

APSAD 2025

Strengths-based cultural approaches to support First Nation's people in prison and post release.

Presented by

Associate Professor Michael Doyle, Dr Alison Evans, Kai Clancy, Julie Matheson
Edith Collins Centre for Translational Research in Alcohol, Drugs and Toxicology

Steve Teekens, Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence) Toronto, Canada
Leeton McGuinness, The Glen Centre, Central Coast, NSW



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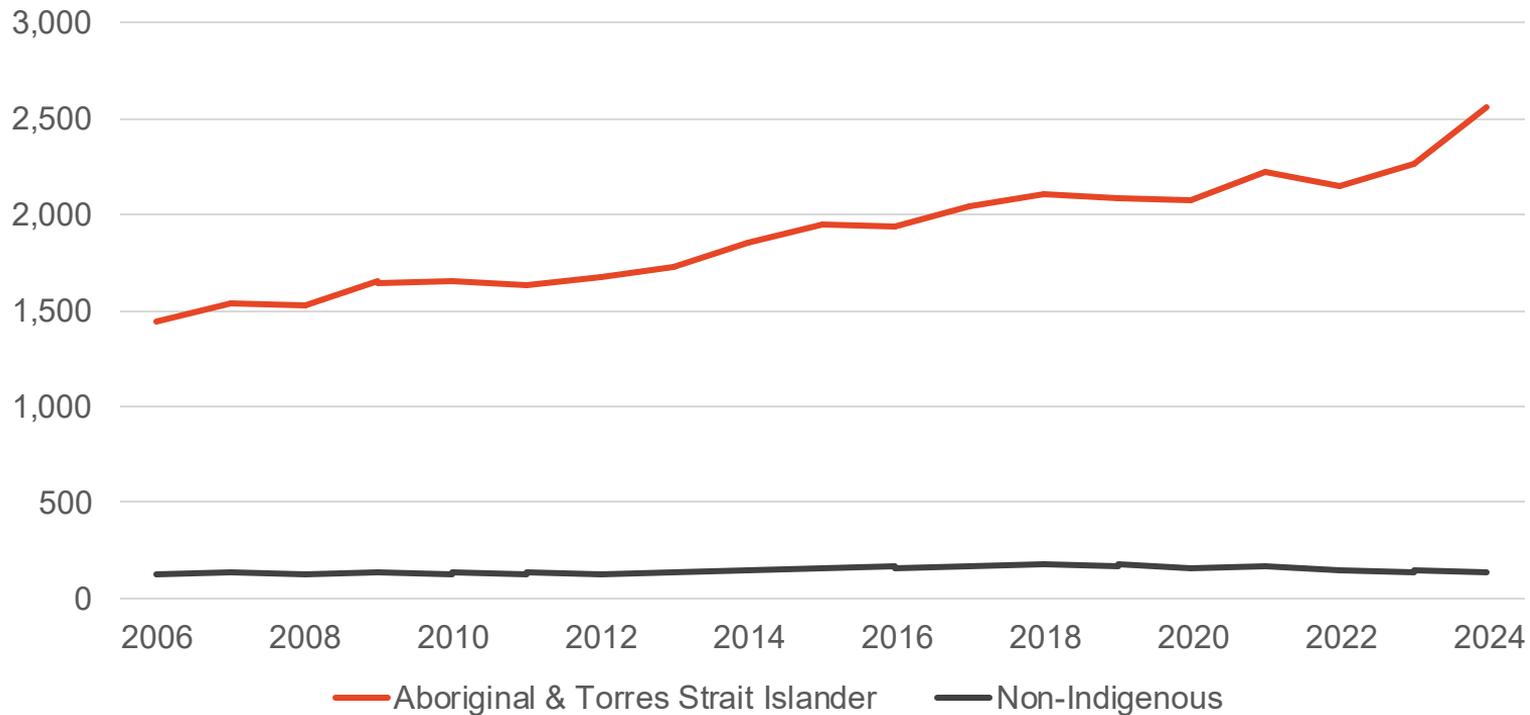
<https://www.edithcollinscentre.org.au>

We acknowledge the Gadigal people of the Eora nation – the traditional owners of the lands – and pay respects to their Elders past, present and future.



