



6th Annual NHMRC Symposium on Research Translation co-hosted by the Lowitja Institute and NHMRC

The Butterfly Effect: Translating Knowledge into Action for Positive Change
14-15 November 2017, Brisbane

'Translation of Knowledge, Jyi Lawton 2017, Yimbana'

Symposium Communique

The 6th Annual NHMRC Symposium on Research Translation
co-hosted by the Lowitja Institute and NHMRC
Brisbane Convention Centre, 14–15 November 2017
The Butterfly Effect: Translating Knowledge into Action for Positive Change

Overview

The partnership between the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) and the Lowitja Institute was founded on a strong commitment by both institutions to deliver a measurable, positive impact on the health and wellbeing of Australia's First Peoples. That commitment informed all aspects of the event.

The partnership delivered a Symposium that was led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, brought together national and international expertise, and put forward Indigenous perspectives that will inform successful policies and programs.

The event also provided an opportunity for researchers, policy makers, community organisations and funding institutions to learn from each other about research translation that has had positive impacts in Australia, Canada and New Zealand.

This communique provides a summary of the Symposium and an update on the next steps for the co-hosts.

Key statistics

Total number of delegates	368
Delegates who identified as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples, Maori or First Nations Canadian peoples	37%
Abstracts received (oral, poster and workshop)	208
Oral presentations	53
Posters	60

CEO comments

In his closing remarks, Lowitja Institute Chief Executive Officer, Mr Romlie Mokak, said, "This Symposium created a solid space for deep and lasting impact. There were great panels, amazing all Indigenous panels dealing with difficult issues. I am lifted up by this conference".

Professor Anne Kelso, Chief Executive Officer of the NHMRC, in her closing remarks said "The spirit of the meeting is extraordinary as is the spirit of community. Community is the engine of research. We will look back on this meeting as a landmark".

Key themes from the Symposium

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership

The feedback from the Symposium overwhelmingly praised the consistency, deep expertise, and inspiration gained from the First Nations speakers and presenters. Of particular note is that all panellists, chairs and keynote speakers were Indigenous, with the NHMRC's Professor Kelso being the single exception. In addition, a third of Symposium delegates were Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers, which resulted in additional benefits to participants such as discussions on resilience, mentorship and life-lessons.

It is clear that there is a strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to lead research. To further grow and activate this workforce there needs to be more courageous conversations about racism and power structures, more research translation that stems from community priorities, and more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and organisations informing the agenda.

Having the hard yarns: A space to unite delegates

There were three ongoing themes that challenged delegates throughout the Symposium. These were presentations, questions and discussions that:

1. meaningfully adopted a strengths-based discourse
2. named racism in academic structures and processes
3. raised power-dynamics issues to enable more community led research.

These conversations have a significant impact on research translation as researchers were encouraged to construct their research findings in ways that help insert these themes into current policy narratives, issues and frameworks. Delegates were encouraged to be courageous in doing this, not only throughout the Symposium, but also for the future. The leadership of the speakers inspired and created a unique space that was bold, respectful and culturally safe.

Research translation in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health is leading the way

There was significant diversity across disciplines, topics, target audiences and geography in the work presented at the Symposium. The range and breath of topics covered by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers related to fields well beyond health. The presentations demonstrated the benefits of working holistically, without silos, and in collaboration with others. Speakers also noted that competitive funding processes need to take into account the way Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and communities operate.

It was clear from the Symposium that working collaboratively and holistically will better translate research into successful evidence-based practice. The Symposium affirmed that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research sector is at the forefront of research translation and is on track to go from strength to strength.

Our commitments as Symposium co-hosts

The Lowitja Institute will circulate a report on the insights and implications of the discussions from the Symposium and will continue to:

- Create spaces for Indigenous research leadership to flourish, with local and global Indigenous communities and other partners
- Support research that privileges Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and expertise from the beginning
- Strengthen the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce through our scholarships, networking opportunities and Knowledge Translation events
- Build research into current policy narratives, issues and frames through our Knowledge Translation seminars and the knowledge translation plans across all of our research projects.

The NHMRC has committed to develop Road Map 3 (*A Strategic Framework for Improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health through Research*) to guide and communicate its objectives and investment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research for the next decade. Following extensive consultation, Road Map 3 will be released in 2018 accompanied by an action plan. NHMRC will continue to:

- Invest 5% or more of the Medical Research Endowment Account in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and medical research
- Maintain an advisory group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (the Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus) and have representation on the Council of NHMRC and Principal Committees
- Improve Indigenous peoples' health through partnerships with the Canadian Institutes of Health Research and the Health Research Council of New Zealand
- Communicate the diverse pathways into research taken by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health researchers and contribute to ensuring that a steady flow of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples enter the sector and can pursue a viable and rewarding career.

Further information from the Symposium, including videos and presentations, can be [found here](#).

The Croakey Conference News Service Symposium report is [available here](#).