



COMMUNITY WAYS OF HEALING:

An Innovative Approach To Understanding Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islanders Health Through Television Based CME

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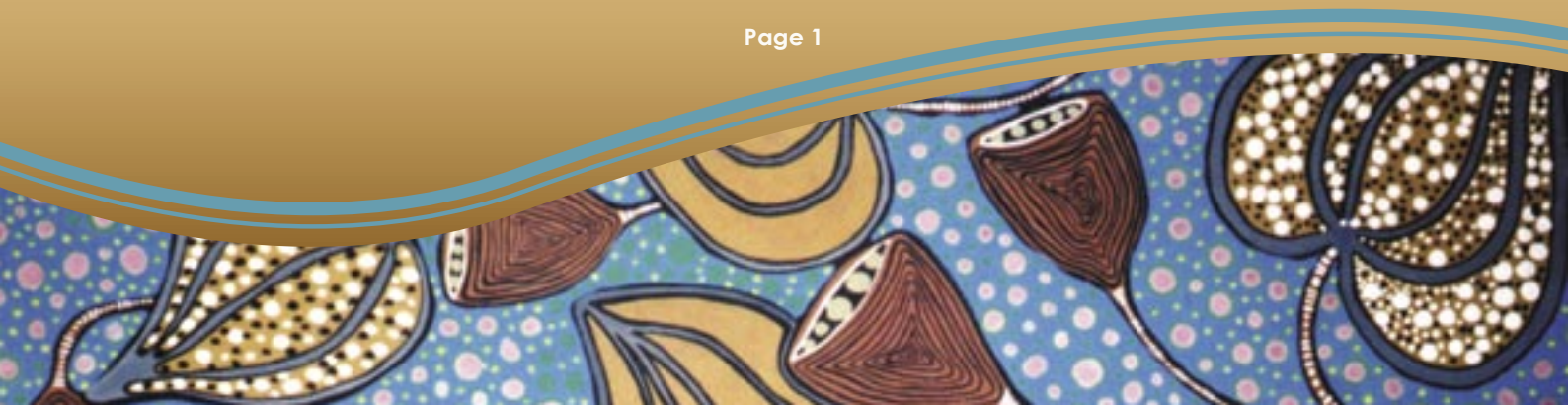
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Introduction

People further down the social ladder run twice the risk of serious illness and premature death than those near the top. Between top and bottom, health standards show a continuous social gradient that reflects disadvantage. The longer people live in stressful economic and social circumstances, the greater the 'wear and tear' and the less likely they are to live to a healthy old age. All Australians, not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, are affected by these social determinants. People with low incomes, no work or insecure jobs, or who feel excluded from mainstream society are likely to have poorer health. Social exclusion is associated with unemployment and poverty, and the risk factors to health of being low on the social ladder. These low social determinants have resulted in many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people living in and experiencing what equates to a third world health system in a wealthy country.

There are many Aboriginal communities who have successfully undertaken and developed key health initiatives that effectively increase the health status of their people. Good support networks, friendships and relationships improve health.

Communities with high levels of social cohesion have, for example, lower rates of coronary heart disease – conversely, these diseases increase when social cohesion declines.

Aim

To produce a series of documentary style programs that examine positive, balanced approaches by communities that address a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health issues from the community perspective.

Core Principles

Underlying core principles have guided the research and development of the programs:

- identifying ways to engage Aboriginal communities
- validating Aboriginal community ways of healing
- identifying ways to build on the skills of local health professionals and general communities,
- understanding community priorities

Program Research and Development

Content in each program has been chosen to emphasise the core principles outlined above and to present a balance between the often more highly publicised 'bad problems'; for example petrol sniffing, violence, alcoholism, substance misuse, and the 'good' outcomes and initiatives for example safety promotion, drowning prevention programs. Each program explores initiatives that strive to achieve a long term reduction in disparity between Aboriginal and non Aboriginal health outcomes through the provision of health promotion and targeted culturally sensitive care. The balance between community, clinical, academic and government stakeholder views is considered in each program.

