

Blue Knot Foundation's Quarterly  
Professional Journal



**blue knot**  
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National Centre of Excellence  
for Complex Trauma



## Blue Knot Review

Welcome to the Summer edition of Blue Knot Review, an electronic journal chronicling recent developments and new perspectives around complex trauma and trauma-informed practice.

## Announcing – Complex Trauma Spotlight Report – Living with and Healing from Complex Trauma

### Complex Trauma Spotlight Report

Living with and Healing from Complex Trauma

This report reviews the current research and practice into complex trauma and experiences of people with a lived experience of complex trauma

**DOWNLOAD NOW**



Given the prevalence of complex trauma across all communities and the breadth of its impacts on mental and physical health as well as on everyday functioning, it is important for all consumers, carers, workers and practitioners to recognise and understand more about its dynamics and impacts on the brain, body and mind.

Mental health consumers and those experiencing mental distress and other challenges, are often unable to access trauma-informed supports and treatments based on the

most recent research and practice-based evidence and pathways to healing and recovery. Despite the significant advances in research over recent decades into the impacts of repeated complex trauma on mental health and wellbeing, these advances have not adequately informed understanding of the presentation and needs of consumers accessing the mental health system and related systems and services.

This Complex Trauma Spotlight Report – Living with and Healing from Complex Trauma aims to better inform practitioners and services within the mental health and related sectors about the lived experience of complex trauma and its relationship to mental distress by targeted discussions to map consumer experiences. This Spotlight Report was commissioned by the National Mental Health Commission in recognition that there is a significant need to build awareness and understanding of the often chronic and largely unmet needs of people living with the long-term impacts of complex trauma.

Blue Knot Foundation – National Centre of Excellence for Complex Trauma (Blue Knot) and BEING – Mental Health Consumers (BEING) NSW collaborated to bring the lived experience of complex trauma front and centre on this project. Our collegiality on the subject and our mutual understanding of the impacts of complex trauma on individuals and broader communities underpins the findings in this report.

This report reviews the current research and practice into complex trauma and experiences of people with a lived experience of complex trauma – how they have engaged with the system and how the systems have responded to their needs. It highlights the chasm between needs and the system's capacity to meet them, to support healing and recovery, minimise experiences of re-traumatisation and to be heard, respected and supported to live meaningful participating connected lives.

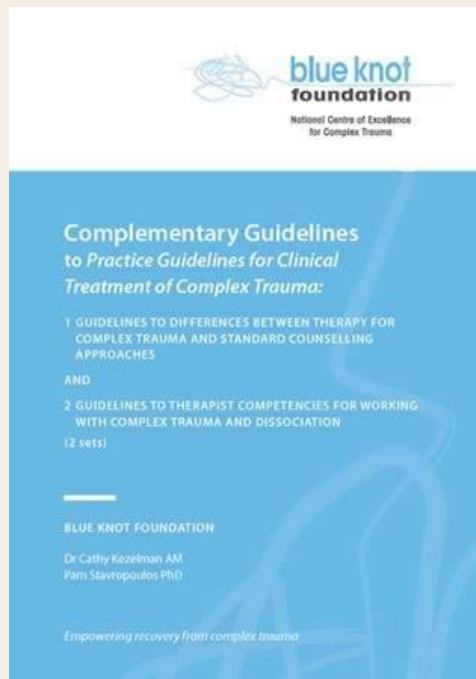
The public health issue of complex trauma has long been ignored. It is time for the knowledge from lived experience, practice and research to inform services and practice in order to reduce the mental distress and sense of hopelessness and helplessness so many people diagnosed with mental illness, with unrecognised complex trauma can experience. We hope that this report will provide the impetus and insight which drives the investment, training and systems change needed for every person who has been abused, violated, neglected

or exploited during their lives to find a sense of safety, hope, healing and wellbeing.

We acknowledge and thank the lived experience participants in this project. It is only through their courage in sharing insightful and rich information that we are better able to strengthen the voices and perspectives and understand the journeys of people who experience complex trauma. We would also like to thank the National Mental Health Commission for their vision and leadership in commissioning this important project in a critical area of mental health literacy which has long been ignored.

[Register and download your free copy of the report here](#)

## Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma... and more!