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Australian imprisonment rate 2006-24 (per 100,000 population)



Social and Emotional Well-being



Adapted from Gee et al., 2014 Source:
Transforming Indigenous Mental Health
and Wellbeing

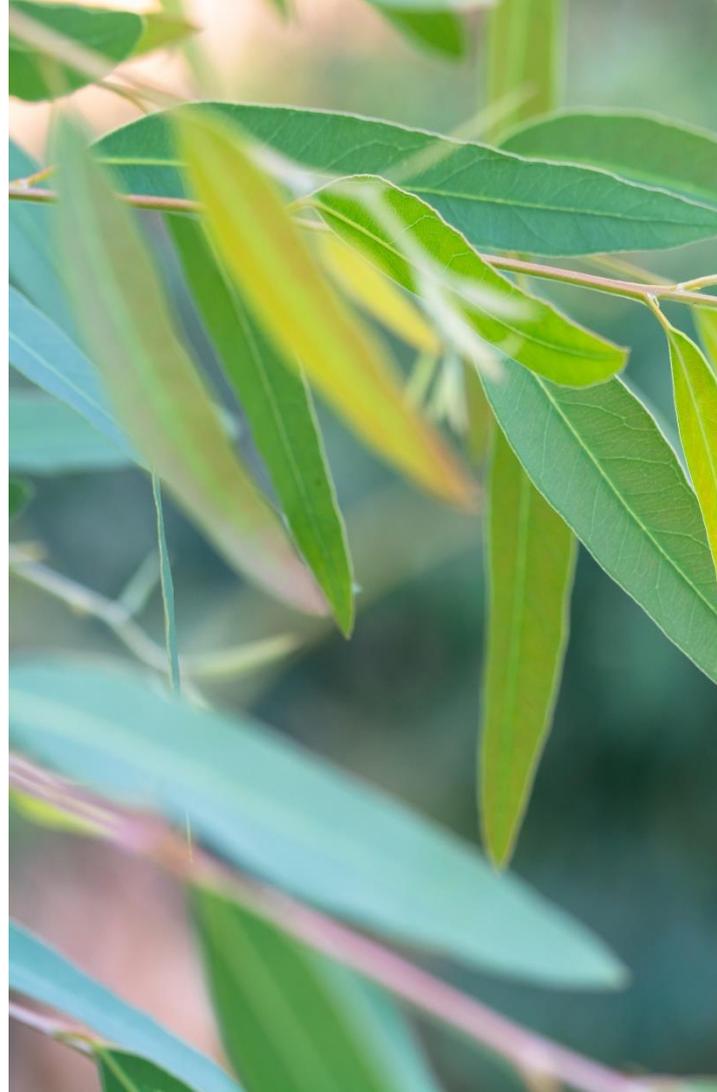
Presentation 1

Scoping review of First Nations specific prison-based social and emotional well-being (SEWB) programs for First Nations people

Dr Alison Evans

Rationale

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander 18–24-year-olds are overrepresented in prisons (47.8%)
- Association between criminal offending and AOD use
- Harmful substance use can impact social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB)
- Current existing prison programs typically do not cover Aboriginal specific issues



Scoping review search results

Grey literature search

Australia (n=32)

- TAS = 0
- NSW = 9
- ACT = 1
- QLD = 7
- WA = 6
- NT = 1
- SA = 6
- VIC = 2

International (n=25)

- New Zealand = 7
- Canada = 17
- USA = 1

Peer-reviewed literature search and screening

2,934 records imported

1,036 duplicates removed

1,898 records screened

49 records full text screened

12 References from other sources retrieved:

- Aboriginal Health Infonet (6)
- Hand search (6)

