

## Health from the Grassroots Aboriginal health priorities project Bundjalung & Yaegl Country



### WHAT WAS THIS PROJECT ABOUT?

Aboriginal staff at the University Centre for Rural Health in Lismore initiated a project to work with the Aboriginal communities of the NSW North Coast to talk about their health priorities and needs and develop local research plans for implementation. The **Health from the Grass Roots** Project adopted a 'bottom up' process of engagement fostering community ownership and self-determination in guiding what topics health researchers investigate in partnership with community, health service providers and other relevant organisations.

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Document perspectives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in Bundjalung and Yaegl country (North Coast region, NSW) on their community health research priorities;
2. Hold community forums across the region (Grafton, Yamba/Maclean, Casino/Coraki, Lismore, Ballina, Tweed Heads) to prioritise the top issues per region for action with respect to development of research projects and/or advocacy to relevant agencies; and
3. Develop pilot research projects with community addressing the priority issues within and/or across region.

Health from the Grassroots brings together culture and research. Centralising Indigenous perspectives in research processes, promoting a process of change, building on the limited evidence about how to develop processes for community-led systems change.

### WHAT DID WE FIND?

During the project several community members were trained up to facilitate workshops and talk with local participants. Community thoughts and ideas were gathered by conducting surveys and yarning circles. Over 200 participated in surveys and four workshops held across the region.

This information told us what the key areas for a healthy future are, what's already working well and what needs improving. Top priority areas for action across the regions varied, but commonly included mental health and wellbeing, prevention and management of substance use and healthier lifestyle choices such as quitting smoking, moving more and eating better. Community perspective often put young people as the focus for these health concerns, highlighting the need for more education and preventative activity programs targeted at youth.

The picture overpage provides the community's vision for a healthy future and the priority areas needing change to get us there.

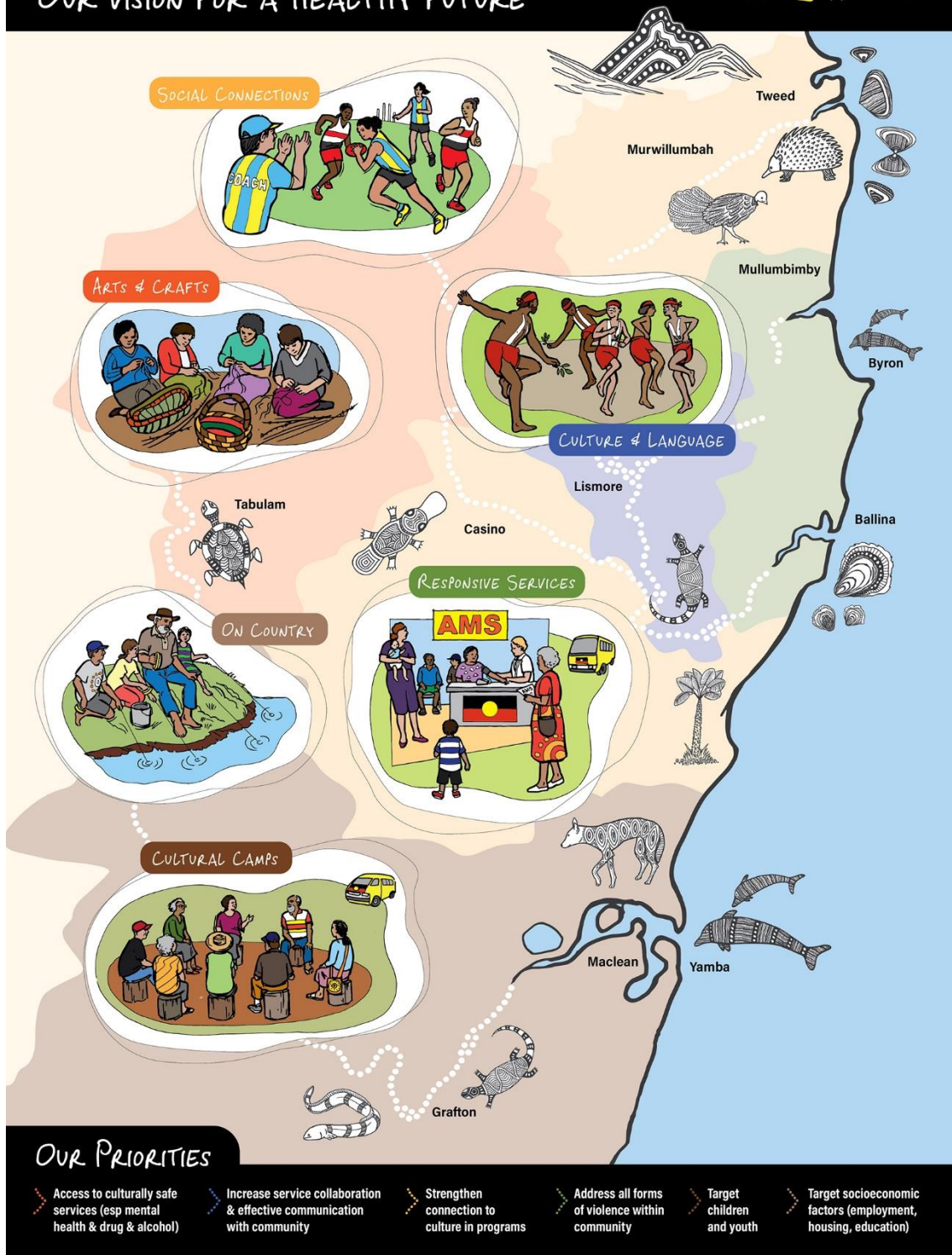
### WHERE TO NEXT?

Based on these community priorities and ideas for what needs to change, we are working to secure funding to facilitate local Aboriginal community-led action to improve health and wellbeing services across Northern NSW. For example, due to a community identified need for suicide, grief and loss support and in partnership with a local Aboriginal health service, we have submitted a funding application to bring community and service providers together to share stories and experiences, talk about what's not working so well, what is working well and to build on these to improve accessibility of wellbeing support for community.

# Aboriginal Communities of the Northern Rivers

## OUR VISION FOR A HEALTHY FUTURE

Health from the Grass Roots  
Aboriginal health priorities project Northern Rivers, NSW



### WANT TO KNOW MORE?

For further information, please contact Project Coordinator, Dr Veronica Matthews at [veronica.matthews@sydney.edu.au](mailto:veronica.matthews@sydney.edu.au) through the University Centre for Rural Health [www.ucrh.edu.au](http://www.ucrh.edu.au).