



VTMH Forum 2025

Practice and Research
Innovations Towards
Culturally Responsive
Systems

6 November

Djerring Flemington Hub

bit.ly/vtmhforum2025



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Practice and Research Innovations
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Introduction

Welcome to the VTMH Forum 2025. This is a chance to gather together and discuss and explore some of the valuable work that strengthens the cultural responsiveness of our sector. We hope you enjoy the day.

Date and time

Thursday 6 November, 2025

Registrations open from 9.15am and close at 9.45am.

The forum commences at 9.45am and concludes at 5pm.

Venue

Djerring Flemington Hub, 25 Mt Alexander Road, Flemington 3031

Accessible via tram, stop 23 on the 59 Airport West line. Accessible via train, a short walk from the Flemington Bridge Station on the Upfield line.

Catering

Lunch, afternoon tea and other refreshments will be provided.

Quiet space

A quiet room is available for attendees to use at any point throughout the forum. Information about this will be provided on the day.

Program

We make every attempt to bring you the program as advertised. However, amendments may occur due to circumstances beyond our control. Should this happen, we will endeavour to communicate changes as soon as possible.

Media consent

VTMH will be photographing the forum's proceedings. Presenters and attendees are likely to be included in some photos, which may be published elsewhere. If you do not wish to be included in any photos, please make VTMH staff aware.

General enquiries and feedback

Please direct any enquiries to vtmh@svha.org.au. A short survey will be available to complete on the day, either via the printed form or online via the QR code below.



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Program

Doors and registration open 9.15 – 9.45am

Introduction and morning sessions 9.45am – 12.25pm

Welcome and opening

Including housekeeping, conducted by **Tharindu Jayadeva (TJ)**, MC.

Welcome to Country

Conducted by **Mandy Nicholson**, the founder of the **Djirri Djirri dance group**. Djirri Djirri are a Wurundjeri female dance group and are Traditional Custodians of Narm and surrounds.

Keynote presentation, Indigo Daya Building liberatory, peer-owned, mad alternatives to psychiatry: Reflections from an abolitionist psych survivor working outside the 'system'

This presentation asks what it means to do abolitionist work as a psychiatric survivor. Indigo will share her practice since "absconding" from consumer work, discussing two of her projects.

Presentation, Flick Grey and Nina Joffe-Kohn Abolition perspectives in mental health: a service user research project

This presentation summarises some of the thinking connected with abolitionist perspectives in the context of psychiatry and mental health laws and explores the process of how this project came to be.

Presentation, Left Write Hook Transdisciplinary pathways to re-storying survivor voices

This triptych presentation explores Left Write Hook's creative and peer-led roots.

Presentation, Malitha Perera Community mental health organisations and the spectrum of restrictive practice

This presentation examines the often-overlooked role of NGO community mental health organisations within systems that employ restrictive practices.

Panel and Q&A

This panel will be moderated, featuring speakers from the afternoon's presentations.

Lunch 12.25 – 1.15 pm

Afternoon sessions (1) 1.15 – 3.10pm

Keynote, Kathomi Gatwiri Re-imagining dignity in mental health practice: our role in changing the narrative

This keynote draws on the Racial Dignity Framework developed to reframe how dignity can be understood and enacted within mental health systems. It invites mental health professionals, educators, and researchers to reflect on their role in shaping narratives, and in particular, what difference foregrounding dignity can make in clinical relational care and healing pathways.



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Program

Presentation, Chris Williams, Dwij, Liz Arcus, and Thuch Ajak Food gardening for the mental health and wellbeing of minority communities

This presentation discusses contemporary approaches that focus on food gardening, exploring the benefits and challenges of programs that help CALD communities grow culturally familiar foods in prison and in regional community settings.

Presentation, Blossom Ah Ket, Nari Kim and Susan Esmaili Language and Justice

This presentation brings together interpreters to reflect on the realities of language injustice in mental health settings, and to consider what it means to work towards language justice that affirms dignity, trust, and cultural safety.

Panel and Q&A

This panel will be moderated, featuring speakers from the afternoon's presentations.