After full text screening, 17 studies in review

44 studies excluded with reasons

Total programs* (n=71) included in the review findings, identified via:

- Grey literature search (n=57)
- Peer-reviewed literature (n=17)

Summary results

- Total (N=71) programs from Australia (37), New Zealand (8), Canada (24) and USA (2)
- Indigenous specific (61) or multi-cultural (10)
- Mainly targeting men (40)
- Traditional cultural education + Western models
- Group setting or with additional 1:1 counselling
- Facilitated by or co-led with Indigenous people
- Outcomes were behaviour change and improved SEWB



Example Cultural Programs

Correctional services

- Indigenous Integrated Correctional Program (Canada)
- Te Piriti Special Treatment Unit (New Zealand)
- Strong Solid Spirit (QLD, Australia)
- Aboriginal Cultural Strengthening Program (NSW, Australia)

Community-controlled

- The Torch (Vic, Australia)
- Djiriba Waagura (NSW, Australia)
- Cultural, Social and Emotional Wellbeing Program, (WA, Australia)

(Dudgeon et al., 2024; Nathan et al., 2003)

Presentation 2

Incorporating cultural knowledge from First Nations health workers in the development of a prison-based program for First Nations people

Kai Clancy, Dr Alison Evans

Aims and method

Study:

- Aboriginal-led study using qualitative yarning methods
- Project governance included the Edith Collins Centre First Nations Reference Group
- Ethics approved by AH&MRC and WAAHEC

Aim:

- To understand how cultural practices are currently used as part of therapeutic programs in the community so we can use this knowledge to develop a SEWB program/s in prison

Methods:

- Yarning (qualitative semi-structured interviews)
- Aboriginal lens applied through data collection and analysis



Research Questions

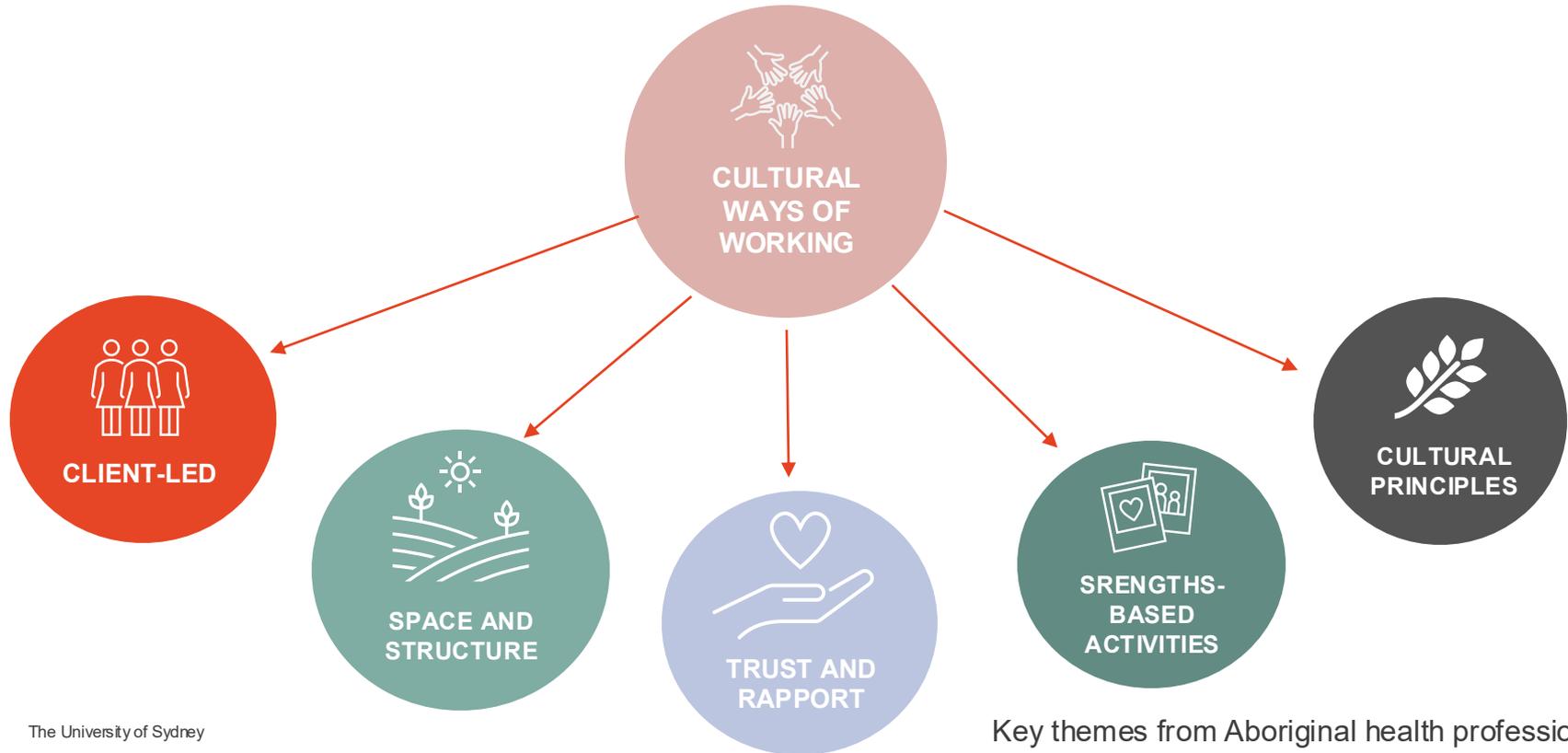
1. How were cultural practices used as part of therapeutic programs in the community?
2. How could this knowledge inform the development of a culturally-based social and emotional wellbeing program for young people in prison?



