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**ORYGEN CULTURAL
STRENGTHENING PLAN**
2021-2025

AUTHOR ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This Cultural Strengthening Plan is my attempt at demonstrating what is possible with mainstream support for self-determination and First Nations leadership. Cultural strengthening at Orygen is relational, not transactional. Sometimes we move slowly, but we move together; and we always put our cultures first. In this way, Orygen will contribute to the social and emotional wellbeing of our young people, and to our future. Thank you to Orygen's First Nations Advisory Group and Strategic First Nations Development Advisor, Leah Johnston, without whom none of this would have been possible. Thank you to Orygen's leadership for your belief, confidence and investment in me and the First Nations Advisory Group.

– **Oliver Tye**, First Nations Statement of Commitment Coordinator



ORYGEN CULTURAL
STRENGTHENING PLAN 2021 -2025

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Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to the First Nations people living today.

Cover artwork by **Emrhan Tjapanangka Sultan**, Luritja clan of the Western Desert
'Honey ants and the rivers of hope to sharing knowledge', 2018

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INTRODUCTION

FOREWORD *By Auntie Joyce Doyle*

Orygen plays a major role in determining the future of youth mental health in Australia and the world. As a sector leader, Orygen is setting the precedent for collaborative work with First Nations leaders to improve the level of cultural safety of its services for First Nations young people. The work that has been done to date, and the commitment from Orygen and First Nations leaders to continue this partnership, supports striving for the level of cultural safety that our young people expect from the mental health sector.

Orygen demonstrates commitment to recognising and following First Nations leadership by actively privileging First Nations voices in the process of cultural strengthening. The Orygen Statement of Commitment to the First Nations of Australia is the result of honest and open dialogue between Orygen and the First Nations Advisory Group. It articulates clearly the guiding principles of a successful partnership.

These principles are: a collaborative and strengths-based approach to First Nations resilience and knowledge, the acceptance of responsibility for our roles, and a commitment to the ongoing process of cultural strengthening.

The First Nations team, with the support of the First Nations Advisory Group, is responsible for guiding the process of cultural strengthening. Responsibility for following the process of cultural strengthening rests with each individual staff member of Orygen. It is a professional expectation, and the expectation of our young people that this responsibility is met.

The nuance of this arrangement makes it unique and progressive in a way that will give Orygen an opportunity to show Australia and the world just why it remains a leader and a source of innovation and inspiration.

Auntie Joyce is a Yorta Yorta woman from Shepparton, Victoria.

Throughout her working life, spanning over 40 years, Joyce has had a significant and positive impact on the health and wellbeing of her community. Working in areas of health, education, leadership and cultural recognition, her strengths lie in the support she provides her community, encouraging empowerment and self-determination and leading by example.

The strongest resource Joyce has relied on is the Rumbalara Football and Netball Club, which provides a base for cultural identity and safety for the community. For Joyce, this journey has been slow and she has watched her community's youth suffer in silence and rely on family strengths and support. She feels there is a huge gap in resources available to support the young people and their social and emotional wellbeing via a strong cultural setting such as Rumbalara Football and Netball Club.

It is with great pleasure and excitement that I welcome the creation of Orygen's Cultural Strengthening Plan. It demonstrates our deep commitment to this overdue and essential process of cultural strengthening and to ensuring it is led and guided by First Nations voices. Our Orygen Statement of Commitment to the First Nations of Australia has been formulated through an inspiring dialogue between Orygen and the First Nations Advisory Group. My sense is that we have so much to learn,

but there is a huge appetite for this to happen. We have defined some key principles and now it is up to all of us to put these into practice.

