



Developing cultural competence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People at Kyabram District Health Service: 2012-2020. Report Summary

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We acknowledge and pay respect to the Traditional Owners of the lands upon which our campuses are situated and across the Kyabram and Campaspe Region where this research took place. We would like to pay our respects to the Elders past, present and emerging.

Background

Kyabram and District Health Service (KDHS) currently provides care to a greater proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members than many other health services of a similar size. The leadership at KDHS have recognised the important role they play in providing care to all local residents as one of a limited number of health services in a region which is home to a high proportion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. The use of the service by the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community has been steadily increasing since 2012 when the service began the journey to help “Close the Gap” in health and wellbeing outcomes and improve organisational cultural competence for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Between 2012-2015, KDHS undertook a range of activities to improve health service delivery including consultation with local Aboriginal Elders, the inclusion of the Aboriginal flag at the entrance to the health service, the purchasing and display of Aboriginal artwork, the development of a leadership team committed to improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and service access, and the establishment of a governance structure to oversee the development and improvement of health service delivery. In 2016, KDHS partnered with researchers from the University of Melbourne, Department of Rural Health in undertaking further change to become more culturally inclusive and responsive to the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. This report summarises this journey to date and the ongoing process of change.

How was the study undertaken?

The research project undertaken in partnership between KDHS and the research team sought to provide evidence about how mainstream rural health services can become inclusive for all. The research with KDHS has been undertaken in three, overlapping phases.

Key events in the KDHS Cultural Competency Journey

- “Statement of Intent” signed.
- Appointment of a new CEO.
- Aboriginal Flag raising ceremony.
- Aboriginal Artwork purchased.
- Consultation meeting with local Aboriginal Elders.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing in Statement of Priorities.

2012



- KDHS Aboriginal Health Plan established.
- “Statement of Intent” resigned.
- Completion of DHHS Cultural Competence Continuous Quality Improvement Tool.

2014



- KDHS Cultural Responsiveness Plan reviewed and endorsed by KDHS Board.
- Community member of Aboriginal origin elected to KDHS Board.
- KDHS Community Governance Committee formed.
- “Experience-led” approach to patient care adopted by KDHS.

2015



- Formation of the Aboriginal Health Cultural Responsiveness Working Party.
- Acknowledgement of Country added to the beginning of all KDHS meetings.
- Welcome to Country performed at all major KDHS events.
- Presentation on research project with UoM to the Loden Mallee Health Services Partnership Forum Working Group in Bendigo.

2016



- Members of KDHS Leadership attend the Aboriginal Health Conference.
- Research partnership between the University of Melbourne, Department of Rural Health and KDHS established.
- KDHS Aboriginal Health Community Governance Group established.

2017



- Cultural Awareness Training offered to all staff at KDHS.
- New AHLO appointed.
- Phase 2 research interviews with Kyabram Aboriginal community members undertaken.
- Formation of the Community and Cultural Working Party.
- NAIDOC week celebrations
- Artwork from local school students displayed at KDHS.

2018



- First Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer (AHLO) appointed at KDHS.
- Discussions begin with Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative to deliver dental services at KDHS.
- Formation of Community and cultural Governance Committee.
- First NAIDOC week celebrations with staff and community.

2019



- AHLO position increased to 3 days per week.
- Further research activities postponed due to COVID-19 pandemic.

2020



- Rumbalara Aboriginal Co-operative dental services commence at KDHS.
- NAIDOC week community walk and morning tea celebrations.
- Phase 3 research discussion activities undertaken.
- Development of “Asking the Question of Aboriginal Identity” flow chart.

Phase 1 – Staff Perspectives 2016-2017

The first phase explored staff perspectives towards delivering inclusive care at KDHS. A series for 4 focus groups were held with a total of 28 staff participants from different areas and levels within the health service. In addition, an informal review of admission and discharge documentation templates was conducted to investigate how the language, format and style used may influence the health service-consumer encounter. An initial series of 5 research discussion activities were then undertaken with staff to explore the diversity of the Kyabram community and the types of challenges faced by different social groups when accessing health care. A further 13 discussion activities were then undertaken on access, equity and diversity with a total of 65 staff from across the service.

Phase 2 – Aboriginal Community Perspectives 2018

The second phase of the project involved gaining consumer perspectives from members of the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community from the greater Kyabram area. A total of nine adult participants were interviewed between July and December 2018 by a researcher who identifies as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.

Phase 3 – Bringing Staff and Community Perspectives together 2019-2020

The third phase of the project involved bringing the experiences of the community and the staff perspectives together and working with KDHS leadership and staff to explore ways in which current processes and practices within the health service can be improved. A total of 12 discussion activities were undertaken with staff from across the health service.