Summary participants

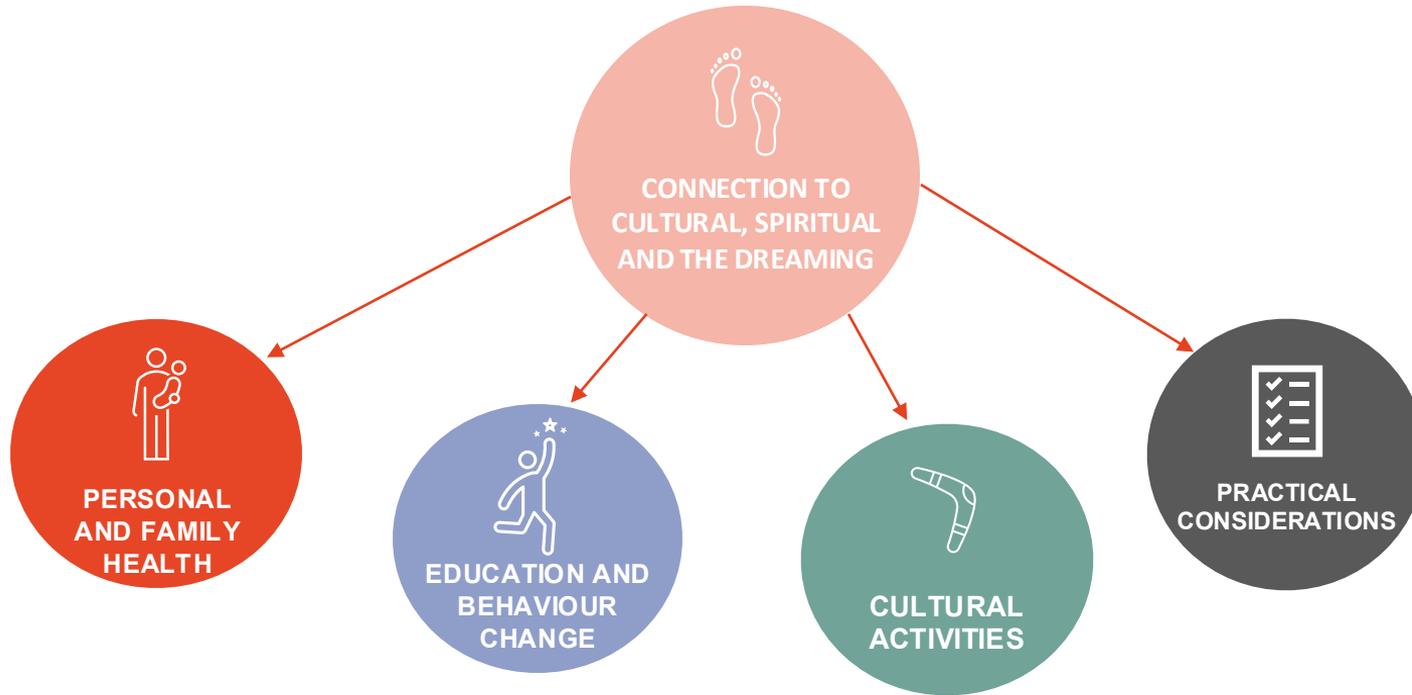


Key findings – Research Question 1



“I think you need to really build the rapport with them. A lot of people are quick to sit down with the paperwork and filling out referrals...but I think you really need to walk the path with them.” - Emma

Key findings – Research Question 2



“I think that if I was to implement a program in there, I think it's gotta be adapted almost all blackfella way, you know. I mean, I don't think sitting in a classroom teaching this stuff's ever gonna work.” - Dennis

Summary

- Client-led approaches to understand and heal underlying causes of alcohol and/or other drug use
- Relationship and trust building are key
- Importance of connection to culture, family, community, spirituality and emotions
- Next step pilot test with young people to understand what they want to learn

Presentation 3

Post-prison support for First Nations men in Australia and Canada: A strengths-based approach

Julie Matheson, The University of Sydney, NSW

Associate Professor Michael Doyle, The University of Sydney, NSW



Post-Release Experiences in Sydney and Toronto

- Qualitative project about the experiences of First Nations men attending either The Glen in NSW or Na Me Res in Toronto
- Yarning interviews conducted in-person at both sites by Michael Doyle
- Thematic coding by Lucy Peck, Julie Matheson, and Michael Doyle
- Ethical approval from University of Sydney, Toronto University Circle of Elders, and AH&MRC
 - With support from Babana Aboriginal Men's Group, Redfern, The Glen Centre, and Na Me Res, Toronto