Afternoon tea and door prize 3.10 – 3.35pm

Afternoon sessions (2) 3.35 – 4.40pm

Presentation, Leanna Azoury Power, privilege, and the provision of mental health services

This presentation explores the themes that have emerged out of a phenomenological study investigating how service providers, specifically those who hold racially marginalised identities and who have accessed mental health services themselves, reflect on and understand the role of power in therapeutic relationships.

Presentation, Bindu Joseph, Erin Joyce, and Taff Ruvaro A collaborative research project: Exploring the role of bicultural workers in mental health settings

This presentation explores the work undertaken for a research project conducted by Alfred Mental and Addiction Health, Better Health Network, and Federation University into the role of bicultural workers in mental health settings.

Panel and Q&A

This will be moderated, featuring speakers from the afternoon's presentations.

Closing 4.40 – 5.00 pm

Thank you

Conducted by **Adriana Mendoza**, this section concludes the day.



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Tharindu Jayadeva (TJ), MC



Tharindu Jayadeva (he/him) has a background in health promotion and community engagement, striving to work towards systems of care that uphold human rights, dignity and cultural humility. He has designed, delivered, evaluated and advised on mental health projects guided by lived experience voice, and is a proponent of public participation in system reform. His experience is informed by years of working alongside his community to listen, learn and unlearn, and his own experiences navigating the mental health system. Tharindu wishes to showcase the collective strength of community in creating equitable spaces to thrive within now and into the future.

Debbie Wood, Graphic Recorder and Illustrator

Debbie Wood is a Melbourne-based Graphic Recorder & Illustrator. Since 2017, she has worked with both large and small organisations around Australia and abroad, and all levels of government to visually convey their messages and purpose, live, in real time at workshops and conferences. Prior to this she spent over 20 years as a Graphic Designer, and has dabbled in other creative pursuits including jewellery making, face painting, and raising boys.



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Keynote speaker

Indigo Daya

Indigo Daya (she/her) is a mad/survivor artist, (re)searcher and activist. She practices independent peer support, training and co-reflection, and works with others to grow liberatory alternatives to psychiatry.

Her practice draws on the collective wisdom of the C/S/X movement, survivor research and mad studies, and her own experiences of oppression, madness and psychiatric incarceration. Indigo's PhD focuses on self-injury and the related experiences of injustice and silencing. It welcomes other psych survivors to co-create an arts-based, anti-carceral peer-support space which generates testimony, solidarity, epistemic justice and collective resistance, and invites the community to witness and participate in dialogue through art.

She seeks collective, emancipatory, loving and creative practices which recognise the deeply meaningful and political nature of madness.

Indigo held consumer roles for 18 years, including education, supervision, advocacy, government policy, reform, consulting and peer-delivered programs. She absconded from system work in 2022 to pursue abolitionist work, building mad collective spaces. Indigo is a white settler, living on the stolen lands of the Wurundjeri People of the Kulin Nations.



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Keynote speaker

Kathomi Gatwiri

Professor Kathomi Gatwiri is a nationally recognised scholar, researcher, and leader whose work bridges academic research and community impact. She is a Professor in the Social Work Discipline at Flinders University and an ARC DECRA Fellow at the College of Education, Psychology and Social Work. As one of Australia's leading Afro-diasporic scholars, Kathomi's research focuses on decolonising methodologies and anti-racist pedagogies.

Her interdisciplinary work explores racial trauma, identity, migranhood, and the experiences of minoritised people, particularly those assigned 'categories of difference' in Australia.

She developed the Racial Dignity Theory and the Racial Dignity Framework, as a tool for understanding racism as an assault on human dignity. This framework has been adopted across various organisational settings.

Since completing her PhD, Dr Gatwiri has secured over \$1.5 million in competitive research funding. She has published more than 100 traditional and non-traditional research outputs, including the books *African Womanhood* and *Incontinent Bodies* and *Afrodiasporic Identities in Australia*.

She is the Founder and Director of Healing Together, a service offering culturally affirming therapeutic support for people impacted by racial trauma, and Femicide Count Kenya, a platform documenting murdered Kenyan women. She served for four years as President of the Australian Women and Gender Studies Association and is a member of the advisory committee for the Australian Human Rights Commission's Racism@Uni national study.



