

Guiding Good Practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research

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Ganma is a Yolngu term for where saltwater meets freshwater, a metaphor for when the knowledge systems of two cultures work together to create something new. Photo: Peter Eve <www.monsoonstudio.com.au>

Aim

To document important issues and effective strategies when researching health in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settings and develop practical resources to guide researchers and research supervisors.

Questions that shaped the guides

What are the key characteristics of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research environment?

What is different about doing research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander settings?

How can supervisors best support emerging Indigenous researchers?

How can researchers engage community in all stages of the project?

How do we collaboratively plan robust, culturally acceptable research that makes a difference?

How can research results be fed back in ways that inform policy and practice?

What is the best way to present the information to researchers?

'I love the checklists, the case studies and the layout. This will be really well used.'

'Everything in this [guide] was exactly what I needed to know when I started working in Indigenous health research, but learnt through trial and error instead.'

Collaborative development approaches

Bringing together Indigenous organisations, academic institutions and government agencies to share knowledge and advice.

More than asking what people wanted – it included bringing people together, listening and learning, drawing on what people know, using the networks, asking who else should have input, following up, requesting permission to quote published sources.

Valuing people's knowledge and generosity, respecting people's experience, including Indigenous and non-Indigenous perspectives, gathering community and academic views, promoting people's good work, both-ways sharing and learning as people told their stories.

Project methods included:

- workshop and meetings with stakeholders
- literature search and drawing on published and unpublished work
- interviews, yarning
- collecting stories: oral and written
- regular editorial workshops: planning, action, reflection, refinement...
- systematic review involving more than 60 people from community and academic research, service delivery, education and policy sectors.

'[The guide] will make our lives so much easier when we are trying to explain how, when and why "things" are "done like that" from an Indigenous perspective. The language is easy to read, clear and concise.'

What we learnt

Investment in relationship building and collaborative approaches resulted in strong engagement in the project and sharing expertise. This engagement supported diverse content from around Australia, including case stories and examples, evidence-based advice, step-by-step processes and recommended resources.

It takes time to work in this way. It is necessary to be flexible, open to ideas, and responsive.

Working collaboratively with the potential users of the guides enabled the development of well-targetted, original and useful resources.

'... unlocks important research information and makes it more accessible for Indigenous people.'



Outcomes – Two practical guides and a web resource

The **Web Resource** on the Lowitja Institute website has more research case stories and information for researchers about Indigenous health research policies, structures and collaborations, resources and links (www.lowitja.org.au).

'This will be a great resource for Masters and PhD students.'

Acknowledgments – A truly collaborative effort

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Incorporating the Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

www.lowitja.org.au



Ngarru Murray (left) managed a mentoring project that supported Aboriginal health workers, including Belinda Briggs, to present at an international conference on mental health

Parents and children with Let's Start project researchers (L–R): Kayleen & Ronaldo, Michaela & Tracey, Cindy & Ian, Lisa (out of view) & Fredo, with Gary, Roger & Celeste (group leaders)

Dr Tommy George and Dr George Musgrave receive their honorary doctorates. Photo: Thanks to James Cook University and to family members Christine Musgrave and Tommy George Jr