# Webinar transcript: NCSEHE panel discussion: Strategies for supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of students of colour and First Nations students

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Sarah O'Shea: Thank you all for joining us today for this National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education webinar. Before we begin I would just like to acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land that I'm located on. I'm currently in Dharawal nation and I'd like to acknowledge with deep respect the traditional custodians of the land, the Wadi Wadi people. I pay my respects to the Elders past, present and emerging and to the Aboriginal people that continue to care for country. I stand for a future that profoundly respects and acknowledges Aboriginal perspectives, culture, language and history and a continued effort to fight for Aboriginal justice and rights paving the way for a strong future. Thank you today for joining us, my name is Sarah O'Shea, I'm the Director of the National Centre for Student Equity in Higher Education, NCSEHE for short. NCSEHE is housed at Curtin University in Western Australia funded by the Commonwealth government with a dedicated mission to improve the higher education outcomes that's access, participation, retention, success and completion rates, for marginalised and disadvantaged people through a variety of strategies, including research practice and policy.

We are really excited today to have an international panel to reflect upon a very important topic which is strategies for supporting the social and emotional wellbeing of students of colour and First Nations students. This very important topic will be discussed by Professor James Smith from Menzies School of Health Research, who will speak about promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander higher education students. James will be joined by Dr Bep Uink from Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre at Murdoch University who will talk on supporting First Nations university students in times of crisis. Also we are joined by Professor Daphne C. Watkins from the University of Michigan who will reflect upon Physical distance, social connection: the practice and potential of the YBMen project. We are delighted to have the experts here today and as you can imagine this has taken quite a while in the planning, but we'd particularly like to thank Daphne who is joining us a lot later in the evening US time, so I think it's 10 p.m. there so thank you Daphne. Before we start, just a few housekeeping details I might just ask James if he could share the PowerPoint at this point. This webinar is being live captioned by Bradley Reporting and will be recorded.

The recording will be available on the NCSEHE website and in the coming days. If you need closed captions can you click on the Closed Captions icon which is located at the top or bottom of your screen. We also have captions available via browser. Nina will add that to the chat pod now. If you have any technological difficulties email NCSEHE. As we have three speakers today we've planned for a panel discussion to run for the hour. Questions can be posed after the session today via the evaluation form which will then be responded to after the session. At the end we will have ten or so minutes where I'll invite the panellists to reflect on some of the issues that they've spoken about during the session.

I'm going to ask if you could perhaps start the session by going in to the chat pod and introducing yourself, it will be great if you could make sure you introduce yourself to all panellists and participants. So that we get a sense of who else is out there in the ether. I know we have people from all over the country and it's really nice to meet each other and comment in that chat pod, please choose all panellists and attendees when you post. Okay I'm going to cross to James now to start presentation.

James Smith: Okay thanks very much Sarah. And I'm just trying to scroll through at the moment. And it's not letting me move forward in the presentation. So I'm not quite sure why that's happening. There we go. Looks like we've got movement now. Thank you very much Sarah for that warm introduction. I would like to thank everybody, 200 plus participants it looks like we've got online today. I'm going to give a brief overview of relatively high level today around promoting the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in this new normal and we will focus on COVID but I know Bep will speak more about that in her presentation and Daphne will be talking around particular intervention YBMen project she has led for a number of years in the US. Before I go any further I'd like to pay my respects and acknowledge the Larrakia people and pay respects to Elders past, present and emerging. I'm on Larrakia land at the moment, I've recently returned from the US and very glad and humbled to be able to work and live on this land in the Northern Territory. I would like to thank the National Centre for inviting us today, I hope it's a really fruitful discussion, and starts conversations between particularly equity practitioners based here in Australia and elsewhere in the world, I'd like to thank Bep and Daphne for joining this discussion today. I have had the privilege of working with Bep on a NCSEHE project that we're doing at the moment around Indigenous males and higher education, and likewise I've just spent some time in the US with Daphne as well, so two brilliant people to be hearing from. In terms of what I'm talking about, what we know about the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, again at a higher level, I'm not going to go into great detail but there's lots of public health scholarship in this space within Australia and I can provide more details for people who would like those post-presentation. Importantly, what can we do to address the social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in higher education? It's a space that we know is really important but it's a space that we don't have lots of clarity on what that looks like, but we'll give a few hints today around what strategies can be adopted in this space.

