality, the dreaming and ancestors provides a sense of security, meaning and purpose	Weaker connection can leave a cultural void or unfulfilled longing

## 9.

# OUR STRENGTH - IN PRACTICE

Quotes collected from IPDMs on Social, Emotional and Cultural Wellbeing in practice.

- "The opportunity to head back to the Indigenous players' country and having them share their culture, beliefs and family traditions with other non-Indigenous players and staff enables their SEWB to thrive. It also provides perspective which encourages support when away from country." - Joel Garner, Indigenous Player Development Manager, Richmond Football Club
- "Utilising networks and connections to link players into local communities and be immersed in culture and connect with elders for guidance. This contributed to the player having one of the best seasons this player had ever had at the Club. The support staff had seen an incredible improvement" - Jeremy Johncock, First Nation Programs Manager, Adelaide Crows Football Club
- "In my role, education about sorry business with the Club is important. When Indigenous players are experiencing this, living off country can be difficult for them and their families" - Jarrod Harbrow, Indigenous Programs Lead Gold Coast SUNS.
- "Advocating for players to be able to return home to connect to country and allow that process without time constraints helped with that players engagement in training and a better performance on field" - IPDM.
- "AT NMFC we value the importance to involve the perspective of First Nations players in any kind of decision making that is relevant to them. An example of this practice is when we involved our first nations players in the Clubs messaging for January 26. In our social media posts, we included quotes from senior Indigenous players about what January 26 means to them." - Jarrod Lienert, IPDM North Melbourne FC & Lucy Amon, Head of First Nations Strategy & Engagement North Melbourne FC
- "Players, when comfortable, lead cultural activities to share with and educate their teammates. This helped with connection amongst team and helped the players' engagement across training and with on field performance" - IPDM.
- "For our Indigenous players the renaming of the Club to (Traditional name) just shows them that we care about their culture and the Club is a safe place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and their families to come and play football. With the renaming of the Club to (Traditional name) for SDNR this has given our supporters and staff added awareness of culture that has existed for tens of thousands of years. It's made our staff proud that we are a progressive and innovative Club and it's encouraged everyone to try and educate themselves and help try and educate those around us. The fact that a second Club has rebranded this year is really exciting for us to see and we can't wait for all or most Clubs to do it to help educate their supporters, staff and players about Indigenous history and language." - Matthew Whelan, Indigenous Project Officer Melbourne Football Club



**“IT IS IMPORTANT FOR THE CLUB  
TO FEEL SAFE FOR CURRENT  
AND PAST INDIGENOUS PLAYERS.  
WE HAVE SPENT A LOT OF TIME  
ON SIGNPOSTING AND CREATING  
SAFE CULTURAL SPACES AND  
PRACTICES WITHIN THE CLUB”**

**- AUNTY KATRINA AMON, IPDM AT  
ST KILDA FOOTBALL CLUB.**



## 10. RECOMMENDATION

To strengthen social, emotional and cultural wellbeing is to act upon the voices of our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players and people and nurture cultural, community, individual, country and other connections. To achieve this, we call upon the AFL Clubs, administrators and football community to adopt the nine guiding principles for Indigenous Health as the foundation for strong social emotional and cultural wellbeing. When empowering Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander players on their journey through football, the Framework will underpin culturally responsive systems that promote the social, emotional and cultural wellbeing of players and their families. Using the Framework to guide their wellbeing responses, the IPDMs bring the Framework to life through their roles. Stronger social emotional and cultural wellbeing is pivotal to healthy players, families and communities, and a healthy game for all. United and coordinated action, informed by the principles represented in the Framework, is required.





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## 12. GLOSSARY OF TERMS

### **Community of Practice CoP**

A group of people with a common role and interest who come together to share and learn from each other to fulfil individual and group goals

### **SEWB**

Social and Emotional Wellbeing

### **IPDM**

Indigenous Player Development Manager

### **Social, political and historical determinants of wellbeing**

The structural determinants that shape the dynamics of power, human rights and justice, and the access and distribution of resources. These include social determinants of health, the influential role of cultural systems of knowledge, law, and practices, the impacts of past government policies experienced by whole cultural groups and communities.

## 13. USEFUL LINKS

### RELEVANT AFL POLICIES

- › Peek Rule (Discrimination and Racial and Religious Vilification)
- › AFL Rules
- › Innovate Reconciliation Action Plan

### FURTHER INFORMATION ON SEWB

- › Gayaa Dhuwi (Proud Spirit) Australia
- › Social and Emotional Wellbeing - Health Topics - Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet (ecu.edu.au)
- › Social & emotional wellbeing - AIHW Indigenous MHSPC
- › Empowering Access - Transforming Indigenous Mental Health and Wellbeing (timhwb.org.au)
- › Social-and-Emotional-Wellbeing.pdf (healingfoundation.org.au)
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- › social and emotional wellbeing (headspace.org.au)



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