Findings

Phase 1 Research Findings: Inclusive rural health care at KDHS – Staff Perspectives

Analysis of the data from the four focus groups revealed ten key themes relating to cultural inclusivity and a review of the documentation templates suggested areas for improvement for the health service-consumer encounter. A full report of this data and analysis was provided to the KDHS Board of Directors in May of 2017. In summary, most KDHS staff have a sincere desire to provide a quality service for all consumers. Many staff expressed pride in the health service, a genuine aspiration to treat people well and to provide a welcoming and inclusive environment. However, many staff were unsure what cultural and/or social difference means for patients in mainstream health services and how to practically deal with that difference while providing culturally and clinically appropriate care. In response to the findings from the four focus groups, discussion groups were held with KDHS staff from across all areas of the service. The discussion groups provided an opportunity to unpack any misunderstandings about cultural inclusion and encourage staff to think and reflect on their practice in relation to cultural inclusion.

During this phase of the research project, key developments and initiatives were undertaken within KDHS:

- Formation of the Aboriginal Health Cultural Responsiveness Working Party.
- Acknowledgement of Country added to the beginning of all KDHS meetings.
- Welcome to Country performed at all major KDHS events.
- Presentation on the research project with UoM to the Loddon Mallee Health Services Partnership Forum Working Group in Bendigo.
- First Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer (AHLO) appointed at KDHS.
- Discussions began with Rumbalara Aboriginal Health Service to deliver outreach dental services at KDHS.
- Formation of the Community and Cultural Governance Committee.
- The first NAIDOC week celebrations were held at KDHS with staff and the community.

Phase 2 Research Findings: Interviews with Aboriginal Community Members

Analysis of the findings from interviews with members of the local Kyabram Aboriginal community identified four key themes: 1) the importance of the Aboriginal Health Liaison Officer role (AHLO); 2) how KDHS communicates with the wider community; 3) the need for increased employment of Aboriginal people at the health service; and

4) the cultural awareness of the health service and how this can be improved. In particular, how the question of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander origin is asked.

During this phase of the research project, the following activities and developments occurred within KDHS:

- Cultural Awareness Training was offered to all staff.
- A new AHLO was appointed.
- The Aboriginal Cultural Responsiveness Working Party was renamed the Community and Cultural Working Party and undertook a broader range of activities and plans for inclusion.
- KDHS NAIDOC week celebrations including a smoking ceremony held at Kyabram Fauna Park, followed by a community walk to KDHS and morning tea with the community.

Phase 3 Research Findings: Bringing Staff and Community Perspectives together 2019-2020

The third phase of the project sought to bring together the feedback from the local Aboriginal community about what improvements can be made at KDHS to increase cultural competence. A series of discussion groups were undertaken with staff about asking the question of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity. It was found that KDHS staff genuinely want to treat every patient with respect, dignity and provide the best possible care to all patients and/or clients. Many though were unsure when, where, how or why the question of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander identity should be asked. Working together, the AHLO, Simone Guinan and the research team developed an “Asking the Question of Aboriginal Identity” flow chart that was added to the health service’s staff intranet portal. Follow up discussion and education sessions with staff were planned however, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, these sessions have been postponed until 2021. In the interim, the AHLO Simone Guinan has been undertaking information sessions with staff on where to access the flow chart.

During this phase of the research project, key developments and initiatives were undertaken within KDHS:

- Artwork from local school students was displayed regularly at KDHS.
- Rumbalara Aboriginal Health Service dental outreach services commenced at KDHS.
- AHLO position increased from 2 to 3 days per week (Jan-Jun 2020).
- Kyabram COVID-19 Community Leadership Group established.

Moving Forward

The progress made towards improving cultural competence at KDHS has taken a significant amount of time, commitment and perseverance. It will now be critical to continue the journey of inclusion and responsiveness that KDHS has started and to further demonstrate commitment and leadership towards improving cultural competence for the local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. In line with the KDHS Strategic Plan 2018-2023, the health service will continue its commitment towards improving cultural competence. Through progression of the Aboriginal Health Plan, KDHS is continuing to align the goals of the health service with Version 2 of the NQSHS standards, the Victorian DHHS Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultural Safety Framework and the Improving Care for Aboriginal Patients (ICAP) program. KDHS will continue to work with local schools and community groups to create avenues for engagement and communication between the health service and the Aboriginal community.

**This research was conducted by members of the Culturally Inclusive Rural Health Care team at
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We acknowledge the Australian Research Council Discovery Program and Australian Government Department of Health Rural Health Multidisciplinary Training program for funding this research.

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