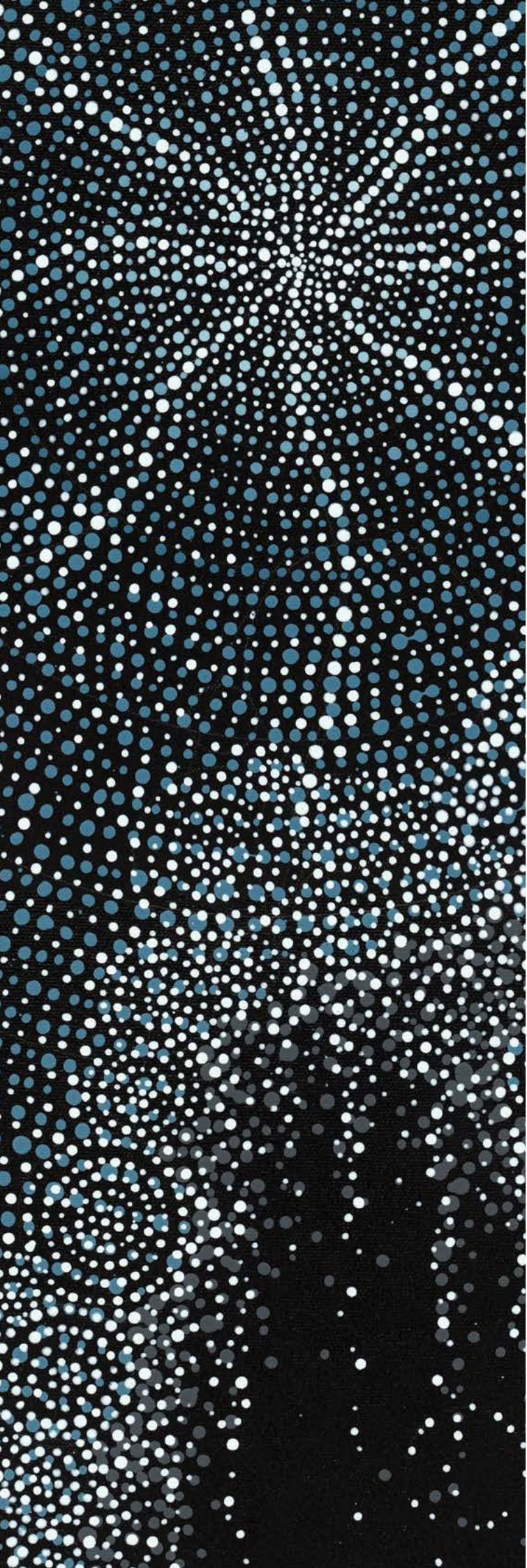




Joint Statement of Action

Connection to Country for
Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing



ARTWORK:

"The story of this painting comes from a series of paintings titled 'Family'.

In Aboriginal culture caring for Family includes caring for Country as Country is considered a key element of Aboriginal family responsibilities.

It's an acknowledgement to Leaders in our community, not only past and present but also our next generation leaders. Also to those who inspire others to be the best version of themselves.

It suggests the importance of how our present choices have impact on the people and environment now and into the future. That we are connected. Its about empowering ourselves through empowering others."

— Tony Wilson – Narungga/Ngarrindjeri

Tony is a contemporary artist based in Adelaide, Australia. He creates artworks that are intricate, refined, flowing and evocative.

He explores the themes of identity, authenticity, collective resonance, patterns and synchronicity, and connectedness in his work. He is inspired by moments or things that make you pause, stop, and bring you into the present.

Heavily influenced by his cultural heritage, interactions with people and nature, Tony's work propels us to "the space between our thoughts". He calls us to identify ourselves by our inner self, our essential core beings and to use them to interpret and filter the outer layers that build us; our culture, our personality and our emotions.

Self-empowerment is a central theme in Tony's art and he is passionate about teaching students through his work as an artist in residence at a school, running a youth art mentoring program. Over the past 18 years he has been involved in the education system outworking this passion.