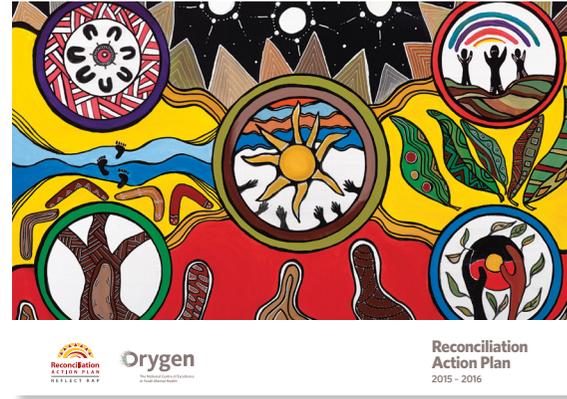
We are so fortunate to be able to draw on the collective wisdom of the First Nations team and the First Nations Advisory Group in our journey towards cultural strengthening. However, this is a journey that we must all contribute to and help shape. I am especially motivated to make cultural strengthening and acknowledgement of First Nations

culture central to everything we do. I believe this is a shared desire among our staff and a change that, through our national roles and influence, we can contribute to more widely as we learn how to do so in partnership with our First Nations team and First Nations Advisory Group. We operate at so many levels from grassroots locally, through the nation, and around the world. If we can be innovative and influential in this arena as in so many others we should have an important role to play.



We are so fortunate to be able to draw on the collective wisdom of the First Nations team and the First Nations Advisory Group in our journey towards cultural strengthening.

HISTORY



Orygen's inaugural Cultural Strengthening Plan was completed in 2021, but this was by no means the first year that Orygen made steps towards supporting the First Nations agenda within Orygen. Previous years had taught us many lessons; finding what worked at Orygen did not happen overnight.

ORYGEN RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN 2015-2016

In 2015 Orygen released a Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP). This RAP was what Reconciliation Australia defines as a Reflect RAP. A Reflect RAP sets out the necessary steps to prepare an organisation for reconciliation initiatives in the future. The Orygen Reflect RAP 2015-2016 was overseen by a RAP working group.

Many of the passionate individuals involved in the RAP working group are still involved in the current Cultural Strengthening Plan Working Group (CSPWG), bringing with them extensive corporate knowledge and experience in the challenges of creating

cross-organisational change. Unfortunately, efforts towards progressing the Orygen Reflect RAP 2015-2016 were delayed by major organisational changes.

CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PLAN

After the completion of several major organisational changes, Orygen revisited its obligations to First Nations. Orygen took a new approach by appointing a First Nations Advisory Group (FNAG) and creating an Orygen Statement of Commitment to the First Nations of Australia, which stipulates its implementation through a Cultural Strengthening Plan (CSP).

Given Orygen's core business as a youth mental health service delivery, research and advocacy organisation, it was decided that Orygen could best contribute to reconciliation by focussing on improving its cultural safety and its ability to respond to the priorities and aspirations of First Nations people. This philosophy serves as the basis of the Orygen Cultural Strengthening Plan 2021-2025.

The Orygen Statement of Commitment to the First Nations of Australia (Statement of Commitment) is the centrepiece of the First Nations agenda at Orygen. The Statement of Commitment outlines Orygen's commitment to the mental health and social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) aspirations of First Nations young people, and to the broader aspirations of First Nations in Australia.



The Orygen Statement of Commitment to the First Nations of Australia

Orygen acknowledges the Traditional Owners of the lands we are on and pays respect to their Elders past and present. Orygen recognises and respects their cultural heritage, beliefs and relationships to Country, which continue to be important to the First Nations people living today.

This Statement of Commitment guides all First Nations activities at Orygen.

1. Orygen acknowledges and recognises:
 - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples as the First Nations of Australia.
 - The resilience, strength, aspirations and the right to self-determination of First Nations peoples.
 - The loss and grief held by the First Nations caused by dislocation from traditional lands, loss of lives and freedom, and the forced removal of children.
 - The ongoing harm done to First Nations by mainstream policies and practices.
 - The continuing impact of these factors on the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations young people.
2. Orygen will work to build strong relationships and meaningful partnerships with First Nations people and organisations, particularly First Nations young people and organisations that work with First Nations young people.
3. Orygen is committed to understanding and acknowledging Australia's history and its impact on the social and emotional wellbeing of First Nations young people. Orygen will promote and celebrate First Nations cultures and build cultural capability at every level of the organisation, acknowledging that the development of cultural capability is an ongoing learning experience.
4. Orygen will pursue opportunities to support the development of First Nations people and organisations.
5. Orygen is committed to implementing reform guided by these principles via the Cultural Strengthening Plan and other works.