So to set the scene a bit I wanted to go back to the public health scholarship and there's been a lot of Aboriginal scholars that have done work in this space over many many years. So certainly the last two decades we've seen a real influx in scholarship in this space, I have two examples of work done recently. Some is work that was done through the Closing the Gap clearinghouse and another example is some that Roxanne Bainbridge and colleagues did around improving social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students commissioned through Beyond Blue. I wanted to focus on these nine guiding principles and I want people to put these in the back of their minds when they're thinking about what some of the approaches might be. The nine guiding principles whilst part of the national strategic framework have been principles built up over many many years and particularly service delivery contexts use this as a focus in the way they approach social emotional wellbeing programs so the Aboriginal community control health sector, has played a major role in this regard so it includes things like thinking of health holistically, so not just a narrow, biomedical or Western framework but in a broader sense. Right to self-determination. Need for cultural understanding. That notion of cultural competency and cultural safety which we're seeing more about in the higher education space as well, certainly NATSIHEC, the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Higher Education Consortium, have been doing lots of work in that space as has Universities Australia. And the impact of history and trauma and loss, so that notion of trauma and loss and the need for healing around this and the need for decolonising approaches within this space. Recognition of human rights, really fundamental, and is obviously key to the work that NCSEHE's involved with as well. Start addressing the impact of racism and stigma and we've seen lots in recent times with the Black Lives Matter movement that we've seen really come to the fore in the US but that has certainly had an impact in Australia too. Recognition of the centrality of kinship, so those relationships, those family ties within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context, recognition of cultural diversity and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander strengths and I think it's really important for me, talking about social and emotional wellbeing, to think from a strengths based perspective, Lowitja Institute have done quite a bit of work in the space.

So what do we know about social and emotional wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students? We know the connection to family and culture are critical, so important. These notions of ties to land and country are really important particularly for rural and he remote students but indeed all students. There has been some scholarship in this space but we are seeing more and more emerge and we're seeing this coming up time and again particularly in Indigenous-focused research around higher education students. We know that many of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have developed personal strategies relating to resilience and self-efficacy. These are skills they've developed across their life course, across that education trajectory from primary school to higher education. It's important that when we are thinking about programs and services for those students and support structures that we recognise those strengths they bring. I mentioned earlier but that notion of social and emotional wellbeing is broader than Western concepts of mental health. It's very easy for us to talk about mental health within a biomedical paradigm and we have to shift away from that and think about the broader social and cultural, political aspects of life and recognising from the holistic point of view that everything is connected as well.

In terms of university settings we know they can be harmful to the social emotional wellbeing of students and that goes back to some of those issues in the previous slide, particularly around racism and stigma and therefore it's important that staff are appropriately trained to be able to engage students in a culturally competent manner and ensure that universities have environments that are suitable, online and off line and I know that Bep will pick that up in her presentation. What else does it tell us? Social and emotional wellbeing impacts Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander participation, achievement and completion within university contexts, that's a no brainer, we know that our state of mind, the broader social and emotional wellbeing has impacts in various aspects of our life. We also know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are often first in family to attend university and Sarah the Director of NCSEHE has done some amazing research in that space. We know that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and staff face structural and systemic racism daily, this is something that's systemic. Something we see time and time again and we need to have strategies to stop that and we're only really now starting to see some people speak out and say what's going on is not okay. We need to have better examples of providing strong supportive environments in universities and indeed I suspect many people online are doing work in that space at the moment. That goes on to the next bit around culturally responsive environments and when we talk about environments, it's not just that social environment, it's the academic environment on and off line as well but it's that broader environment. Do people feel safe and comfortable within that broader university setting? What is being done to make them feel better? What else do we know? Family support is critical to Indigenous students’ success. There's been various reports through NCSEHE and I'll touch on those in a moment.

Recognising that there's that broader community-oriented notion of health and wellbeing within the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander context is really important. Supporting digital literacy development is also really important and if COVID hasn't shown us anything else it's certainly shown us we are now shifting towards an online environment and have had to do so quickly, again I know Bep will touch on this as will Daphne I suspect as well, but what we need to recognise here is that we need to support the digital literacy development. We need to think about whether people have the infrastructure to be able to engage, what that looks like, how that impacts them personally, we need to make sure that we've got ways to build that digital literacy in place so they can engage in those spaces if they don't have the confidence to do so. That's students and staff in that regard.