Tony's art has been involved in number of exhibitions, most recently Our Mob 2018 at the Adelaide Festival Theatre winning the Don Dunstan Foundation Our Mob 'Emerging Artist Prize', also a solo exhibition at Tandanya. In 2016 he won the people's choice award for the "Peace is Personal" exhibition at the Black Diamond gallery Port Adelaide and was the 2017 recipient of the "Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander (ATSI) Award" for contribution to the arts. Tony currently holds a residency at Fontanelle Gallery and Studio in Port Adelaide."

Joint Statement of Action

Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing

SECTION 1: PREAMBLE

Aboriginal people are the First people and sovereign Nations of South Australia and their spiritual, social, cultural and economic practices are aligned to their traditional lands and waters. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), to which the Australian Government is a signatory, affirms Aboriginal people's right to self-determination.

The authors of this Statement recognise Aboriginal people as the traditional custodians of this land and Country. We respect the spiritual relationship between all Aboriginal nations and their Country and acknowledge the effects that colonisation has had and continues to have on Australia's first people. This Statement acknowledges the deep feelings of attachment and relationship of Aboriginal people to Country.

On Friday the 8th June, 2018, over 80 representatives from a number of different communities and organisations, across the health, environment and Aboriginal community sectors, attended the 'Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing' workshop. The purpose of the workshop was to gain a deeper understanding of how Connection to Country can be better promoted and integrated into research, policy and programs across the health and wellbeing, environment and Aboriginal sectors.

Workshop participants were asked to reflect on their own personal experiences with Connection to Country initiatives, and to provide advice on what they perceived to be the critical factors that could support more Aboriginal South Australians to connect with Country.

All workshop attendees, whose ideas and comments have shaped the themes and key asks outlined in this document, are considered the authors of this Joint Statement of Action.

The Healthy Parks Healthy People SA Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Working Group, have taken a lead role in finalising and producing this Joint Statement of Action.

The Key Principles (Section 3) and the Key Asks (Section 4) within this document outline the commitments and calls to action that form this Joint Statement of Action on Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing.

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY STATEMENT

For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, please be aware that there may be names or images of deceased people contained within this document.

SECTION 2: INTRODUCTION

1

This Statement is intended to be an advocacy tool and a document to guide partnership between the Aboriginal community and state government agencies. It documents an agreed understanding of the importance of Connection to Country for Aboriginal health and wellbeing, and articulates principles to guide how Aboriginal people in South Australia can be better supported to connect to Country through the combined action of government, the non-government sector and the community.

2

Aboriginal people have long understood and benefited from a strong relationship with Country. The reciprocal and interdependent relationship between Aboriginal people and their ancestral lands and seas is sustained by cultural knowledge and connection. This relationship, and the cultural practices and customs that strengthen and protect it, vary between places and communities. The relationship with Country is a personal one, Aboriginal people see themselves as belonging to Country, and every aspect of themselves and their life as holistically interconnected with Country. Connection to Country encompasses opportunities to be on and with Country.

3

We know that connection and/or re-connection to Country is a significant determinant of health and wellbeing for Aboriginal people, and is part of Aboriginal peoples' sense of belonging and self-determination. Importantly, 'Country' is more than a geographic area: it encompasses the values, places, resources, stories and cultural obligations associated with Aboriginal people's rights and identity. For Aboriginal people, Country, culture and language are intrinsically linked.

4

This long-standing understanding is now also being supported by an increasing body of western evidence that shows connection to family and community, land and sea, and culture and identity is integral to health from an Aboriginal perspective. Numerous studies also confirm the benefits that arise from Aboriginal people's reciprocal relationship with Country through Connection to Country initiatives. Caring for Country centres on the relationships between Aboriginal people and their Country, and includes activities that reinforce and support relationships with the physical, cultural, social, economic, and spiritual environment.

5

Supporting and providing opportunities for Aboriginal people to access and connect with Country is the joint responsibility of Government, the non-government sector, and the community as a whole. Everyone has a role to play in better understanding and acknowledging the importance of Connection to Country as a cultural determinant of Aboriginal health and wellbeing. Providing better access for Connection to Country initiatives supports Reconciliation in the community.

6

The 'Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing' workshop, held in June 2018, was convened by the Healthy Parks Healthy People SA Connection to Country Working Group. The workshop information recorded has been used to inform the development of the following sections of the Statement: Section 3 – Key Principles, and Section 4 – Key Asks or Calls to Action. Section 5 – Statement Endorsement identifies the organisations represented, whose voices have collectively contributed to the development of this Statement.