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Artwork by Emrhan Tjapanangka Sultan,
Luritja clan of the Western Desert
'Honey ants and the rivers of hope
to sharing knowledge', 2018

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CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PROGRAM

CULTURAL STRENGTHENING AND CULTURAL SAFETY

Throughout this document the terms *cultural safety* and *cultural strengthening* are used to describe the dimension along which Orygen can improve its services for First Nations young people and their communities. Cultural safety is the aim and cultural strengthening is the process by which Orygen can progress towards cultural safety. Cultural safety has no single definition, however, in this context, it is 'about acknowledging the barriers to clinical effectiveness arising from the inherent power imbalance between provider and patient'.¹

Cultural safety seeks to achieve care that removes systemic barriers. It aims to provide a lens through which care can be critically examined to ensure an awareness of power dynamics in relationships, understand colonising frameworks with a view to decolonising practice, and understand value systems as they are applied to the provision of

care. Acceptance that it is patients who will determine the cultural safety of service rather than the service providers is critical to achieving cultural safety.

Examples of systemic barriers that may obstruct care, research and other engagements include rigid policy frameworks that perpetuate colonial values, ways of knowing, being and doing that underpin services that aren't shared by the young person/ community, and when ways of communicating don't allow equitable relationships to be built. A culturally safe environment is enhanced when First Nations peoples are able to meaningfully and sustainably contribute to a spectrum of work across the organisation, embedded in both strategic leadership and service provision.

Cultural strengthening is a process that requires organisational responsiveness to the work of First Nations peoples that enriches, expands and ultimately transforms through self-reflection. Cultural strengthening at Orygen

asks us to examine and confront those elements of our systems, practice and our being that colonise, exclude or otherwise harm or prevent an individual from accessing services based on their identity and culture.

CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PLAN WORKING GROUP (CSPWG)

Orygen's CSPWG is comprised of up to 25 members, excluding members of the First Nations team. Twenty-two places are reserved for Orygen employees and three are reserved for First Nations stakeholders who are not Orygen employees. The remit of the CSPWG is to work with the FNAG to develop and implement activities that deliver on the Statement of Commitment as part of the Cultural Strengthening Plan.

FIRST NATIONS ADVISORY GROUP (FNAG)

The FNAG is Orygen's source of strategic advice on the delivery of the Statement of Commitment. This requires the FNAG



membership to be active in communicating the expectations and aspirations of First Nations young people across Australia to the CSPWG and the First Nations team.

The FNAG represents Orygen's support for the sovereignty of First Nations representative structures, recognising the ability of First Nations leaders to speak on behalf of their communities and empowering First Nations to present a united voice.

FIRST NATIONS VOICE WITHIN ORYGEN

Safely and effectively integrating a First Nations voice into a mainstream organisation requires mutual trust and investment. FNAG members are not Orygen employees, they are independent advisors appointed based on their expertise and status as recognised advocates for First Nations communities. The FNAG provides high-quality advice on First Nations activities as well as strategic advice on the principles of First Nations work and cultural strengthening at Orygen.

As the FNAG members are not employees of Orygen, they are wholly accountable to First Nations. This takes the burden off First Nations employees to represent First Nations perspectives within the confines of a role in a mainstream organisation.

The First Nations team contains identified roles. The team provides a safe and effective interface between the FNAG and Orygen, allowing First Nations ways of communicating, thinking, and working to be meaningfully translated into outputs that fit the mainstream processes of Orygen.

