



MEDIA RELEASE

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Train police in mental health says Indigenous National Health Leadership Forum

The National Health Leadership Forum (NHLF) has called for police to get better training to de-escalate situations involving people struggling with mental health.

The call comes after a situation in Geraldton, Western Australia (WA), where an Aboriginal woman with long standing complex mental issues died by police shooting after police were called by a family member to provide her with aid.

The NHLF says the incident has once again raised concerns about systemic issues that affect how police engage with both people with mental illnesses and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

“The Aboriginal woman who tragically lost her life has been let down by known systemic failures within the policing and mental health systems and a lack of resources and it is time the Western Australian Government did something about it”, said Ms Pat Turner, Chair of NHLF.

“There are serious questions that the WA Government must immediately answer. Why was lethal force used and why were eight police officers required to attend the victim’s house?”

Recent police responses to various mental health crisis situations in WA are highlighting to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that police are more likely to use lethal force in a mental health situation than they would if a non-Indigenous person was involved.

“This is further evidence of a dangerous trend where policing responses are severely disproportionate for Aboriginal people in WA. What cultural safety training is in place for police officers to work better with Aboriginal people?”

“We’re calling on the WA Government to make sure police have the skills and training to respond in a culturally safe way and can de-escalate situations involving people with mental health issues. This requires genuine partnership with Aboriginal people and organisations.”

The NHLF is deeply concerned about the absence of acute mental health services available in Geraldton.

“The Western Australian Government must do better by Aboriginal people and urgently address the lack of culturally appropriate mental health services particularly in regional and remote parts of the state. We know that Aboriginal Community Controlled Services provide better health outcomes for Aboriginal people. We need to start looking at what funding is available for mental health services for Aboriginal people and transition the funding across to the proven Aboriginal community-controlled sector. The most effective way to deliver cultural appropriate services is through Aboriginal led organisations and programs.”



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