SECTION 3: JOINT STATEMENT OF ACTION - KEY PRINCIPLES

Principle 1:

ABORIGINAL LEADERSHIP

Aboriginal leadership is prioritised and recognised as critical in supporting Aboriginal people to connect to culture and Country.

Why this is important:

Leadership promotes learning through interaction and connection with Elders, community, Country and culture, and in particular engages and nurtures young Aboriginal people as emerging and future leaders. Aboriginal leadership requires the right people in the community sharing their knowledge and guiding people in the community to continue, and also revive, traditional spiritual teachings and practices to ensure a continued sense of connection with, and giving back to, Country.



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Principle 2:

A STRONG AND ACTIVE ABORIGINAL PUBLIC SECTOR WORKFORCE

Aboriginal people are able to make strong contributions across the public sector to shape policy, programs and services to improve outcomes for the Aboriginal community as well as shape and support the achievement of wider public sector goals. An Aboriginal cultural lens should be applied to all public sector policy decisions, to assess their potential impact for Aboriginal people, and to assess how certain Aboriginal cultural practices can be firmly embedded into the design of public policy.

Why this is important:

Aboriginal public sector employees improve the development of policies and programs and the delivery of services by providing a cultural lens that acknowledges the importance of Connection to Country. Retaining these positions, as well as identifying opportunities to incorporate additional positions for Aboriginal people in future restructures, ensures the maintenance and growth of a strong Aboriginal workforce.



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Principle 3:

SECURE AND SUSTAINED FUNDING FOR CONNECTION TO COUNTRY INITIATIVES

Programs and services to support Aboriginal connection and re-connection to Country have secure and sustained funding, rather than ad-hoc or short term funding, to ensure effective and sustainable investment now, and for future generations.

Why this is important:

Sustainable, secure and ongoing funding and support for Connection to Country initiatives is critical as it provides opportunities for Aboriginal employment, engagement with communities and strengthens recognition of Aboriginal culture and learning.



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Joint Statement of Action

Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing

Principle 4:

HEALING AND LEARNING THROUGH CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

The benefits of Connection to Country for healing and learning are embedded in the design and delivery of health, environment and education services.

Why this is important:

Being on Country, and learning about Country, contributes to Aboriginal people's sense of wellbeing and belonging, particularly at times of cultural significance. Healing, culture and Country are inextricably linked for Aboriginal people. Emerging evidence shows that health outcomes can be better and morbidity is lower among Aboriginal people who are able to live on and feel deeply connected to their Country, for example connecting with Country can have a restorative effect for Aboriginal people who have had adverse psychological experiences in childhood.

Aboriginal community controlled health services are a great example of culturally relevant health services that are able to be provided on Country, placing the health and healing of Aboriginal people back in the hands of the Aboriginal community.



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Principle 5:

PROMOTING AND PROTECTING PLACES OF ABORIGINAL CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Aboriginal people have access to places of cultural significance, particularly for healing and ceremonies. These places are protected and where appropriate, re-established and/or promoted to the South Australian community more broadly.

Why this is important:

Connecting with Country provides Aboriginal people with the ability to access places of cultural significance. Knowledge and promotion of these places is integral for the wellbeing of Aboriginal people; it enhances cultural identity, and awareness of cultural history and traditions. Promoting greater awareness of the importance of place in Aboriginal culture strengthens positive cultural identity which supports mental health and wellbeing.



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Principle 6:

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE ARE THE SOVEREIGN OWNERS OF THEIR CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE

Aboriginal communities have full ownership of their cultural knowledge, and this is recognised and valued by the broader South Australian community. Aboriginal people, as owners of this knowledge, are able to apply it autonomously and in partnership.

Why this is important:

Aboriginal People are the sovereign owners of their knowledge and therefore have ownership over the impact that this has for their Connection to Country and their health and wellbeing. Acknowledging and valuing the ownership and sovereignty of this knowledge is critical for addressing Aboriginal business, and also makes valued contributions to the broader SA community. Strengthening of Aboriginal voices is an effective way to address the historical and continued power imbalance experienced by Aboriginal people in our society. When working in partnership with Aboriginal communities the use of cultural knowledge is negotiated and informed by Aboriginal owners.