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Presenters

Nina Joffee-Kohn

Nina Joffee-Kohn is a consumer academic and coordinator at the Consumer Academic Program within the Centre for Mental Health Nursing. She has completed postgraduate studies in mental health law, anti-discrimination law, and inclusive education. Drawing from her lived experience of enforced mental health treatment, including seclusion and restraint, Nina's lived experience informs her work and has profoundly shaped her understanding of social justice, equity, and freedom.



Flick Grey



Flick Grey is multiple as a consequence of prolonged trauma in childhood. Over nearly 20 years, she's been given 14 pathologizing, decontextualizing diagnostic labels. She has spent many years resisting coercion, violence and domination within the mental health system. She has worked as a trainer (especially in Intentional Peer Support and Open Dialogue), supervisor, consultant, researcher (including researching Alternatives to Suicide, group reflective processes and dialogical spaces) and stand-up comedian (teaching Absconding-101).

Daniel Rylatt

Dr Daniel Rylatt is a Clinical Psychologist with 20 years' experience, specialising in trauma and suicidality. As a senior clinician at Alfred Mental & Addiction Health, he leads service development and evaluation while specialising in trauma and suicidality. A former martial arts instructor, he's co-piloting a men's program with Left Write Hook as both participant and researcher. Since early 2024, he's explored the overlap between clinical practice and lived experience, informed by his own journey as a survivor.



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Donna Lyon

Donna Lyon, PhD, is Associate Professor in Film Producing at the University of Melbourne and producer of the award-winning documentary *Left Write Hook*. She founded and now leads the charity of the same name, delivering trauma-informed writing and boxing programs for survivors across Australia. A graduate of the Australian Institute of Company Directors, Donna has co-designed higher-ed programs, raised over \$500,000 in philanthropic support, and driven research impact through film and survivor-led initiatives.



Lauren Wraight



Lauren Wraight is a disabled and neuroqueer survivor advocate and Consumer Consultant at Alfred Mental and Addiction Health. They focus on co-design, consumer participation, and trauma-responsive cultural change. Their work blends peer support, care ethics, and relational strategy. With *Left Write Hook*, Lauren has co-led research, co-produced a survivor storybook, and appeared in an award-winning documentary, promoting creative, body-based healing. They are dedicated to inclusive systems that honour the humanity and wisdom of those navigating trauma and recovery.

Malitha Perera

Malitha Perera, born in Sri Lanka and raised in Brisbane, is passionate about tackling systemic inequities. He has held clinical, operational, and strategic leadership roles in mental health, including as Clinical Adviser at the Victorian Department of Health and the Office of the Chief Psychiatrist. Currently, he is National Manager of Service Innovation at Wellways. Malitha holds degrees in Occupational Therapy, Psychological Science, and Public Health, plus a Diploma in Financial Counselling.



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Presenters

Chris Williams



Dr Chris Williams is a Lecturer in Urban Agriculture at the University of Melbourne's Burnley Campus, coordinating subjects in the Master of Urban Horticulture. Since 2014, his Novel Crops project has explored growing culturally significant, non-mainstream crops in Melbourne's climate. He partners with groups like FareShare and United African Farm to cultivate crops such as sweet potatoes, taro, and yams. Chris advises on landscape and horticulture across sectors and serves on several environmental and community boards.

Dwij

Dwij has a Master of Urban Horticulture from the University of Melbourne and is now a horticulture teacher employed by Kangan Institute in the corrections education centre. She is involved in teaching different cohorts including CALD communities, incarcerated individuals with various mental health challenges and intellectual disabilities. The horticulture program has been significantly important as a cultural link for a wide cohort including South Sudanese, Pasifika, Aboriginal and indigenous communities in incarceration and an enormous benefit to their mental health and rehabilitation.



Liz Arcus



Liz Arcus is a Nature-Based Therapist and Community Hub Leader in regional Victoria, with a background in Community Services. She works with refugee and migrant communities through trauma-informed, culturally responsive programs that support recovery and connection. At St Georges Road Primary School & Shepparton English Language Centre, Liz leads a therapeutic gardening and nature play program for women and young children, fostering healing through culturally familiar plants and shared knowledge.