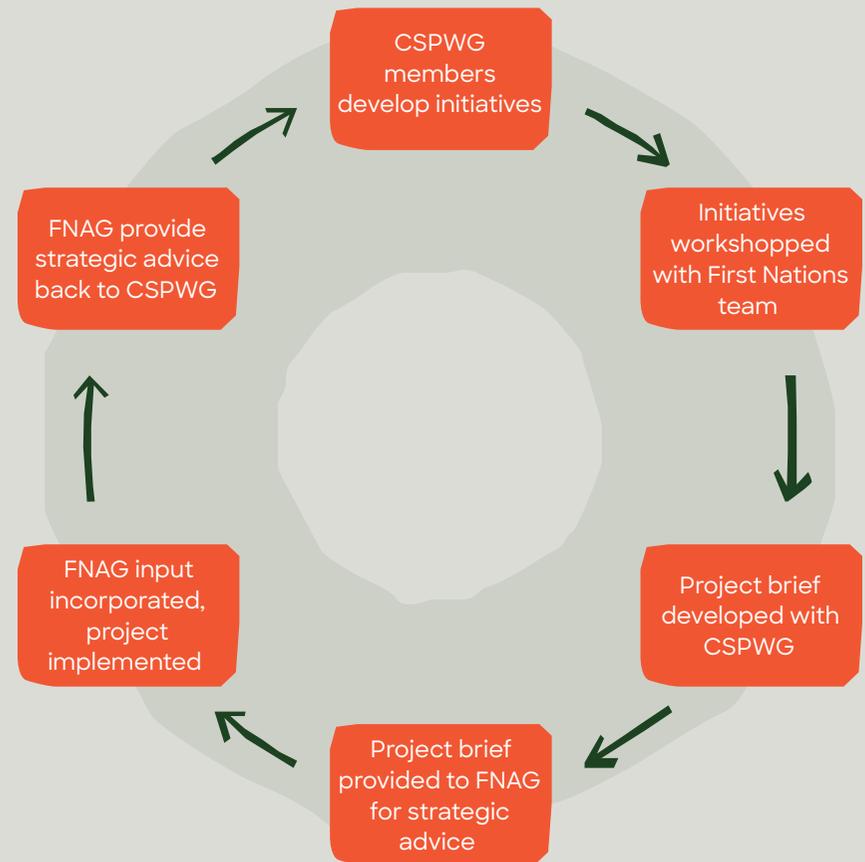


FIGURE 1.
CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PLAN WORKING GROUP
AND FIRST NATIONS ADVISORY GROUP WORKING RELATIONSHIP