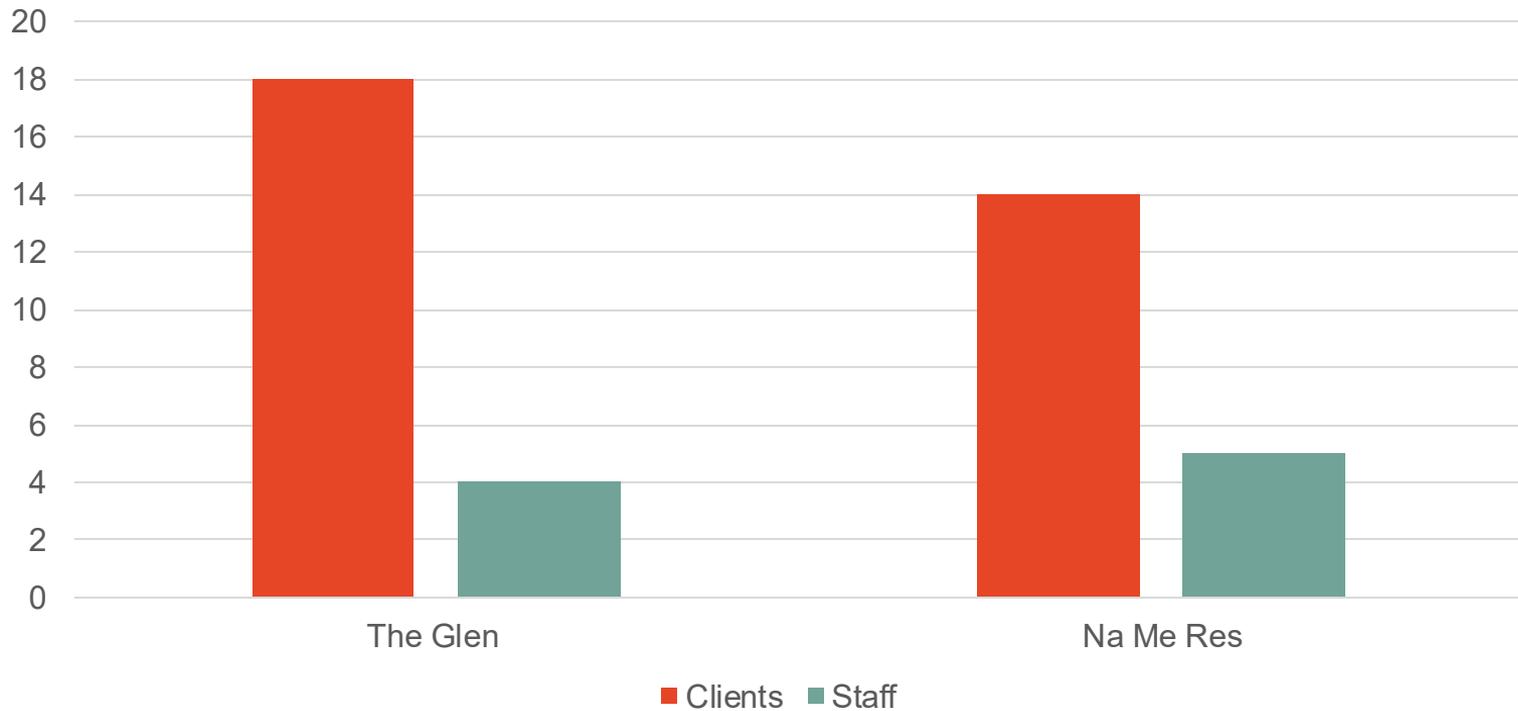


First Nation's Men's ways of
healing, growth, and strengths

Underlying reasons
behind their prison time

What prison
was like

Participants





Demographics

First Drug Use (range 8-15)

11

First police contact (range 5-25)