I've mentioned around that students have the strong sense of self efficacy and often develop resilience strategies across their life course. I think that's important to recognise in the context of program development. I've included a few projects that have been funded through NCSEHE in recent times, don't think of NCSEHE as the webinar extraordinaire although it is, but recognise that they have got so many resources on their website for you to be able to access. Go and have a look at some of these reports, these small research grants that NCSEHE have provided have produced amazing research findings in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander space and other equity spaces as well. So I guess what can be done from a health perspective, we need to recognise that past trauma impacts social and emotional wellbeing and it does so in a few different ways, some of which I've got listed there. We know that colonisation has intergenerational impacts. We know trauma informed care is critical so we're starting to see more training happening in relation to trauma informed practices, even trauma informed research practices. I know my team at Menzies have all been engaged in trauma informed training within an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisation locally. We also need to talk about healing programs as being legitimate in this space, we find people will often consider healing programs to be something a bit light and fluffy and that's anything but the truth. What we are finding is that healing programs provide a really deep sense of connectivity between people that have experienced trauma and we have to recognise that, so some of those group based models are really important within that healing space. We need to recognise that people of colour face multiple health and social inequities that prevent access to and participation in higher education, and two points I wanted to make there were that inequities are often felt in the life course, if we look at Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students we know they've gone through an education system that hasn't necessarily support their needs as best they could, whether it's primary school secondary school or post-secondary education, particularly in the VET space. Recognising they've faced those inequities all through that journey and they've got to a pointy end when it comes to higher education and we need to start acknowledging those inequities they've faced. And I say both health social inequities there because it's not just the health inequities relating to their social and emotional wellbeing, it's those broader inequities that they faced whether that's in relation to education, justice system et cetera and we've heard lots in the Black Lives Matter movement in recent times. The other thing I wanted to say is they're often cumulative impacts, if you are an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander person that's from a low socioeconomic background or a rural and regional background there are those compounding factors relating to those inequities that you face so that ability to show resilience to have self-efficacy in those contexts is really important. The image I've got up there is a promising practice guide that the team I lead here at Menzies completed recently. It was released earlier this year around improving the social and emotional wellbeing of young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Whilst it's focussed on severe and complex mental health needs, the strategies in there are set up for service providers, commissioners, and policymakers so I've left of the link in the presentation which will be available post seminar. Other things that can be done, we need to call out forms of racism, I've spoken about that, we've heard about that from Black Lives Matter work and many other scholars, not just here in Australia but globally. Something that I think you will hear in Daphne's presentation is that the interventions we create need to be gender sensitive culturally responsive and age appropriate and they need to address that complexity, it's no use just saying these are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males or these are people from a certain background or these are a cohort of 18 to 25 we need to understand the complexities in the audiences that we are engaging in. I've included recent papers from the American Journal of Men's Health, one we've done here in Australia and one that Daphne has done based on her work that she'll be presenting today and I think engaging in the scholarship to inform strategy and program development is really important. Here are a few other resources, I'm going to, not going to go through them in any detail because we are short on time, so I'll hand it over to Bep now.

Bep Uink: Thanks James. Okay I'll just bring up the slides. So I'm Bep Uink. I'm from the Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre at Murdoch University here in Perth. I'm going to be talking today about supporting Indigenous students at university during times of crisis and of course the latest crisis in terms of student wellbeing has been around COVID‑19. Before I start I want to acknowledge I'm coming to you from Nyungar country and I want to pay respects to my ancestors on this land and understand they have an enduring and dynamic culture and pay respect to my Elders both past and present and also like to acknowledge any First Nations people in attendance today. So my aim of the presentation is to share what I think is best practice from Kulbardi Aboriginal Centre around what we did to support our student body during COVID-19 and I see a lot from the chat that there's a lot of what we can do to support them in COVID‑19 and I see a lot from the chat there's a lot of practitioners who will be having face to face contact with their Indigenous student cohorts, that's really great. But when we talk about COVID‑19, like James touched on, what we are talking about is a transition to online learning and how do we support Aboriginal students when we don't have the face to face contact. I'll give some current enrolment and progression figures for Aboriginal university students and do a very brief overview of the historical and current context about students to provide context for those figures. I'll briefly go through the impacts we saw of COVID‑19 on our students' wellbeing and what we did as a centre to respond and how we are take those lessons into our future practice.