In 2019 Blue Knot released its updated [Practice Guidelines for Treatment of Complex Trauma](#) and [Guidelines to Differences between Therapy for Complex Trauma and Standard Counselling Approaches](#) and [Guidelines to Therapist Competencies for Working with Complex Trauma and Dissociation](#) as Complementary Guidelines.

The Complementary Guidelines were somewhat overshadowed by the updated clinical guidelines but are

valuable in their own right. This is because more and more therapists and health professionals from diverse disciplines are working clinically with people with the lived experience of complex trauma.

The first short guidelines in this publication address the ways in which working with complex trauma clients require adaptation of common counselling principles. All modalities need to be trauma-informed but at a more basic level they consider the 'taken-for-granted' of what is widely considered to comprise 'good' therapy.

The second additional short guidelines present therapist competencies for working with complex trauma clients and can be read as a prelude to the clinical guidelines. Although the original (2012) and updated (2019) clinical guidelines convey what therapy for complex trauma clients entails, they do not specify the attributes and abilities the therapist needs. These guidelines fill this gap.

To purchase a hard copy or download your copy of these 2 sets of guidelines within a single Complementary Guidelines publication [go to our website](#)

See Diane, a person with lived experience of complex trauma speaking at the launch of the Practice Guidelines for Clinical Treatment of Complex Trauma [here](#)

## Dissociative Amnesia and false memories



A journalist, Joshua Kendall, spent considerable time carefully reviewing both sides of the debate about dissociative amnesia and false memories. He interviewed several key characters on both sides and accurately

reveals the history of the False Memory Syndrome Foundation.

The False Memory Syndrome Association ceased to exist at the end of 2019.

[Read the article here](#)

## Vision Australia Radio

Interview with Dr Cathy Kezelman and Peter Greco



In this interview by Vision Extra, Peter Greco speaks with Cathy Kezelman, President of Blue Knot about trauma and the work of Blue Knot in empowering recovery for people living with complex trauma impacts. It focusses particularly on intergenerational trauma and how people and communities can work together to heal.

[Download the interview here](#)



"Repeated trauma requires you to create a system of defenses that protects you. And these protections were so important. They saved your life. They protected your real self."

-Gretchen L. Schmelzer, PhD.

## So... Podcast with John McKenna

ADVOCACY AND COUNSELLING FOR PEOPLE WITH DISABILITIES AND THEIR FAMILIES



Are you into podcasts? The latest episode of "So...with John McKenna" discusses the emotional and advocacy support available for people with disability who have experienced trauma, or are thinking about telling their story to the Disability Royal Commission. Closed captions and transcript of the episode are available too.

[Listen to the Podcast here](#)

[Read the transcript here](#)

## Work needed to improve COVID-19 messaging for people with disability

Article originally published by Pro Bono Australia



Australian governments must improve their COVID-19 public health messaging to ensure people with disability receive clear information during any future outbreaks, service providers say.

There was a high level of frustration in the disability community last year at the slow response of government during the start of the pandemic, with people with disability and their families reporting feeling forgotten.

A disability royal commission report in December found that the federal government failed to make any significant effort to consult with people with disability or their representative organisations during the early stages of crisis.

Alex Sar, who is deafblind, said the communication and support from the government during the initial stages of COVID left him feeling helpless at times.

He said he found it very difficult to decipher the facts and was quite overwhelmed when trying to find clear information for the deafblind community.

“There could have been better communication. It was disappointing that the disability community was left out and wasn’t receiving the same level of attention and support as the aged care sector,” Sar said.

“For me personally, there were a lot of mixed messages, conflicting rules and I found it very confusing. As someone who is deafblind, how am I meant to know how far one metre away is when I rely on touch?”

Noting the possibility of another major COVID outbreak in the community, service provider Able Australia is calling on governments to ensure they are better prepared this time around for the unique communication needs of people with disability.

Able Australia national director of marketing and engagement Chandi Piefke told Pro Bono News that governments should learn from the communication issues that arose during the first COVID wave last year.

“One of the challenges was that the language being used was quite complex... and messages were changing on a daily basis,” Piefke said.

“So it’s not that there was any shortage of information coming out. I think it was more in the way that it was often delivered.

“I think this probably just added to the feeling of anxiety that everyone was feeling at the time.”

To help combat this issue, the federal government recently committed more than \$4 million for the Medical Research Future Fund (MRFF) to support six new COVID-19 research projects.