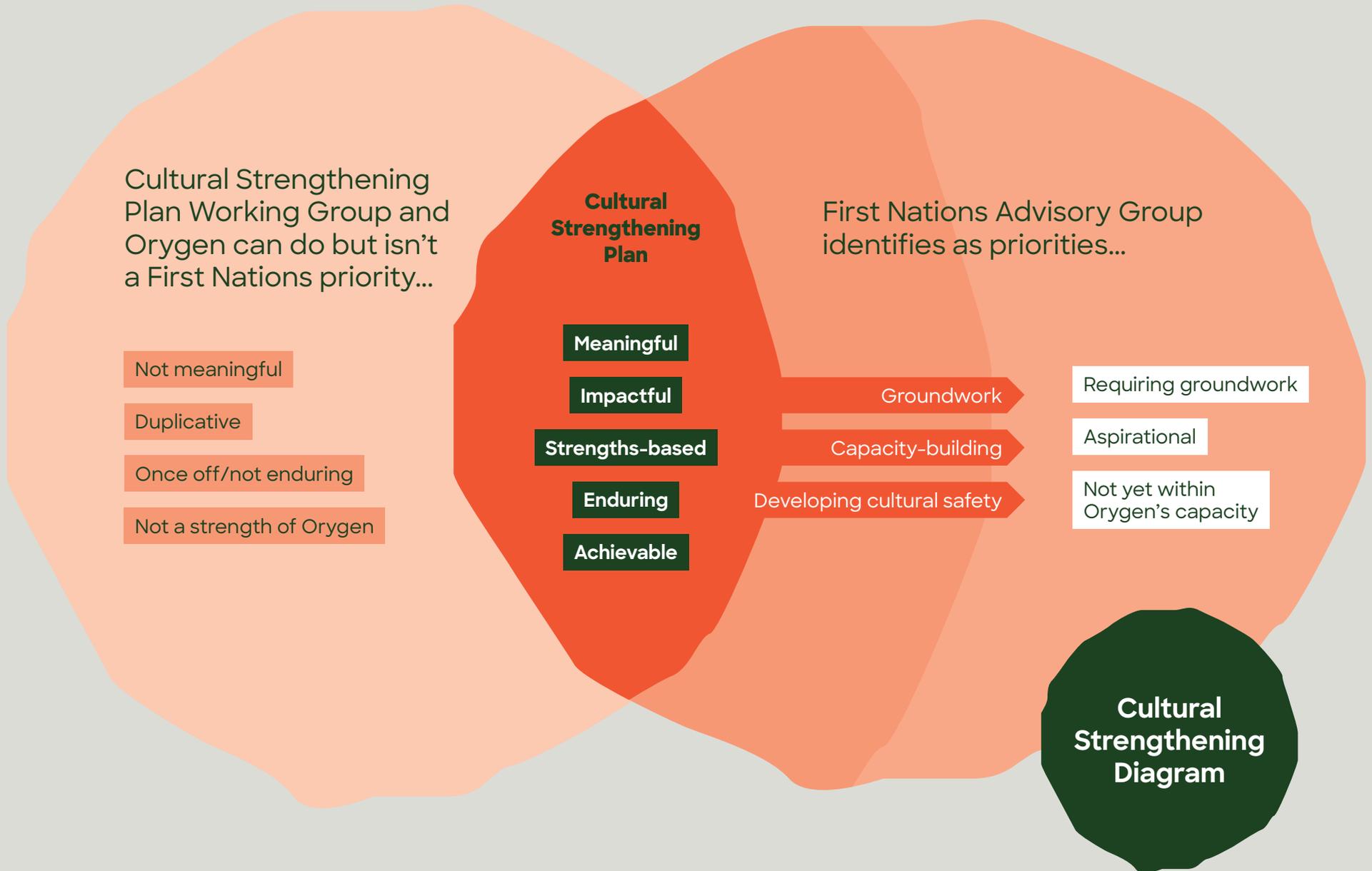
CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PROGRAM

In order to effectively and sustainably deliver on Orygen's Statement of Commitment, cultural strengthening activities that meet the priorities of the FNAG but are also feasible for Orygen must be prioritised. The following diagram lays out the framework used to prioritise the activities and intended outcomes of the Orygen CSP.

There are many cultural strengthening activities Orygen is capable of performing that are relevant to the Orygen Statement of Commitment, however not all are appropriate. Additionally, Orygen isn't immediately capable of meeting all the goals and aspirations articulated by the FNAG. These goals and aspirations will evolve over time, furthering the need for continuous cultural strengthening. Establishing these strategic priorities is only possible when the FNAG is empowered to use First Nations ways of problem-solving and communicating to deliver the quality of advice necessary to ensure Orygen's Statement of Commitment is met.

The First Nations team plays a crucial role in mediating this dialogue. The role of the First Nations team requires exceptional cultural mediation as well as administrative capability to create a space where the FNAG can operate in a culturally safe way to produce advice that is translated into effective actions and meaningful outcomes in a mainstream setting.





THE CULTURAL STRENGTHENING PLAN

PRIORITIES, ACTIONS AND NEXT STEPS

In 2021, Orygen has taken a significant leap forward. The First Nations team, the CSPWG and the FNAG have all undergone transformations resulting in the emergence of a clear line of accountability between Orygen and the FNAG, and clear roles and expectations of the First Nations team and the CSPWG.

The priorities of the CSP 2021-2025 have been developed as part of the ongoing dialogue between Orygen and the FNAG, as well as in consultation with key stakeholders and end-users. These priorities are aimed at consolidating the foundations established in 2021 and before, and investing in key areas of work which will expand to 2025 and beyond. Each priority specifies actions to the level of detail appropriate to the status of the work area during the timeframe of this CSP.