As you can see this is a figure taken from the Department of Education and Training who release figures around higher education, the purple line is Indigenous student enrolments in bachelor degrees and as you can see they're slowly increasing, we're slowly increasing the rates of students at university, especially from 2013 onwards, that's a bit more of an increase. What we can also see from the figure is compared to other equity groups Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander enrolments aren't increasing as fast. For example the yellow line is students with a disability and that's shot up in terms of enrolments. The second figure shows us Indigenous bachelor completion rates across six years, so how many students, what percentage of Aboriginal students who have enrolled in a bachelor degree have completed that degree within six years. As you can see that figure is holding steady at around 40 per cent across the years. So this is alarming, this is telling us that under 50 per cent of Aboriginal students who enrol in a bachelor degree have the degree by six years and if we think about an increase in enrolments but not necessarily an increase in completions, there's a question on what's happening to Aboriginal students when they enter our universities and are they necessarily completing? There are a few reasons for why that figure is so low in terms of completions. One of them might be the way in which we measure completions, so the Centre have done some great work supporting analysis of remote and regional students and what their completion rates are and they found in this report that Aboriginal students take at least ten years to complete their degrees, not six, so maybe the national data and how it's captured isn't taking into account how long it takes for an Aboriginal student to complete their degree. The figures could be around greater counselling, could be the case students are coming in trying university out and realising it's not for them and having greater resources around other university options. As James talked about there's definitely university level factors that indicate whether someone would want to stay at university in terms of our topic today definitely student wellbeing we know plays into how well students can study, and when mental health conditions come in that affect people's capacity to study. So the history of Aboriginal Australians in higher education is long and complex, I wanted to give a brief overview so people who weren't familiar with the setting could understand the figures and why our completion rates are lower than non‑Aboriginal students but showing that Aboriginal people have had a resilient story in engaging Western systems. So in terms of where learning began prior to colonisation, learning occurred for Aboriginal people mainly through observation and through sharing knowledge in the forms of storytelling and we have a rich history of sharing knowledge in our culture. With colonisation there was this move towards what was Nakata had referred to in his book as "educating the savages", the idea that Aboriginal people needed to Westernised and be taught mainly Christian ways. So obviously a very negative view of education there. Moving forward, up until 1937 in Australia we had government policy which was the Aboriginal Australians Protection Act and this saw the first time when Aboriginal children were allowed to engage in western schooling but the purpose of this was to teach them how to become domestic servants or labourers and they weren't allowed to complete high school so they were sent out to work at 12 years of age not really entering the education system. If we move to 1937, the government policy changed to that of assimilation and we saw a big increase in Aboriginal children being allowed to participate in western schooling systems at all levels, but this was very much around teaching Aboriginal children to think white, act white and not a lot of representation of Aboriginal culture and Aboriginal knowledges in what was taught and this led to a very big sense of erasure of Aboriginal identity and a separation of Aboriginal knowledges from the western education system that we are still dealing with today. Fast forward to the 1970s and the government implemented what's now the primary policy which is self-determination and this was finally the recognition that we as Aboriginal people have the right to self-determination and as part of that we should be involved in decision making around educating our children and our young people. So these are the policies now that frame discussion around higher education and have launched the policies we have now around indigenising curriculum. So what is it like being an Aboriginal student in higher education? At Kulbardi, we talked to students a lot about this cultural interface which was proposed by Nakata. He describes the cultural interface as a contested space where students are put between two knowledge systems, both western and Indigenous, and things are not clearly black or white so it's a very ambiguous space. Indigenous students at the space often feel a contradiction and a tension of feeling they have to align with one knowledge or another or one way of learning or another either indigenous or western, and that can be conflicting and we find our students when they enter university can really struggle with that tension. Some colleagues of mine who did a study here at the centre found students entering university initially felt that doing so was in a sense betraying their sense of Aboriginality and this is what they were hearing from their families and their community. But as they went through they were able to have this transformative experience that we know that university brings, and it actually helped students develop even a greater sense of connection with their Aboriginality to be at this cultural interface. It's a tense and complicated space for students to be in. Then we had COVID‑19.

From this we saw social distancing guidelines put in across Australia and it meant the closure essentially of university campuses across Australia and a rapid migration to online learning. So in my institution, students and staff were given two weeks to prepare for online learning, to transition all of their unit content online and from discussions I had with colleagues that actually was a lot of time compared to what a lot of other people were given. What we found, what colleagues and I found, was that equity groups particularly Aboriginal students were being overlooked in decisions around this transition online and around planning discussions, although we did have evidence that the universities were concerned that students in general would struggle with online teaching and learning. We saw this evidenced by universities academic safety net which was a policy put in place that any students who had a fail in a semester where it was online learning didn't have that recorded on their transcript so there was definitely messaging from the university that students across the board would struggle with online learning. So thinking about this and putting together a response about what social distancing guidelines and closure of universities might mean for Aboriginal students we were thinking this is already an educationally disadvantaged group of young people and students and we theorised that the social distancing that came about through COVID could put students at risk of three forms of isolation, the cultural isolation that could endure, digital isolation and, combined, these forms of isolation would lead to further educational disadvantage and isolation.

In terms of cultural isolation here on the screen an Indigenous model of social emotional wellbeing. As you can see, four of the seven components of wellbeing there are about having connection with country or connection with other people and so what we saw with social distancing guidelines was that ability to connect with others and country was really restricted for our students. For students who wanted to return to country who weren't necessarily on country because they were down here learning that became impossible because of intrastate travel border closures, what we saw was the mass postponement or cancel of events that happened in the community, the biggest was that NAIDOC week was postponed. What would normally happen was a celebration where people could come together and really get that sense of community and culture, people weren't sure if that's what going ahead. Then on a more individual level students were unable to connect with family as much as they would because people were staying away from each other particularly students with elderly family they were telling them not to visit because they were concerned about their wellbeing so the social distancing really impaired our students' ability to have that connection.

That had practical and psychological impacts that we could see. So primarily for our female students not being able to call on family to help with child care was a huge burden and that added additional stress on top of the typical stresses that come with university studies. And then not having that easy access of being able to drop in to a friend's house or family member's house meant that students weren't necessarily getting the debrief and social support they normally get. For our students in particular we have about 300 Aboriginal students across the campus and about a third of them regularly visit the centre and have a really big community of practice at the centre so we were worried that the social and emotional support would be lost with the centre not being as accessible. So our second form of isolation we thought about was digital isolation. We know that as James touched on that Aboriginal Australians are part of the digital divide, so they have lower access to digital technology, and so when we transition to online learning it's an obvious question how will that disadvantage our students? So we saw issues around device ownership, even if students had a laptop or tablet they were using it to give to their children for home schooling so they used it late at night or not at all and couldn't study. And of course we had students struggling to get a stable internet connection. Access extends beyond those pragmatic things and it really goes into, do students know how to engage with an online learning system? Even if a student has a device and internet connection are they comfortable using an online learning system? And we also saw a lot of low motivation, not having the accountability of coming to class regularly impacted our students and we were also worried about the non‑Indigenised online curriculum. When I talk about Indigenising the curriculum, that's about bringing Indigenous worldviews and perspectives into the curriculum. It's been proposed as a way to ensure that Aboriginal knowledges are respected and given equal precedence as western knowledges in our universities.

