

Media Release

Research Shows Importance of Sport in Indigenous Men's Health

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Twenty-five years after a group of young Townsville men left home for a footy tour of Victoria a report on their health may have important lessons on Indigenous men's health for health planners and policy makers.

The research report, ***Boys to Men: Garbutt Magpies Twenty-Five Years On***, explores the current health status of those Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men who were members of the Garbutt Magpies under-17 AFL touring side which went to Melbourne in 1983.

Principal researcher on the project is Randall Ross, one of the 19 Indigenous members of the '83 team and now a health researcher at James Cook University's Indigenous Health Unit. Randall says the report's findings may have critical lessons for those struggling to address the poor health of Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander men today.

"As a member of the original team I was very interested to see whether our positive experiences as young men back in 1983 may have impacted on our health and lifestyle as middle-aged men 25 years later," said Randall Ross. "The report's key findings seem to indicate that is the case."

"We contacted the men and their family members seeking their permission and when that was forthcoming we gathered historical information and then organised a questionnaire, interviews and a community workshop to collect the data for the study.

"The results are remarkable; of the Indigenous young blokes who went to Melbourne all are still alive and none have spent time in prison; most have been employed full-time since leaving school and many own or are buying their own homes," reports Randall. "A large percentage does not smoke and many do not drink alcohol."

Randall Ross said researchers, from JCU and Melbourne's La Trobe University, have compared the study's data with national statistics on Indigenous men's health and lifestyle and the results indicate that the men in the study are faring better than the national average.



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However, according to Randall the next step is to compare the status of the men studied with a group of their Townsville peers.

“We are currently investigating the possibility of funding to expand the research project in that direction,” he said.

The report also found that:

While sport is popular amongst Indigenous young men one of its core strengths is the ‘safe’ place it can provide for young Indigenous men. This space allows generational relationships to be formed and strengthened between young men and older men and women. This strengthens the health of the larger Indigenous community. These relationships remain critical if we are to improve health and lessen the health gap of the Indigenous community. Despite these strengths, there remain significant health issues, including particularly obesity, when men cease playing sport and get older.

The Community Report, ***Boys to Men: Garbutt Magpies Twenty-Five Years On*** will be launched this coming Saturday.

***Boys to Men: Garbutt Magpies 25 years on
Mercure Hotel
Townsville
5pm Saturday 4th October***

Boys to Men: Garbutt Magpies Twenty-Five Years On is an in-kind project of the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health and was assisted with funding from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies.

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