CULTURAL STRENGTHENING

At the heart of the Statement of Commitment is the process of cultural strengthening. This occurs at the system as well as the individual level. Cultural

strengthening is the responsibility of the whole organisation, however due to the limited resources available to the First Nations team, key areas have been targeted for specialised development. This specialised development goes above and beyond the learning outcomes of generalised cultural strengthening activities, providing researchers and clinicians with practical skills which will improve their interactions with First Nations individuals and communities.

INDIVIDUAL CULTURAL STRENGTHENING

Cultural strengthening is the responsibility of everyone at Orygen. In 2021-25, Orygen and the First Nations team will:

- take a whole-of-organisation approach to ensuring completion of cultural strengthening training and participation in cultural strengthening activities is required of all staff; and
- support continuous cultural strengthening by providing new and engaging material developed and brought together through the CSPWG

that highlights First Nations perspectives and platforms First Nations voices on key issues.

SYSTEMIC CULTURAL STRENGTHENING

Cultural strengthening is a journey, not a destination. In 2021-25, Orygen will:

- ensure that all employees are supported with the necessary tools and policies to commit to ongoing learning; and
- ensure that this ongoing learning is monitored and evaluated with visibility and accountability to the FNAG.

SPECIALISED CULTURAL STRENGTHENING

Cultural strengthening and cultural safety can take on specific meanings in the context of service delivery, research and other discrete functions. In 2021-25 Orygen will:

- invest in First Nations-developed, evidence-based tools and training for staff in key areas of the organisation to improve cultural safety in service delivery, research and other discrete functions.

PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are instrumental in holistic service delivery, impactful research, and influential advocacy. Good partnerships require trust, clear goals and responsibilities and strong interpersonal relationships. As Orygen strives to deliver on its Statement of Commitment, good partnerships within the organisation and between Orygen and other entities will become increasingly valuable.

INTERNAL

In 2021-25, Orygen will:

- ensure that strong partnerships are formed between the First Nations team and key areas of Orygen. These partnerships will be led by the priorities of the FNAG and will be geared towards delivering on the Statement of Commitment in high priority areas of Orygen.

EXTERNAL

In 2021-25 Orygen will:

- ensure that the First Nations team is supported to work constructively with key external stakeholders as well as support the interactions between other Orygen teams and external First Nations and First Nations-related stakeholders.

FIRST NATIONS DEVELOPMENT

As well as its role as a service delivery, research, and advocacy organisation, Orygen is also an employer and a leader in the mental health and higher education sectors. As per its Statement of Commitment, Orygen strives to support and advocate for the development of First Nations individuals and structures.

In 2021-25, Orygen will:

- aim to reach population parity for First Nations representation in its staff, including two (2) additional roles in the First Nations team as well as staff across the organisation;

- put in place mechanisms for its First Nations staff to develop both professionally and culturally and invest in making Orygen a safe and appealing employer for First Nations people and strive to support First Nations businesses where possible.

POLICY AND PROCEDURE REFORM

Policies and procedures shape our actions based on how they are designed and their intent. A key component of enabling delivery on the Statement of Commitment is ensuring that all relevant policies and procedures are aligned to the principles of the Statement of Commitment and are supportive of activities that deliver on it.

In 2021-25, Orygen will:

- support the First Nations team to lead strategic reform in internal policies and practices across the organisation.



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1. [Curtis E, Jones R, Tipene-Leach D, Walker C, Loring B, Paine SJ, and Reid P. \(2019\). Why cultural safety rather than cultural competency is required to achieve health equity: a literature review and recommended definition. *International Journal for Equity in Health*, 18\(1\), 1-17.](#)
2. [Steel L, Heritage B. \(2020\). Inter-cultural contexts: exploring the experience of indigenous employees in mainstream Australian organisations. *Australian Journal of Psychology*, 72, 248-256.](#)



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