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Presenters

Thuch Ajak



Thuch Ajak is the Founder and CEO of Sprout Connect, leading therapeutic horticulture programs in youth justice settings to support resilience and employment pathways. A former refugee and community leader, he's a strong cultural advocate, having hosted the South Sudanese radio show Cultivating Identity. He co-founded the United African Farm and chairs the African Cultural Garden, promoting sustainable farming and youth engagement. Thuch is dedicated to empowering CALD youth and driving systemic change through culture, education, and healing.

Blossom Ah Ket

Blossom has over six years of experience as a NAATI-certified Spanish interpreter and translator, having worked in legal and community health settings. She lived and studied in Colombia before obtaining her NAATI certification and Masters in Interpreting and Translating at RMIT University. Blossom is passionate about language justice and dedicated to enabling intercultural communication that strives for more just access to services for community members.



Nari Kim



Nari has been working as a Korean interpreter for over 20 years. She interpreted for cabinet officials in Korea and is currently a Specialist Legal Interpreter in Australia. She is the co-facilitator of a mental health interpreters' reflective group supported by VTMH, where interpreters come together monthly to share thoughts on ethical challenges encountered in their daily interpreting space.



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Susan Esmaili

Susan is a lifelong lover of words and stories. She is fluent in five languages and believes that interpreting is more than transferring words from one language to another, it's about building bridges between cultures, preserving meaning, and honoring the human stories behind every sentence.



Leanne Azoury



Leanna is a proud Palestinian-Lebanese woman committed to promoting socio-economic and health equity. She works as a Consumer Academic, researcher, and workforce development leader. She has managed lived experience workforce development across multiple organisations and now leads the LLE Workforce Development team at the Victorian Collaborative Centre for Mental Health and Wellbeing. Her research explores the role of power in mental health service provision and the intersections of race, culture, and mental health.

Bindu Joseph

Bindu Joseph is a Mental Health Nurse and academic who migrated from India to Australia in 2005. She holds a Master's and PhD in Mental Health Nursing, and coordinates postgraduate programs at Federation University. Bindu is research active, supervises PhDs, and contributes to national health guidelines. She also holds roles with the Australian College of Mental Health Nurses, the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Accreditation Council, and Women in STEM.



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Presenters

Erin Joyce

Erin Joyce is a Social Worker and Community Development Practitioner with experience across family services, humanitarian aid, and public mental health in Australia and abroad. She holds an MSW, a Postgraduate Diploma in International Community Development, and a BA in International Studies. As Senior Lead for Cultural Safety, Equity and Access at Alfred Mental and Addiction Health, Erin leads research on bicultural workers in mental health. She's a strategic thinker and passionate advocate for equitable, inclusive care.



Taff Ruvaro



Taff Ruvaro is a public health and mental health equity professional with over a decade of experience in cultural safety and inclusive practice. At Alfred Mental and Addiction Health, he contributed to research on bicultural workers in mental health. He holds degrees in International Relations, Public Health, and Health Protection, and completed a Practice Fellowship with VicHealth. Taff focuses on translating research into inclusive care and driving systemic change.

About VTMH

Victorian Transcultural Mental Health (VTMH) builds the capacity of the public mental health and wellbeing sector to deliver services that engage with and are responsive to the needs of diverse communities, ensuring that all Victorians can have access to a safe, inclusive, and culturally responsive mental health care system. Through our work, we draw attention to enduring patterns of social inequity and systemic barriers to accessing mental health support, collaborate with others in the sector to develop strategies addressing these, and support organisations to embed cultural responsiveness at all levels of mental health care service design and delivery.

This forum was organised by the VTMH forum committee: Adriana Mendoza, Naomi Chapman, Nadya Kouzma, Olivia Fletcher, Ra Vivek, Radhika Santhanam-Martin, Sam Ryan, and Sylvia Basile.

Connect with us on vtmh.org.au and subscribe to our newsletter via the QR code below.



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