Various universities have been working towards Indigenising their curriculums across Australia and there is many ways this can be achieved. Another Centre-based report by Dreamson and colleagues found that this isn't happening at all in learning management systems. So Dreamson and colleagues looked at ten universities across Australia and their online learning management systems and assessed them against what they proposed as fairly solid principles for engaging Aboriginal students in online learning, whether the platform allowed them to communicate with each other, to collaborate, whether there was a learning community and whether there was interculturality built into the curriculum and they concluded that essentially at present, a couple of years ago, that learning management systems were not designed with Indigenous education in mind so we had a real fear that students weren't necessarily getting an appropriate curriculum when they were going online.

So this cultural social, isolation and digital isolation we theorise would really converge to educationally isolate our students in two ways as I said before the loss of a support community not being able to access community members and family members, but also not being able to access your peers here at Kulbardi, we were worried that would impact wellbeing. Then a loss of a learning community so we very much think of Kulbardi and the broader university as a learning community where students can debate issues, talk to each other, that allows the co‑construction of knowledge which we know is it a really essential part of learning.

What do we do to support our students? Along with the rest of the university we at the Centre were given two weeks to transition to complete online learning and support. So we do teaching at the Centre, we teach an enabling course but we also are responsible for the all the student support for Indigenous students across the university. So our primary concern was how we maintain contact and relationships with students so they still feel engaged and they still feel like they're part of the learning community. We had a staff discussion and decided we'll extend our academic transition paths and support, our TAPs model, and make that more frequent. Typically, our TAPS model includes regular check-ins with students at what we know to be pressure points across the semester. We have student support co‑ordinators who reach out via email or phone and check in with the student in Week 1, Week 5 and Week 10 to check how they're going and we ask questions around the transition, this previous semester we were asking how are you feeling about the transition to online learning and what can we do to support that? Whether they've set up academically, booked collaborate meetings with their tutors or any assignments they were worried about. We offer pastoral support by asking how they're feeling about COVID and online learning and how can we support you and point you in the right direction. So we increased that frequency to weekly, all staff got involved not just our support co-ordinators, we devided up students by discipline group and everybody had a student list to either email, social media or phone call to check in with them and that was based on the student preferences and based on some work that Sian Bennett, a PHD student at the Centre, had been doing. We decided to do daily text messages to what we know to be at risk students because we know that helps keep them engaged. They were daily check-ins around how they were feeling.

Through that process we reached out to all of our 235 Aboriginal students who were enrolled at the university and we had contact with 178 of those students, 76 percent of the cohort we managed to reach by the end of semester and check in with and for the majority of those students we had multiple contacts in the semester. So I pulled some comments that staff were making on a spreadsheet we developed around some of the common issues to do with COVID and of course we had issues with online learning you can see some quotes there, the students couldn't get into collaborate, feeling like they wanted to socialise more, lack of motivation, feeling stressed, not sleeping, but the email check-ins were keeping other students on track. We also, to overcome that social or cultural isolation, we hosted regular cup of tea sessions over Microsoft Teams, so instead of having a cup of tea at the kitchen with students we did those online. The university also had online regular activities hosted through their Facebook page. We provided students with data credit, so they could top up their phones and hotspots, we allowed them to borrow some laptops we had at the centre, pull forward our usual laptop subsidy, and even though we're not really experts, provided some IT support to some students, reminded unit co‑ordinators that our students didn't necessarily have digital literacy and they needed to understand that with assignments. And the broader university also put together a great support package around technology bursaries and IT equipment.

We shared specific resources with students through our Facebook page or through check-ins, anything we found online from the Australian Psychological Society or Aboriginal health websites that James was sharing we sent through to students as well as app suggestions to increase productivity and we worked with the health and counselling centre to make a family and domestic violence resource because we were particularly concerned about students who may be in unsafe environments. I'll come back to this slide on resources but I wanted to end on this idea that university Indigenous student wellbeing although it's something we deal with every day as the Aboriginal centre. The actual Universities Australia policy is a whole of university approach and that means that all university staff have a really important role to play in supporting Indigenous student wellbeing and their progression and their completions. Lessons we have learnt that we are going to take forward, we've always known that relationships are key when working with Aboriginal students but we know now if you do enough outreach and that's frequent and across multiple digital mediums that that communication and relationship building can happen online. We shouldn't, as James said, assume digital competency, we should understand that Indigenising curricula needs to happen online and off line and we need to acknowledge as educators the impact that broader social events have on student wellbeing. I'll take us back briefly to the resources that we shared with students that you can find at HealthInfoNet, I made these in conjunction with another project I'm part of, but it was about pulling together simple self-care tips around staying strong in language that our students would understand and appreciate just to support them along the way. I'll stop sharing now. I will pass on to Daphne.