Principle 7:

CULTURE AND LANGUAGE AS DETERMINANTS OF ABORIGINAL HEALTH AND WELLBEING:

The government, the non-government sector and the general community recognise the significance of Country, culture and language as core determinants of Aboriginal health and wellbeing, and facilitate greater opportunities for Aboriginal people to connect with Country.

Why this is important:

For Aboriginal people, culture, Country and language are interwoven and inherently linked. Aboriginal languages, for example, are centred on metaphors of nature and Country and references to ancient culturally significant stories.

Recognising culture and language as determinants of Aboriginal health and wellbeing ensures that services are designed and delivered in culturally competent/appropriate ways that involves the inclusion of Aboriginal people. This recognition is essential in increasing opportunities for Aboriginal people to connect with Country.



The Kanku-Breakaways Conservation Park forms part of the traditional country of the Antakirinja Matuntjara Yankunytjatjara people. Photograph by Tricia Smith.



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Joint Statement of Action

Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing

Principle 8:

PARTNERSHIPS CREATE OPPORTUNITIES TO STRENGTHEN CONNECTION TO COUNTRY

Strong partnerships between Aboriginal nations, government and NGOs are established and maintained.

Why this is important:

Strong partnerships already exist between the Aboriginal community and environment sector, to support Aboriginal people to connect to Country. Building on this work and the strong foundation of Aboriginal community-controlled health services creates opportunities for different sectors to work together to develop reciprocal approaches to care for, and connect to, Country and thereby improve outcomes for Aboriginal people. The application of co-governance mechanisms can create more equitable partnerships that will strengthen Aboriginal autonomy and authority in decision making. This in turn delivers tangible benefits determined by the Aboriginal community and for the Aboriginal community. Partnerships provide an opportunity for sectors to work collaboratively towards common goals and to share often limited resources.



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Principle 9:

ABORIGINAL PEOPLE HAVE THE RIGHT TO CARE FOR THEIR COUNTRY

Aboriginal interests in relation to their Country are recognised, and greater equality in the allocation of natural resources for Aboriginal nations is realised.

Why this is important:

The historical exclusion of Aboriginal people from the ownership and control of their traditional lands and waters should be redressed through co-management processes. This will enable Aboriginal people to connect or re-connect with Country. This also has significance in protecting ancestral lands that are vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.



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SECTION 4: KEY ASKS

The Key Asks are the specific actions that the authors of this statement invite partners - including the Premier, the South Australian Government, local government, non-government organisations and the community - to commit to delivering. These contribute to the themes outlined in the Key Principles (Section 3):

1

That the Premier, in his role as Premier and as Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, incorporates Connection to Country as a core element of the new State Government Aboriginal Affairs Action Plan, and seeks to incorporate it into the Landscape SA legislative reform. This will demonstrate a strong commitment across government towards improving Aboriginal health and wellbeing (combined with the provision of appropriate funding and resources to support this) and ensure future and sustainable implementation of strategies to establish Aboriginal people's Connection to Country as a state-wide policy priority.

2

That the Premier, in his role as Premier and as Minister of Aboriginal Affairs, supports the growth and development of partnerships between Aboriginal Nations and key government organisations, industry and the non-government sector to work towards Connection to Country goals. This will support the creation of long term outcomes such as the improvement of Aboriginal health and wellbeing and greater employment opportunities for Aboriginal people.

3

That the Governor is invited to declare his support and recognition of the importance of Connection to Country and the significance of this in promoting Aboriginal health and wellbeing.

4

That state and local governments acknowledge, recognise and value the cultural authority and status of all Aboriginal people. This includes strengthening Aboriginal leadership across government and ensuring that the formal representation of Aboriginal people on committees and boards is appropriately remunerated and supported. This should incorporate the development of a whole-of-government framework to recognise the intellectual property of Aboriginal people's knowledge.

5

That state and local governments strengthen and foster partnerships with community controlled organisations, to seek advice into policy and service delivery and to ensure that Aboriginal cultural expertise is valued and equitably remunerated. A system should be established where Aboriginal Elders are more formally recognised for their knowledge and leadership, and greater opportunity is created for Aboriginal youth to be mentored as future community leaders.

