

Caring for Indigenous People with Mental Illness

Project SE63: Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative in the Northern Territory (AIMHI NT)

What's the project about?

The Australian Integrated Mental Health Initiative in the Northern Territory (AIMHI NT) has been working with people in both remote and urban areas to learn more about the experience of Indigenous people with mental illness. AIMHI has studied the journey of Aboriginal people through mental health services, and explored strategies to facilitate the journey of clients and their carers from community to primary care to specialist mental health services and home again.

Who's involved?

- Aboriginal mental health workers
- Top End Division of General Practice
- Top End Mental Health Service
- Tiwi Islands Mental Health team
- CRC for Aboriginal Health
- NT Department of Health and Community Services (NT DHCS)
- University of Queensland
- National Health and Medical Research Council
- Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Fund

Outcomes

- An 18-month randomised controlled trial of brief intervention in remote communities demonstrated improved wellbeing, life skills, mental health and self-management skills, along with decreased alcohol and marijuana dependence and decreased domestic violence in the home, among clients suffering from chronic mental illness and substance abuse.
- The project has also resulted in numerous other achievements, including:



The AIMHI NT team, Top: Valerie Thompson, Carolyn Thompson, Leigh-ann Onnis and Dr Tricia Nagel. Bottom: Neil Spencer, John Cusack and Daniel Muholland

- Completion of a DVD incorporating many of the sounds and images resulting from collaborative work in remote and urban communities.
- The provision of training courses in assessment and brief interventions to more than 300 service providers attending 30 workshops across four states of Australia, including primary care and specialist services.
- Training and resources already integrated into the preventable chronic disease strategy of the NT, and currently being integrated into Aboriginal mental health worker roles in acute wards and remote communities.
- A popular website showcasing resources including care plans, information sheets and flip charts (www.menzies.edu.au/AIMHI).
- Distribution of resources upon request to more than 200 services across Australia.
- Winning the Royal Australian and New Zealand College of Psychiatrists Rural Research Award 2007 and the TheMHS 'Gold Award' for rural and remote service delivery 2007.

Implications of findings for policy and practice

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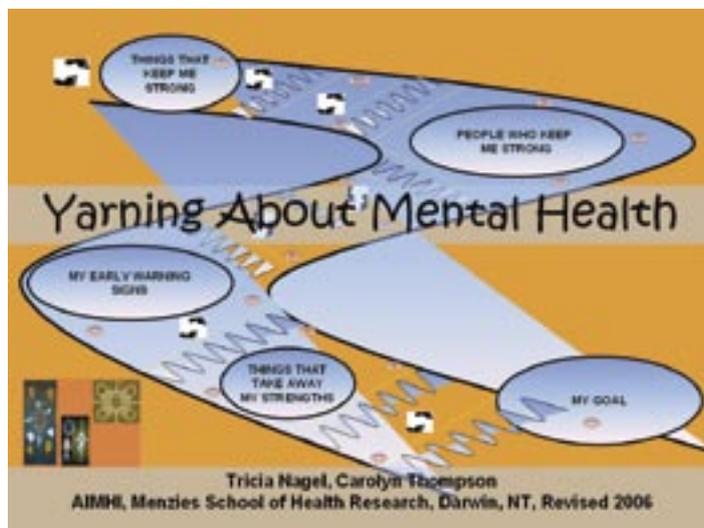
- Integration of mental health care planning into primary care.
- Development of an effective brief intervention for clients with mental illness, which can also be used in the setting of chronic disease, substance misuse and social stress.
- Improved partnership with Aboriginal mental health workers in the workplace.
- Increased Indigenous research capacity.

The project began in 2003 and is due to finish in 2008.

AIMHI: From the Territory to the world

The Top End Division of General Practice and the Preventable Chronic Disease Strategy of the NT DHCS actively supported, funded and incorporated AIMHI resources and the brief intervention into the training and education of their staff in 2006-2007. It is intended that the AIMHI approach will be embedded in orientation and induction as well as ongoing staff development activities.

AIMHI has also achieved great success with its promotion of Indigenous mental health resources. Requests for resources (such as the flip chart pictured here) have been received from across Australia, and from as far afield as Canada and Alaska.



Cooperative Research Centre for
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To find out more

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