Daphne C. Watkins: Thank you. Okay. So let me now share my screen. In the event we run out of time I encourage you to submit questions in the evaluation form and we will endeavour to answer those post the webinar today. So again, I'm Daphne Watkins. I'm a professor at the University of Michigan here in the United States and I want to begin by acknowledging the land I'm on. We acknowledge that The University of Michigan, named for Michigami, the world’s largest freshwater system and located in the Huron River watershed, was formed and has grown through connections with the land stewarded by Niswi Ishkodewan Anishinaabeg: The Three Fires People who are the Ojibwe, Odawa, and Potawatomi along with their neighbours the Seneca, Delaware, Shawnee and Wyandot nations. I want to make sure that I acknowledge the land I'm on. I'm really excited to talk with everyone today about an exciting project that I developed some years ago and is currently running it's called the YBMen project and the YBMen is an acronym for Young Black Men, Masculinities and Mental Health project, and I'm going to tell you more about that in the next few slides. Let me begin with what I would call are some sobering statistics. I promise you I'm going to start here but this is not where I'm going to end and I also want to note that these are some statistics that are really speaking to the current livelihood of black men in the United States and also just as a reference, when I use the term black men I'm speaking specifically about African American men and men of African descent in the United States so just to provide that context I think is helpful for this particular presentation. What we are finding now that is many of the statistics that we are seeing in the United States around black men show that black men live about seven years less than other men in other racial groups, they have higher death rates compared to women for all leading causes of death, that black men ages 18 to 44 are less likely to report feelings of anxiety or depression, they're less likely to seek help for their mental health challenges, five times more likely to die from HIV/AIDS and that also suicide is the third leading cause of death for black males ages 15 to 24. I want to give you a sense for what a lot of the research is telling us based on black men in the United States. So let me tell you a little bit about my work. I'm approaching my second decade studying the mental health of black men in the United States. These are screen shots from some of my publications that I could put in to the scientific community in the past few years. I'd summarise my work as trying to understand and doing something to improve black men's mental health, try to do more to encourage more progressive definitions of manhood or masculinities in a plural sense but also thinking about how we can increase social support for men because a lot of the literature that we're producing here is showing that not just black men but many men don't feel safe or comfortable disclosing vulnerability and really sharing some of the challenges they're going through and so they tend to keep those things bottled up.

With this kind of work I'm trying to unpack what are those nuances and what are the social determinants that influence black men and specifically within groups of black men so we're trying to get a deeper understanding about the different features and characteristics of black men in the United States. This is a diagram from a paper that I published in 2012, so speaking of social determinants of health. With this paper, which is a heavy conceptual paper, I was really trying to unpack what are these determinants, what kinds of things should we take into consideration as we understand things like depression and psychological distress over the adult life course for black men. You'll see along the bottom of this triangle, six determinants of mental health that I have been able to dig a bit deeper into over the course of the past few years, things like socioeconomic status, stressors, racial identity and masculine identity, kinship and social support, self‑esteem and mastery and also quality health care. You'll see that this triangle is angled up and so a lot of my work clusters in different areas but the majority of it is really around the young adult black male group which we define as ages 18 to 30. That middle adult group is usually 31 to 54, and the older adult group is 55 and over. I present this just to lay a foundation for the YBMen program I'm about to share. But speaking of YBMen so I talk about social determinants of mental health here but what I was beginning to do a little later in my work was really trying to understand - given the fact we know that many men particularly black men are very less likely, I would say to seek help for their mental health challenges and being affected by the stigma that is put on this idea of being vulnerable or perceived as weak, I wanted to dig into understanding what does internet use look like for black men, what kinds of things can we expect if we produced an internet related program or intervention for black men. On the screen are a few screen shots from publications that help ground my work with the idea of thinking about what does internet use and social media and different kinds of online programs look like for black men. This really sparked an interest for me, it really began to encourage me to think, if it's something I'm really passionate about, that I have to think about what's most relevant particularly for the young adult age group, so that 18 to 30 age group. So I began to dig deeply into social media and what kinds of platforms are primarily used with that particular demographic. Then I asked myself what would happen if we used social media as a tool to improve mental health, promote positive more progressive definitions of manhood, and increase social support for black men and from that primary question the YBMen project was born. So you'll see here, that again, YBMen is an acronym for the Young Black Men, Masculinities, and Mental Health Project, but as you can imagine that's a mouthful so we just call this the YBMen project for short.