6

That the Department for Education and the Aboriginal Commissioner for Children and Young People support Aboriginal youth leadership in all relevant organisations and forums, including through schools.

SECTION 4: KEY ASKS

7

That the South Australian Government takes affirmative action to increase the number of Aboriginal people employed across the public sector. This includes a specific focus on building the capacity of Aboriginal people to progress to senior management and Executive roles. This requires formal and cultural mentoring and other workforce development/planning strategies. Such strategies will support Aboriginal young people and new public sector recruits to plan for a long-term public sector career. This will enable better retention and continuity of Aboriginal public sector employees.

8

That the South Australian Government increases the status and expands the use of Aboriginal languages within the public sector in partnership and with permission from the relevant Nations and organisations. This will create a system that recognises the intrinsic link between culture, Country and language for Aboriginal people and embeds Aboriginal ways of seeing, doing and being across the sector. This includes funding the revival of Aboriginal languages across South Australia and establishing a mandate to teach Aboriginal history, culture and languages (through an Aboriginal cultural lens) throughout the South Australian education system.

9

That state and local government employees at all levels are required to attend cultural awareness, competence and responsiveness training that is Nation and Country specific. In the spirit of Reconciliation, this will create better recognition across the public sector of past government policies that have impacted Aboriginal people and communities.

10

That Healthy Parks Healthy People SA, in partnership with Aboriginal researchers, shares and promotes the Aboriginal and western scientific evidence about the benefits of connecting to Country for all Aboriginal people.

11

That Healthy Parks Healthy People SA promotes and advocates for Connection to Country projects, in particular Indigenous ranger and co-management programs. That Healthy Parks Healthy People SA, in partnership with Aboriginal communities and young people, establishes new ways to engage young people in Connection to Country programs, including through modern media and the arts.

12

That Healthy Parks Healthy People SA establishes an evaluation framework to support the development of an evidence base to guide future program and policies that support increased opportunities for all Aboriginal people to connect to Country.

SECTION 5: STATEMENT ENDORSEMENT

This Joint Statement of Action represents the collective voices of the group of representatives in attendance at the 'Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing' workshop, held on 8 June, 2018.

The workshop proceedings and discussion of this group informed this Joint Statement of Action. A group of self-nominated workshop attendees (the Statement Reference Group) met with the Healthy Parks Healthy People SA Connection to Country Working Group to further refine this Joint Statement of Action.

The agencies, groups and organisations represented at this workshop include:

The Healthy Parks Healthy People SA – Connection to Country for Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Working Group

- **Kim Morey**
(SA Aboriginal Chronic Disease Consortium)
- **Wendy Keech**
(Health Translation SA)
- **Ian Liddy**
(Department of the Premier and Cabinet, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation)
- **Lachlan Sutherland**
(Department for Environment and Water)
- **Rachel Pfitzner**
(Department for Environment and Water)
- **Carmel Williams**
(Department for Health and Wellbeing)
- **Linn Barelli**
(Department for Health and Wellbeing)
- **Amy Porcelli**
(Department for Health and Wellbeing)
- **Beth Keough**
(Department for Health and Wellbeing)
- **Dana Shen**

Aboriginal Community Members, including Elders

Aboriginal Health Council SA (AHCSA)

Adelaide Primary Health Network

Alinytjara Wilurara Natural Resources Management Board

Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation

Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation

Council of Aboriginal Elders of South Australia (CAESA)

Central Adelaide Local Health Network (CALHN)

Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS)