A series of programs have been produced; Injury Prevention in Aboriginal Communities, Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care, Growing Health Aboriginal Kids – the early years 1-5. The latter two programs are also linked with the research into the continuing professional development needs of rural and remote health professionals undertaken as a conjoint project between the Foundation and the Centre for Remote Health. Each program is produced in two versions- a 60minute version targeting health professionals and a 26 minute version targeting consumers. Additionally each version is titled differently to reflect the differing audience. The analogy of 'strong', used in the title links clearly to the need for healthy beginning to life and the knowledge that a healthy start can

help offset health and social problems that occur later in life. The programs explore community-based holistic primary health care initiatives that positively address the deficiencies in health care for Aboriginal Australians, with an emphasis on prevention and health promotion.

Key Development Issues

Establishing strong links with Aboriginal communities and health professionals and academics across broad areas of rural and remote Australia.

Permissions were sought from the NT Department of Health to film their employees, individual communities gave permission for access to their community lands.

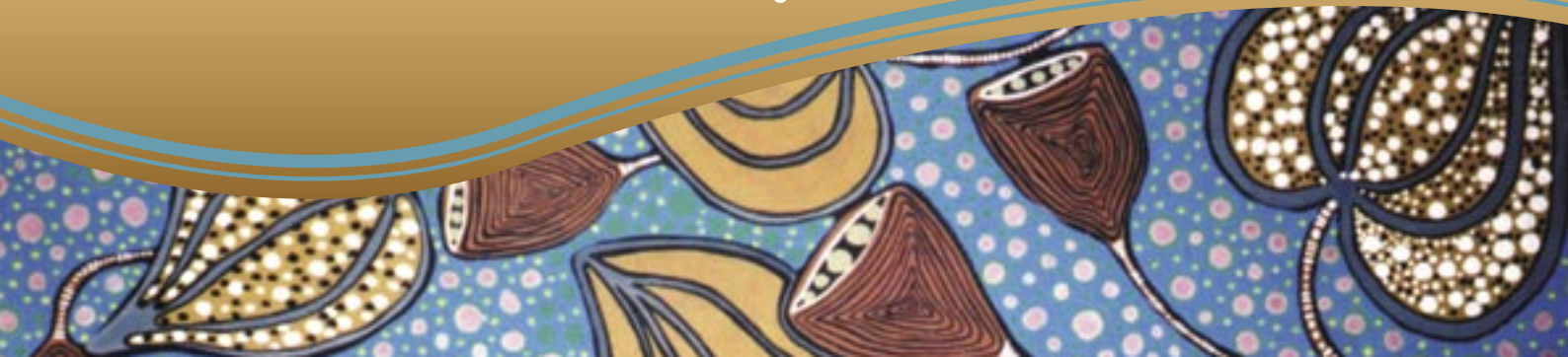
Broad research and consultation particularly with OATSIH assisted us in understanding, the nexus between government health priorities and the 'on the ground' interpretation of these priorities. Engaging an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander consultant in the program development. This input was been invaluable in enhancing the understanding of Aboriginal culture, particularly within the context of health.

Music was composed specifically for this program and permission to use particular artwork was sought from the artist.

Outcomes

Overwhelmingly communities health professionals and academics identified models of health care delivery that were successful not only as a model for Aboriginal health care but in most cases a model for delivering community based primary care initiatives.

The response to the development of the programs has been positive from all stakeholders; participants were appreciative of the opportunity provided by the Foundation to tell their stories.



ABORIGINAL MATERNAL AND INFANT CARE

A healthy, strong start to life, continuing through early development and good access to primary health care, has a positive impact on health and wellness throughout life. Large numbers of Aboriginal women, many of whom are 'at risk', do not access mainstream antenatal care until late in pregnancy and attend irregularly thereafter. Subsequent poor birth outcomes, eg low birth weight babies, are associated with poor antenatal care.

This documentary-style program examines community based primary care initiatives that are focused on improving birth outcomes, building a healthy base for infants and providing culturally sensitive, safe and appropriate antenatal care.

Key Initiatives

- Mums and Babies (Townsville Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Service QLD),
- Daruk Aboriginal Medical Service (Sydney),
- Strong Women Strong Babies Strong Culture (NT),
- NPY Health Service (NT),
- Alukra (Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Inc NT)



Learning Objectives

Identify the benefits of antenatal care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander mothers and babies.