So now I'm going to tell you some of the details around how we recruit for the YBMen project. So I want to be very clear, that what the YBMen project aims to achieve is not to provide any therapy, or any therapeutic experience for our participants. Instead we target black men who are in that 18 to 30-year-old age range who may be less likely to discuss sensitive topics face-to-face, they may also be the kind of guys whose distress has not yet reached clinical severity, so they have not been diagnosed for a mental health disorder or anxiety disorder by any clinician, and then we want guys who also want to have these conversations about mental health, manhood, social support and in a private social media based setting so it's very important to not only identify guys who may less likely talk about these things face-to-face who haven't been diagnosed but who are open to having these conversations with other men in a private social media group. So I want to walk you through what does the process look like for all of our participates so this to the left of your screen you'll see a pathway that all of our participants follow or at least those so far, we have done about five or six iterations of the YBMen project across college campuses in the mid-western part of the United States, in and around the state of Michigan which is where I live and where the University of Michigan is, and I'll show you a map at the end of this presentation with the actual stars where you can see where we have done the work so far. But on the left side you'll see we usually begin every YBMen project with some sort of baseline interview, so we have done these interviews via the internet, things like Skype, Google hangouts for the guys who have been further out and not in our drivable distance. We then have all participants take a baseline interview and survey and they receive a small cash incentive as a thank you. During that survey, we encourage guys to either opt in to the YBMen project or opt out. If they opt in we enrol them in the project and we assign them to a YBMen social media group and to date we've used Facebook for the majority of our YBMen project interventions and we have also pilot tested Instagram for some of our programming. At the conclusion of the YBMen project, I'm at number five here on the screen, they complete a second round of interviews and surveys and they receive another small cash incentive just as a thank you. Now in the next few slides I'd like to present some outcome data from our latest iteration of the YBMen project, at two large universities in the mid-western part of the United States and I'd like to show you what that looks like and what we found from the black men we worked with. So we began with that survey that we had as many guys comple as we could get. We had about 350 black college men across the two campuses complete the survey, we had about 50 guys opt in to the YBMen project intervention and from that about 40 were selected or completed all the paperwork that allowed them to be eligible to participate in the intervention and it was really exciting to be able to have these gentlemen self-select into the YBMen intervention. Again we began by issuing a survey and the survey covered three primary outcomes, mental health, manhood or masculinity and social support, and I'll talk a bit about what we found in a second but at the end of the survey we encouraged the guys to think about participating in this private social media-based group with other black men and receive some mental health education. We had about 40 guys who were in the final program. So what I want to show you now is just a sample Facebook curriculum, I'm going to walk you through what's here, but the number one question that we receive from people who are interested in the YBMen project is exactly what happens in that private Facebook group? So what I've put together is a curriculum or sample curriculum for what the intervention can look like. So it's broken down by week and we never really finalise any curriculum without partnering with the university so even though our interventions are based at these college campuses and various cities around our region we make sure we sit down with the counselling centre directors there and the multi-culture centre directors and students from the campus and we negotiate what topics do we want to cover, what are some relevant concerns and challenges that the black men on your campus are facing and we lay those out and my team comes back to our campus and we spend weeks brainstorming relevant content. Now for those of you who are into popular culture you may recognise some faces on the screen now and this is why I think we are having a lot of success with the YBMen project is because a cornerstone of the YBMen project is the use of popular culture references. Each week has a theme, introduction to the project and orientation to the project, we then cover racial identity, masculine identity, mental health, wellbeing and social support then we wrap up and close. Every week we post questions, use things like YouTube videos, song lyrics, content that many of our participants are already engaged with on a day‑to‑day level so we post content and we have conversations if you will about what kinds of things in popular culture are influencing how these men see themselves, how they really grapple with their mental health, challenges or stress or pressures that they're facing as young black men in the United States. It's interesting to hear them and read in some of Facebook group posts how they think more about their identity given what's happening in popular culture be it music, art or movies, in the news there are lots of racial tensions happening now in different parts of the United States and what we have found over the years is that when a YBMen group is active, these black college men run to the group and it's a safe place for them to process what's happening in the world around them. So even though we present initial content and ideas that we want to engage in with the men they usually bring their own content as well which is really an important piece of building this community in a social media setting.

So I'm going to flip through a few screens here so you can see some actual real content that has been exchanged via our intervention for, a while the football player Colin Kaepernick was very popular, not necessarily for his football abilities but for taking a knee during our national anthem and so a lot of the black men from our program would come to our group and process what's happening with the NFL, the National Football League here in the United States, and they would want to come and talk about what does that mean, what does that symbolise to have a black male football player kneel during the national anthem. So we were able to capture their reactions right here in the YBMen Facebook group. We also post a lot of popular culture videos and song lyrics, and it was a great opportunity for some of the men to grapple with things they were taught as children or things they were taught by their fathers or uncles or even their older siblings, and they found some benefit to be able to question some of the ways they were raised and decide for themselves if they wanted to take those ideals into adulthood. Because we work with a lot of black college men, many of them are first generation college students, many of them don't have families or don't come from families or have parents who completed college degrees. This was a whole new world for them to be the first in their families to enter college, to be among other black men and to be around what they'd consider to be a positive environment but they really felt like fish out of water and we were able to tackle some of those challenging discussions and questions that they had about what does it mean to be a black college man in this world today.