One of these projects is aimed at improving the effectiveness of tailored COVID-19 messages for vulnerable Australians, including people with disability.

Able Australia played a role in securing this funding, and will help with the research so tailored communication strategies for the disability community can be co-designed.

Piefke said researchers were working in partnership with providers so they can work directly with people who have a disability and understand what their specific communication needs are.

“So for example, we work very closely with the deafblind community and the challenges that they face can often be quite considerable,” she said.



“These researchers will be talking to deafblind people and understanding first-hand how exactly we can best support them and get information out to them in a way and format that they can understand.”

Piefke said she hopes this research will help the disability community be better informed and receive more targeted information during any future outbreaks.

She said it was important that a co-designed template was created to help governments communicate with vulnerable communities.

“This way, when governments have important messages they need to convey to the community, they understand how to translate that into different ways that will be better understood by the different cohorts within the community,” she said.

“Governments [must realise] that a one-size-fits-all approach just doesn’t work.”

- Luke Michael, journalist at Pro Bono News covering the social sector

[Original article can be viewed here](#)

## National Counselling and Referral Service (Disability)

The National Counselling and Referral Service is now not only supporting people affected by the Disability Royal Commission. It is a key trauma-informed support for people with disability, family members, carers, advocates and workers who have experienced or witnessed abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation during these difficult times. Anyone who wishes to access this support does not need to make a submission or have any prior involvement with the Disability Royal Commission.

If you are living with disability (or are a family member of or caring for a person with disability) and

- have experienced abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation
- are currently experiencing abuse, neglect, violence or exploitation

- are distressed or anxious about coronavirus
- are affected by the Disability Royal Commission

**You can call the National Counselling and Referral Service on 1800 421 468.**

**This service operates from:**

- **9am-6pm AEST/AEDT Mon-Fri and**
- **9am-5pm AEST/AEDT Sat, Sun and public holidays.**

### **How to contact the National Counselling and Referral Service (Disability)**

There are a number of different ways you can contact NCRS depending on your accessibility needs, and the type of service you require.

**Telephone:** Contact **1800 421 468** or **02 6146 1468** to speak with one of our counsellors for short term counselling support and referrals.

**Video Conference (VC):** VC is available to people who have restrictions around their ability to contact our counsellors via telephone. Please contact us first by email at to [ncrscounsellors@blueknot.org.au](mailto:ncrscounsellors@blueknot.org.au). You can call us yourself or with a support person on **1800 421 468** AEST to discuss accessing this service. This service is available for a single session with a focus on linking you with local and ongoing supports.

**Webchat (WC):** Webchat is available for people who require support, information or referrals. Webchat is found at the bottom right of the screen our website. It is not a counselling service. Please refer to the Webchat Terms and Conditions for further information should you choose to use this service.

**SMS:** SMS is available to people who have been in contact with us by phone or webchat and can be used to provide people with information or referrals. SMS contact **0451 266 601**. It is not available for counselling support.

**N.B. This is a separate service from the Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service (call 1300 657 380 Mon-Sun 9-5 AEDT) which provides counselling, support, information to people with experiences of childhood trauma and for support around applications to the National Redress Scheme.**

If in crisis, in need of immediate support or concerned for your safety:

Call Lifeline on **13 11 14**. If you are currently experiencing any form of violence or abuse, or are concerned for your safety, call 000.

Blue Knot Review is an electronic journal chronicling recent developments and new perspectives around complex trauma and trauma-informed practice.

Contact [newsletter@blueknot.org.au](mailto:newsletter@blueknot.org.au) for feedback or to contribute. [Click here](#) to subscribe or forward this email to anyone who may be interested



The [Blue Knot Helpline and Redress Support Service](#) has established a [referral database](#) of mental health practitioners, doctors, service providers and support groups to provide referral options to callers of our Helpline. If you are a trauma-informed health professional you can apply to be included on this referral database [here](#).



Need support?

Blue Knot Helpline  
1300 657 380  
Monday - Sunday  
between 9am - 5pm AEDT  
or via email [helpline@blueknot.org.au](mailto:helpline@blueknot.org.au)

National Counselling & Referral Service (Disability)  
1800 421 468  
9am - 6pm AEDT Mon- Fri  
9am - 5pm AEDT Sat, Sun & public holidays

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