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**Lowitja**  
Institute

Australia's National Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research

**ETHICS CASE STUDY: JUNE 2015**

## ABCD National Research Partnership

A collaboration led by Menzies School of Health Research

The ABCD National Research Partnership aimed to improve the quality of care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary healthcare settings, both community-controlled and state-managed health services.

### Background

The partnership brought together stakeholders from across jurisdictions and all levels of the health system to support and guide research on priority primary healthcare system issues and to answer key questions relevant to quality improvement in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary healthcare sector. Stakeholders included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community controlled peak bodies and primary healthcare services, government and leading research institutions.

The partnership aimed to identify factors that underlie variation in primary healthcare, including variation in practice between regions and between health centres. It further aimed to develop an understanding of what factors help health centres achieve improvements in care despite challenging environments, as well as identify and share successful strategies to improve quality of care. This is important to help refine quality improvement tools and processes so that they can be effective across diverse settings.

### Why is the project an example of good practice in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Ethics?

*This project strongly demonstrates ongoing engagement, collaboration and partnership with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and has included capacity building and professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The project has also demonstrated a high level of research translation to ensure stakeholder involvement at every stage of the research.*

The partnership has **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander led governance and collaborative structures**, critical to the success of establishing national and regional level partnership management structures and steering committees across the country. This includes representation from peak community controlled bodies, as well as leaders of local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services.

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**EthicsHub** is an online resource to support people and organisations working or participating in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research.

[www.lowitja.org.au/ethics](http://www.lowitja.org.au/ethics)

Of the 28 organisations involved in the regional steering committees for the partnership, 10 of the organisations were community controlled health services and five were community controlled peak bodies. The regional and national governance structures enabled Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services bring their priority issues to the attention of regional and national decision-makers.

The broad **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been engaged** in the ABCD program of work and the ABCD National Research Partnership since inception. **From the planning phase**, research users helped prioritise and shape the research, including through **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services participating on regional steering committees** to set research directions.

Forty organisations were involved in the biannual meetings and with half community controlled health services and peak bodies, government-managed services and health departments and half were research organisations. The Partnership provided research and development support to One21seventy, which in turn has provided continuous quality improvement (CQI) service support to over 230 healthcare centres.

The extent to which **stakeholders have worked in partnership** is reflected in the active engagement and representation of more than 50 organisations in steering committees, bi-annual partnership meetings, audit tool reviews and collaborative research. Participating organisations included 15 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services (both government managed and community-controlled), six community-controlled peak bodies, seven government health departments, three Medicare Locals, and three international collaborations and 23 different university/research organisations. More than 170 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health services participated through making CQI data available for research purposes. The extent of engagement of stakeholders is also reflected in **collaborative authorship of research publications**, with eight different organisations taking the lead on publications.

The partnership has drawn on the **expertise of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people** and communities, and has strived to reciprocate this through a commitment to building on existing skills and abilities within these communities. A focus of the partnership has been on improving the capacity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health service staff to analyse, interpret and use data for the purpose of setting priorities and planning strategies for practice and system improvement to improve the health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations.

More than 1200 staff have benefitted from One21seventy training to date, with 45 per cent of all attendees at One21seventy CQI training in 2014 being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Partnership has focussed **on supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, research officers and a post-doctoral fellow**. The partnership supported attendance at conferences and participation at professional development workshops and accredited courses for a range of participating researchers with a priority on supporting professional development for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

**Findings have been presented in oral, visual and written form**, with 83 conference and poster presentations, 24 peer-reviewed publications, research reports and briefs, to promote knowledge exchange among community, wider Australian and international stakeholders. Nine 'plain English' briefs for community health boards and Aboriginal Health Workers have been developed.

A flier about the impact of the Partnership's work, and plain English statements about each peer reviewed publication to enable accessibility of findings is available. Papers are published in open-access' journals to enable access for those who don't have free access to journals. The research translation activities have contributed to increased national policy interest and momentum for CQI, including development of a national CQI Framework for Indigenous primary healthcare.