The next few slides are just some results that I'm going to quickly go through because I know we're running short on time, but our three primary outcomes are mental health, in our case depressive symptoms that we capture using the PHQ-9 and the Gotland Male Depression Scale, so you'll see here from this slide that we saw depressive symptoms decrease over the course of the intervention, so you'll see that before the YBMen intervention we saw depressive symptoms be around maybe 7.55 for the PHQ-9 and around 10 for the Gotland Male Depression Scale but you'll see, after those scores drop tremendously, for the Means anyway, and for this change it was statistically significant. Our second primary outcome, is what we call traditional masculine norms or masculinities, and there are different subscales within our measure for masculine norms and for the YBMen project we use a shorter version of the Conformity to Masculine Norms Inventory, I won't spend much time here but you'll see variations as the blue bars are these men's scores before the YBMen intervention and the orange are afterwards, so you'll see that the scores have changed. We actually want these scores to go down and so we saw a little bit of variation across the different participants for this particular measure. And then finally the last primary outcome is really increasing social support, we want men to be participants in our group and we want them to see something beneficial with coming together with likeminded men, and even those who are not likeminded and trying to grapple with the world around them, receiving education, receiving positive messages and being able to have difficult conversations about the things they're dealing with, as for many first generation black college students.

So I'll begin to wrap up here, but I think sometimes the voices behind the numbers can be so powerful so I want to share some of the intervention results and some quotes that came more directly from the latest iteration of the project. So with regard to the meaning of mental health and depression one gentleman said, “When I think of depression, I think of it across a spectrum. I think a lot of times when people talk about depression, we only talk about it in the most severe stage of it. We don’t talk about the early phases of it and other forms of mental health challenges that can lead to depression. So I think they are two very complex issues and words, and I honestly don’t know if there is one real definition to define them”. With regard to masculinities and how different this may be for black men and black college men in particular one gentleman said, “From my personal experience, I think Black men’s experience with masculinity is more severe than some other cultures…. I feel like other cultures, especially White cultures… are more likely to talk about counselling and getting professional help, or talking to a therapist with their children, growing up, versus in a black community….it’s like no, you deal with it…You go deal with it on your own…You don’t let things that happen in your family get outside that family…”

Then when it comes to stress, it was really interesting to be in these groups with these guys and to hear them talk about stress and the pressure that they have to deal with as a black man in the United States. One guy said, “They call stress the silent killer that will build up, and that eats away at you over time. Also, in a land where you’re supposed to be able to do things such as protest freely… in a peaceful manner, you have people saying ‘You can’t do this.’ Many see other people getting away with other types of activities, and just not being condoned for it.” Then finally we always want to get a sense for do these participants like the YBMen project, do they feel it's relevant to young black men? So here are quotes that came from participants, one guy said, “… what you guys are doing, the actual program and trying to spread awareness about mental health to Black men. I think it's really good…” Then another guy said “… the [YBMen group] was definitely a safe space… where you could talk about your ideas as Black men... And talk about your opinions on things without judgement, without backlash. Because this was a private group, only we could see what we were saying. It just felt good, and— it showed me what having a social support group would be like…”

So with that I will begin to bring my portion of the presentation to a close, just want to give you a sense for those who may not be familiar, this is a map of the State of Michigan where I live and where the University of Michigan is and we've been able to do the YBMen project with about six college campuses in our region. We're also beginning to pilot test ideas for maybe how can we start a little younger to have conversations about mental health, masculinities and social support, so we're currently piloting some ideas of doing a version of YBMen for high school students and we've already done some exploratory work with some middle school students. So the goal moving forward is to start here in the State of Michigan and in our region but really think about a "train the trainers" model that will allow us to bring these things full circle and do some great work all across the United States. With that, I'll share some final publications. All of the data that I've presented in the talk came from this paper that James alluded to earlier. And here is my contact information and I look forward to hearing from people as soon as, I think we're wrapping up now, I think, maybe we will have some questions, thank you.

Sarah O'Shea: Thank you Daphne and thank you everyone else. James, Bep as well. Unfortunately we have really run out of time and we've gone over a bit but I'm sure everyone will agree it was such a powerful presentation from each of the presenters. Each presentation was really an hour in its own right. You managed to get through a lot of information in a very short period of time so I suppose I'm going to finish up now, but I did want to remind people that if they wanted to ask some questions, I know there are questions on the Q and A which we'll collect, but also we'll be sending an evaluation form and you are welcome to include questions there and we will talk to the panellists and ask them to supply answers, and we often follow up these webinars with additional resources and information. Our website has been slightly overwhelmed with people eager to download the slides. Please be aware that we will be sending them out to you via email in the next day or two don't worry, all the resources that have been covered will be available there. This slide if you haven't connected with the National Centre please do so. We welcome all to get involved and our newsletter is out every four to six weeks. On that note, I'm going to thank our presenters again, especially to Daphne for staying up so late and being such a terrific presenter, but also James and Bep for their involvement in the session today and also to ADCET for their continuing support and assistance with these webinars, good‑bye everyone.

End of webinar