

Apology to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People
from the Australian Psychological Society
delivered by Professor Tim Carey
at the Australian Psychological Society Congress - 15 September 2016

I'd like to begin by acknowledging the traditional custodians of the land upon which we are meeting the Wurrundjerri and Boonwerrung people of the Kulin nation and I'd like to pay my respects to their elders past and present.

I'd also like to pay my respects to the elders past and present of the Arrernte people of central Australia who are the traditional custodians of the land upon which Alice Springs is situated which is where I'm from.

And, finally I'd like to acknowledge the Aboriginal artist Nancy Gununwanga from Maningrida who created the Pandanus Mats design that I'm wearing

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Disparities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians and other Australians on a range of different factors are well documented. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience much higher rates of psychological distress, chronic disease, and incarceration than other Australians. They manage many more stressors on a daily basis and, although suicide did not exist in their cultures prior to colonisation it is now a tragically inflated statistic. The fact that these disparities exist and are long standing in a first world nation is deplorable and unacceptable.

As we understand these challenging issues in relation to wellbeing and health, it is very important that we tell the stories of the strengths and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are the proud custodians of the longest surviving cultures on our planet. With this in mind, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' resilience and resourcefulness could make a significant and positive impact on Australian society should they have the opportunity to contribute routinely in their areas of expertise.

We, as psychologists, have not always listened carefully enough to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. We have not always respected their skills, expertise, world views, and unique wisdom developed over thousands of years. Building on a concept initiated by Professor Alan Rosen, we sincerely and formally apologise to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians for:

- Our use of diagnostic systems that do not honour cultural belief systems and world views;
- The inappropriate use of assessment techniques and procedures that have conveyed misleading and inaccurate messages about the abilities and capacities of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people;
- Conducting research that has benefitted the careers of researchers rather than improved the lives of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participants;
- Developing and applying treatments that have ignored Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to healing and that have, both implicitly and explicitly, dismissed the importance of culture in understanding and promoting social and emotional wellbeing; and,
- Our silence and lack of advocacy on important policy matters such as the policy of forced removal which resulted in the Stolen Generations.

To demonstrate our genuine commitment to this apology, we intend to pursue a different way of working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that will be characterised by diligently:

- Listening more and talking less;
- Following more and steering less;
- Advocating more and complying less;
- Including more and ignoring less; and,
- Collaborating more and commanding less.

Through our efforts, in concert and consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, we envisage a different future. This will be a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people control what is important to them rather than having this controlled by others. It will be a future in which there are greater numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander psychologists and more positions of decision making and responsibility held by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Ultimately, through our combined efforts, this will be a future where Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people enjoy the same social and emotional wellbeing as other Australians.