Ceduna Koonibba Aboriginal Health Service Aboriginal Corporation

SA Aboriginal Chronic Disease Consortium – Community Representative

Conservation Council SA

Conservation SA

Country & Outback Health

Country Health SA

Department for Education

Department for Environment and Water

Department for Health and Wellbeing

Department of Human Services

Diabetes SA

Flinders University

Gawler Ranges Aboriginal Corporation

Healing Foundation – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander

Heart Foundation

Indigenous Peoples Organisation Australia

Moorundi Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Service

Mutawintji Local Aboriginal Land Council

Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority

Northern Health Network/Sonder

Office of the Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement SA

Pangula Mannamurna Aboriginal Corporation

River Murray and Mallee Aboriginal Corporation

Royal Adelaide Hospital

Royal Flying Doctor Service

SA Aboriginal Chronic Disease Consortium

SA Ambulance

Salt and Pepper Outreach

South Australian Aboriginal Advisory Council

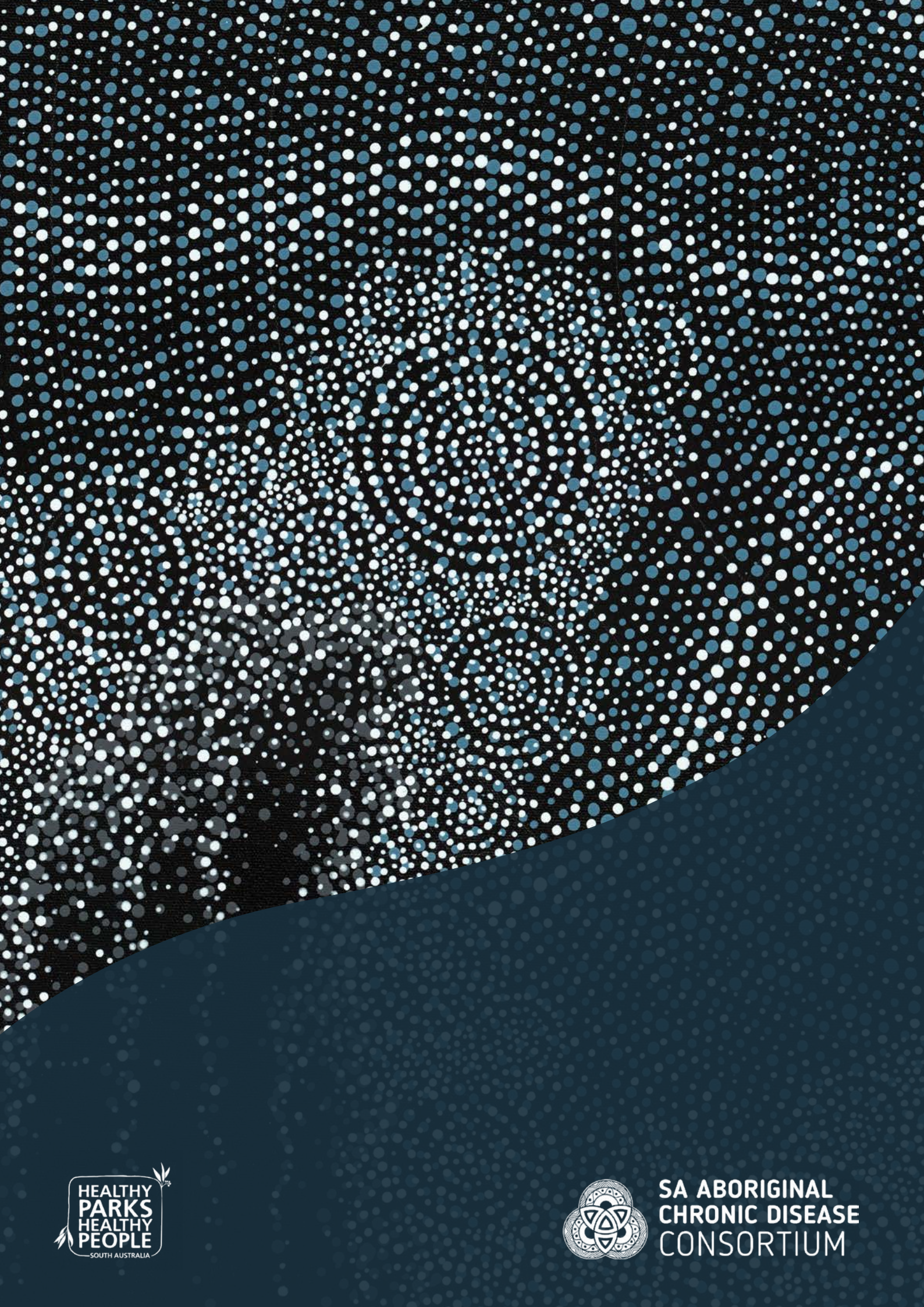
South Australian Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI) – Wardliparingga

South Australian Native Title Services

University of Adelaide

University of South Australia

Youth Cancer Service SA/NT



SA ABORIGINAL
CHRONIC DISEASE
CONSORTIUM