



BANKSIA BULLETIN

JULY 2024

Let's talk about perinatal mental health & cultural safety

This July, we were thrilled to celebrate NAIDOC Week: "Keep the Fire Burning: Blak, Loud, and Proud." This week is dedicated to honoring the rich history, vibrant culture, and remarkable achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. It's also a wonderful time to highlight the importance of creating psychologically safe birthing experiences for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents in Far North Queensland.



What is meant by cultural safety in birthing?

As a helping professional, it is important that we understand the importance of cultural practice and beliefs in the birthing process, ensure that information about pregnancy, childbirth, and parenting is accessible and culturally appropriate and work towards creating and promoting services that are culturally safe and responsive to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander parents. This means respecting and incorporating cultural beliefs and traditions to ensure parents feel understood, respected, and supported. This includes:

- **Respecting Cultural Knowledge:** Integrating traditional birthing practices can provide immense comfort and reassurance. This might include birthing positions, practices, and rituals passed down through generations[1].
- **Cultural Support Workers:** Having Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural support workers present during childbirth offers invaluable emotional and cultural support. These workers understand the cultural context and bridge the gap between medical staff and parents[2].
- **Community Connection:** Encourage parents to stay connected with Elders and community members who can offer guidance, support, and a sense of belonging. This connection provides a strong support network[3].
- **Holistic Care:** Adopting a holistic approach that considers the physical, emotional, and spiritual needs of parents is crucial. This includes respecting cultural practices and providing care that aligns with their values and beliefs[4].

Spotlight on... Ngamumu (For Mothers)

"Delivering a creative and cultural project that supports mothers and their babies during the first 1000 days. Artists work with communities to explore ancestral practices to relearn, reinvigate and reimagine parenting for the modern mama that is inclusive of her cultural and creative self." - For Mothers

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Understanding Perinatal Mental Health and Birth Trauma

Perinatal Mental Health [PMH] refers to the emotional and psychological well-being of parents during pregnancy and the postpartum period. This phase, often filled with excitement and joy, can also be a time of significant emotional upheaval.

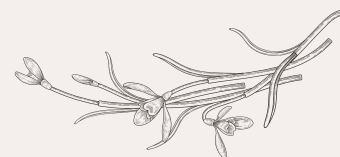
Recognising the signs and symptoms of PMH issues is the first step in supporting affected parents. Encouraging open conversations about mental health can reduce stigma and promote early intervention. PMH includes a spectrum of conditions such as:

- **Perinatal Anxiety and Depression:** Anxiety and depression can affect parents during pregnancy (antenatal) and after childbirth (postnatal). Symptoms may include persistent sadness, anxiety, irritability, and changes in sleep and appetite[5].
- **Postpartum Psychosis:** A rare but severe mental health condition that can occur after childbirth, characterized by hallucinations, delusions, and extreme mood swings. Immediate medical attention is crucial[6].
- **Birth-Related PTSD:** Trauma from childbirth can lead to post-traumatic stress disorder, causing flashbacks, severe anxiety, and emotional numbness[7].

Birth Trauma is the psychological distress experienced during or after childbirth. Factors contributing to birth trauma can include:

- **Medical Interventions:** Unplanned C-sections, use of forceps or vacuum extraction, and emergency procedures can be distressing[8].
- **Complications:** Situations like excessive bleeding, severe tearing, or life-threatening conditions for the baby can be traumatic[9].
- **Perceived Lack of Control:** Feeling unheard or powerless during the birthing process can leave lasting emotional scars[10].

Recognising birth trauma is crucial for providing appropriate support. Parents experiencing birth trauma may benefit from counseling and support groups to process their experiences and emotions.



Gender Disappointment

Gender Disappointment is a complex emotional response that some parents may experience when they discover their baby's sex differs from their hopes or expectations. This feeling is natural and can be challenging to navigate. Here's how it can impact new parents and ways to work through it:

- **Acknowledging Feelings:** It's important for parents to recognize and validate their feelings of disappointment. Suppressing these emotions can lead to greater distress later on[11].
- **Talking About It:** Encouraging open and honest conversations about gender disappointment can help parents process their emotions. Discussing these feelings with a partner, friend, or therapist can provide relief and perspective[12].
- **Finding Support:** Joining support groups where parents can share similar experiences can be beneficial. Knowing they are not alone can help parents feel more understood and less isolated[13].
- **Focusing on the Positive:** Shifting focus to the joy of having a healthy baby and the unique qualities they will bring can help parents move past disappointment[14].
- **Seeking Professional Help:** If feelings of disappointment persist, seeking the help of a mental health professional can provide parents with strategies to cope and adapt[15].



Supporting New Parents

- **Listen and Validate:** Active listening can be incredibly supportive. Validate their feelings and experiences without offering unsolicited advice. Sometimes, knowing that someone is there to listen can make a significant difference[16].
- **Encourage Self-Care:** New parents often neglect their own needs. Encourage them to take breaks, engage in hobbies, or simply rest. Simple acts like a warm bath or a short walk can be rejuvenating[17].
- **Offer Practical Help:** Assist with daily tasks such as cooking, cleaning, or grocery shopping. Even small acts of kindness can alleviate the burden on new parents[18].
- **Connect Them with Resources:** Provide information about local support groups, mental health professionals, and parenting resources. Knowing where to seek help can be empowering for new parents[19].
- **Promote Healthy Sleep:** Emphasize the importance of rest. Suggest taking turns with night-time feedings or napping when the baby sleeps to ensure they get adequate rest[20].
- **Normalise Seeking Help:** Encourage parents to seek professional help if they're struggling. Remind them that seeking support is a sign of strength, not weakness[21].

Local services for Culturally Safe Birthing Practices in FNQ

Wuchopperen Health Service: Located in Cairns and offering comprehensive maternal and child health services that are culturally appropriate for First Nations families; including, antenatal care, birthing support, and postnatal care, with a focus on incorporating traditional practices and community involvement.

Mareeba Hospital: Providing culturally sensitive maternity care to First Nations families. The hospital works closely with local Indigenous health workers and Elders to ensure that cultural practices and traditions are respected and integrated into the birthing process.

Apunipima Cape York Health Council: Apunipima delivers culturally appropriate maternal and child health services across Cape York, including antenatal and postnatal care. Their Mums and Bubs program supports pregnant women and new mothers with health education, home visits, and community support, emphasizing traditional knowledge and practices.

Yarrabah Health Service: This service provides maternal and child health care to the Yarrabah community. The program includes culturally safe antenatal care, birthing support, and postnatal care, with a strong emphasis on community involvement and support from Indigenous health worker.

Mookai Rosie: Offering primary care services and accommodation to First Nations families from Cape York, NPA and Torres Strait regions while they are in Cairns, including health, nurse practitioners, midwifery, social and emotional wellbeing and First Nations health worker teams. For full reference list, please visit www.banksiamhc.com.

For more local resources:



Words from our founder: Understanding and supporting perinatal mental health and birth trauma is essential for the well-being of new parents. This NAIDOC Week, we celebrated the rich cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and advocate for culturally safe birthing practices. By working together, we can create a supportive environment where all parents feel respected, understood, and empowered. For more information or support, please contact Banksia Mental Health Care. We're here to help. Always was, always will be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Land -

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