



# NMHCA APPOINTS TWO FIRST NATIONS BOARD DIRECTORS

1 May 2025

The National Mental Health Consumer Alliance (the NMHCA) is proud to announce the appointment of two outstanding First Nations leaders—**Leilani Darwin** and **Louisa Salee**—to our Board of Directors.

**Leilani Darwin**, a proud Quandamooka woman, is nationally recognised for her groundbreaking contributions to suicide prevention, mental health reform, and culturally informed systems change. With decades of experience, Leilani brings unmatched expertise in First Nations-led policy development, program design, and lived experience leadership. Her advocacy has reshaped how services engage with culture, community, and Country.

**Louisa Salee**, a proud Wakaid and Wagadagam woman from the Torres Strait Islands, brings over 27 years of experience in the health sector. As the National Network Manager for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Lived Experience Centre at the Black Dog Institute, Louisa leads the development of Local Lived Experience Networks that empower community voices and drive cultural transformation in mental health systems.

Their presence on our Board strengthens our collective knowledge, strategy, and direction—and affirms our deep commitment to embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, worldviews, and definitions of wellbeing at the heart of national mental health consumer advocacy.

**We recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as sovereign owners of the land and the longest living culture in the world.**

First Nations peoples have always had systems of care, healing, and collective wellbeing grounded in kinship, culture, land, and spirit. The Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB) model—encompassing intergenerational, spiritual, and community-based approaches—challenges us to move beyond Western clinical frameworks and work in ways that honour culture and uphold self-determination.

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We also acknowledge that First Nations lived experience is inseparable from the impacts of colonisation, racism, and structural inequality—and that true healing and reform must be led by those with lived and living experience of these realities.

This is a milestone for our organisation, but it is also just the beginning. We will continue to listen, learn, and act in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to shape a mental health system that reflects the strengths, rights, and priorities of all peoples.

We warmly welcome Leilani and Louisa and look forward to walking together—toward healing, justice, and systemic change.

## QUOTES

### **Leilani Darwin, incoming NMHCA Board Member**

“Louisa and I are proud to join the NMHCA Board as representatives of the Indigenous Lived Experience Centre. As founder of the Centre, I believe our appointments to the NMHCA Board reflect a critical point in the inclusion of First Nations lived experience in this country. We must be included to see genuine changes in the communities and people we represent, and this must involve both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as we represent two distinct cultural groups. Having Louisa Salee – an incredible Torres Strait Islander leader – on the NMHCA Board is setting a high standard for future inclusion of both cultures.

“I will never shy away from elevating our people across the systems and policies that impact us, particularly those that so adversely affect my people.”

### **Mathew Fagan, Chair, National Mental Health Consumer Alliance**

“As a national peak body led by people with lived and living experience of mental health challenges, we know we must do more than include First Nations perspectives—we must follow First Nations leadership, respect sovereignty, and support self-determined solutions.

“We remain dedicated to building authentic partnerships, creating spaces where First Nations voices are **not only heard but hold power**, and working toward a future where healing and justice are possible for all.”





## **Priscilla Brice, CEO, National Mental Health Consumer Alliance**

“Leilani and Louisa embody the strength, wisdom, and resilience of First Nations lived experience. Their appointments reflect our recognition that meaningful systems change must be led by those most impacted. We are honoured to have their voices on our Board and committed to continuing this journey of accountability, learning, and transformation alongside First Nations communities.”

## **ENDS**

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