Understand the impact of poor nutrition and substance use during the antenatal period and the potential effects on the child in utero and the new-born.

Identify strategies to broaden the skills and knowledge of Aboriginal mothers in a culturally appropriate way.

Recognise the need for a family approach when dealing with Aboriginal antenatal and infant care.



GROWING HEALTHY ABORIGINAL KIDS: THE EARLY YEARS 1-5

Continuing the the philosophy of the earlier program entitled Aboriginal Maternal and Infant Care this program focuses on issues including general poor health, diarrhoea, gastro, otitis media, skin problems, anaemia and nutrition and the impact on reduced immunity to infection and delayed physical and intellectual development. It also examines the important links between communities and health services.

The core essence of these programs was to examine the positive impact of the community based programs on these health issues not only now but also later in life.

Key initiatives

- Jirnani Childcare Centre (Nutrition & Family Program),
- Growth Assessment and Action program (GAA)
- Central Australian Aboriginal Congress Inc Alice Springs, 'Under 2' Program.

The program also examines how services such as the Rural and Remote Health community paediatricians and the paediatric liaison service provide a cohesive team linking communities and mainstream services.



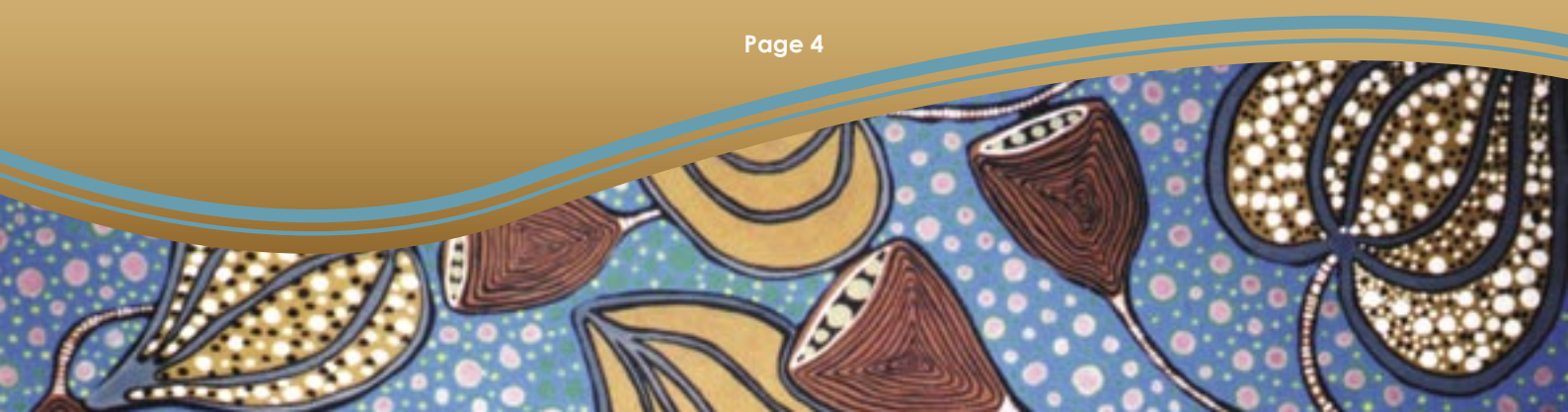
Learning Outcomes

Identify health problems commonly found in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children aged 1-5 years.

Understand the impact of child development programs on later life patterns of health.

Recognise the impact of anaemia and poor nutrition on reduced immunity to infection and delayed physical and intellectual development.

Recognise the need for a family approach when dealing with issues related to Aboriginal child health and early development.



INJURY PREVENTION IN ABORIGINAL COMMUNITIES

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community-based initiatives are striving to achieve a long term reduction in the disparity between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal health outcomes.

This program is designed to share the work of targeted individualised programs within communities, across a broad spectrum of injury.

It examines the magnitude of injury through prevention and safety promotion in different community initiatives aimed at capacity building and improving health outcomes and safety.

Focus areas were family violence, sports injury, petrol sniffing, empowerment of women, water safety.