14

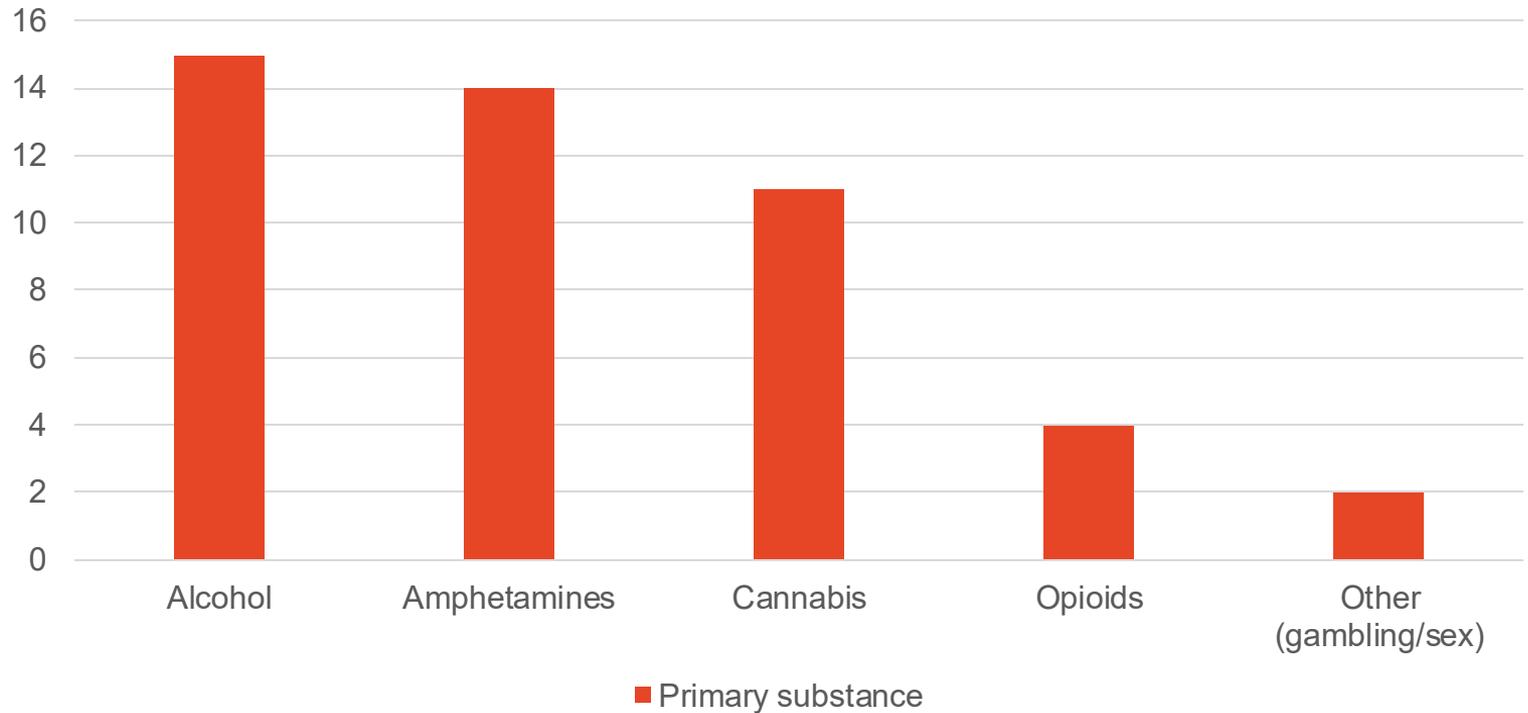
First incarceration (range 12-30)

17

Current age

36

Alcohol and Drug Use (Where Mentioned)





Overview of dataset

Client
Background

Drug and
Alcohol

Criminal
Justice
System

Post-release
experience

Post-release
plans

Therapeutic
needs

Trauma and
discrimination

Service
delivery and
feedback

Impacts of
post-release
programs



Theme highlight

Drug
and
Alcohol

Family and Friends

Pattern of use

Problems leading from use

Criminal
Justice
System

First time in prison

Prison sentences

Release



Drug and Alcohol

Family
and
Friends

Pattern
of use

Problems
leading
from use



Criminal Justice System

First time
in prison

Prison
sentences

Release



Next Steps

Post-release
experience

Therapeutic
Needs

Trauma and
Discrimination

Many
more...



Thank you

Thank you to all participants at Na Me Res and The Glen!

Investigators:

- PI: Associate Professor Michael Doyle
- Professor Michelle Dickson
- Professor Ethsi (Suzanne) Stewart
- Jeremy Heathcoate
- Alex Lee
- Associate Professor Rowena Ivers
- Karrah McCann
- Joe Coyte
- Kaiwarr Clancy
- Anna Grager
- Lucy Peck
- Julie Matheson

Discussion

Implementing strengths-based cultural approaches to support First Nations people in prison and post release