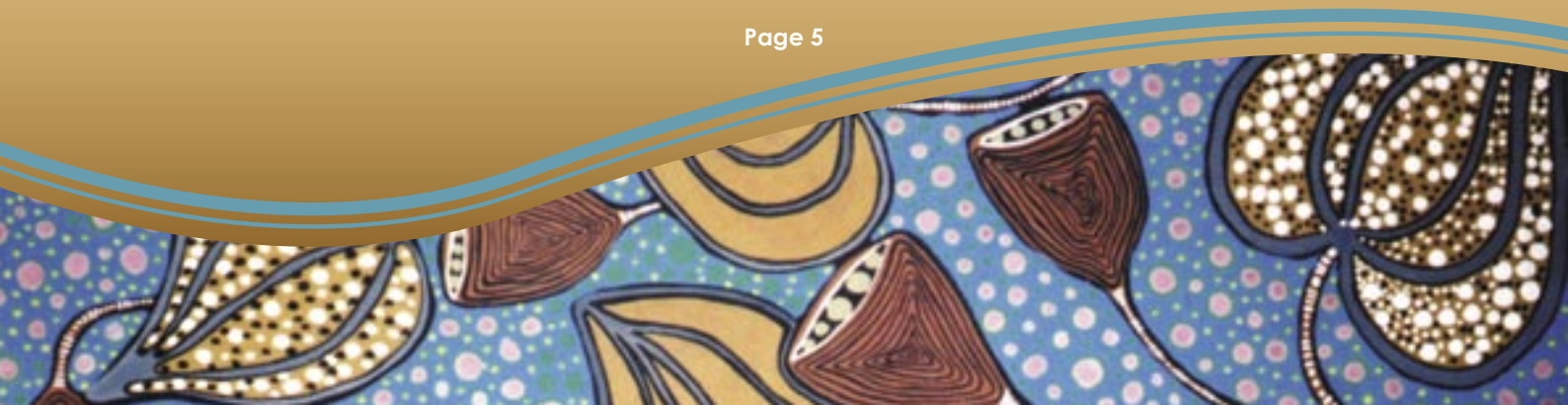
Key Initiatives

- Tangentyere Night Patrol (Alice Springs),
- Hermannsburg (NT) Night Patrol,
- Top End Women's Legal Service (Darwin),
- Water Safety Initiative 'Watch the Kids" (WA)
- 'Strong' program (NT).



Learning Outcomes

- Identify patterns and possible causes of injury amongst Aboriginal people
- Identify initiatives and possible ways to reduce injuries in Aboriginal communities
- Stimulate local injury prevention strategies
- Recognise the need for a family approach when dealing with injury prevention in Aboriginal communities



CULTURAL SAFETY

In the non Aboriginal community there is a limited understanding of the differences between a culture based on individualism, where the individual ranks above the community in importance, and a communitarian culture, in which each individual is less important than the whole. Houston et al believe that any healthcare system is a social institution built on the cultural stance of the population it serves. Therefore it follows that cultural values should provide the value base for health services.

So how can we as healthy professionals contribute to improving the health, social and emotional well being of Aboriginal Australians?

Cultural Safety and Health Education

Access to for GPs well supported and effective Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health training is clearly outlined in the framework for General Practice Training in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health. Resources including videos and the opportunity to gain a clear understanding of Aboriginal health is essential. These programs facilitate this by providing a frame of reference for understanding health care based on communitarianism. Understanding what works in terms of health care for Aboriginal people is paramount to the delivery of sustainable, holistic primary health care.



Cultural Competence

"...understanding it from their perspective, stepping outside of yourself. ...that's where your medical education and cultural competence is very important, not just awareness... like being aware of something that makes no difference to the way you operate.

Actually understanding your own cultural background, your own identity, issues around your own family, where you're from and how you view the world allows you to better understand someone who is from a different cultural background. ...giving it that kind of personal perspective is very important and if we could do that for all of our professionals, our med students, our teachers even if most people never go to an Aboriginal community again, that basic understanding and respect is paramount and is central to any program, to any initiative, to the health of any individual, any community that we have, ...that we understand one another and show respect and then we try and move forward."

(Dr Ngiare Brown, 2005 'Growing Health Aboriginal Kids – the early years 1-5')