Steve Teekens, Na-Me-Res (Native Men's Residence), Toronto, Canada

Leeton McGuinness, The Glen Centre, Central Coast, NSW

Kaiwarr Clancy, The University of Sydney, NSW

Associate Professor Michael Doyle, The University of Sydney, NSW

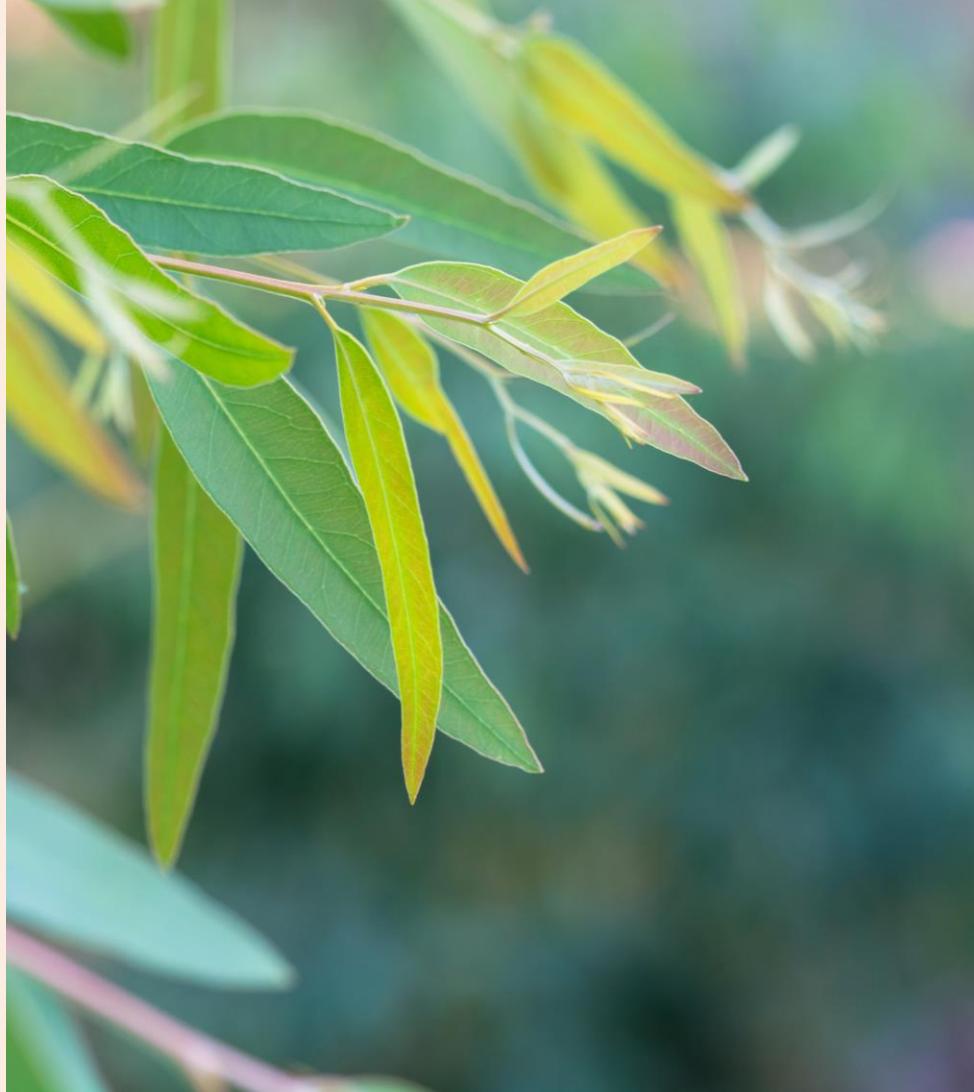
Thank you

Michael Doyle

E: michael.doyle@sydney.edu.au

**First Nations Health Research Program
Edith Collins Centre for Translational Research
in Alcohol, Drugs and Toxicology
edithcollinscentre.org.au**

**Sydney Medical School, Faculty of Medicine and
Health, The University of Sydney
sydney.edu.au/medicine-health**



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