



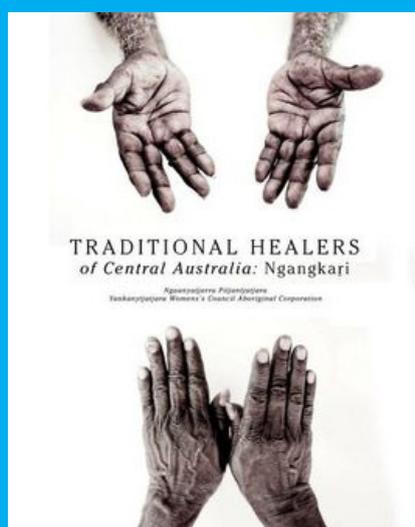
SETTING

Rural and Remote

ANTAC and the Ngangkari Healers of Central Australia

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations have medicine and healing traditions that helped sustain physical and mental health and wellbeing over tens of thousands of years. Many of these traditions survive into the present day and, as discussed here, there are movements to both integrate these traditions into the contemporary Australian health system and to ensure their survival into the future.





Within this broader movement, the Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation (ANTAC) is the first organisation of Aboriginal traditional healers in Australia. ANTAC includes the Ngangkari healers of the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY) in the far north-west corner of South Australia, straddling Western Australia and the Northern Territory.

The Ngangkari's work is described in *Traditional Healers of Central Australia: Nganagkari*ⁱ (published by the NPY Women's Council an organisation that operates in Alice Springs and in Central desert areas across WA, NT, SA) and ANTAC's *Hand-in-Hand Report on Aboriginal Traditional Medicine*.ⁱⁱ

It combines 'hands on' and breath-based healing practices with the use of traditional plants and balms to heal within an uniquely Indigenous belief system combining physical, emotional, mental and spiritual levels of being and in the context of a spiritual world not recognised in western medical paradigms.

“ Ngangkari practices have proven effective not only in physical health contexts but also in addressing grief, depression and mental health challenges which for some Aboriginal people can include working with the spirits of deceased kin or relatives, or spirits in general ”

Dr Francesca Panzironi, founder and CEO of ANTAC



Mrs Debbie Watson, ANTAC Director and Senior Ngangkari

Recently, for example, some Aboriginal women requiring dialysis became sensitive to the presence of a spirit in the dialysis rooms with an Adelaide hospital. This too was cleared by the Ngangkari and so their treatment could proceed.

In an interview with Dr Panzironi, she explains how ANTAC's aim is to integrate the Aboriginal medicine tradition into Australia's national health care system through the development of a two-way health care model that ensures access to the 'best of both worlds' in Aboriginal traditional medicine, healing practices and western medicine.



ANTAC has positioned itself in the two-way health care model it proposes as a point of connection between the Ngangkari and the mainstream health system. There are two elements to this positioning.

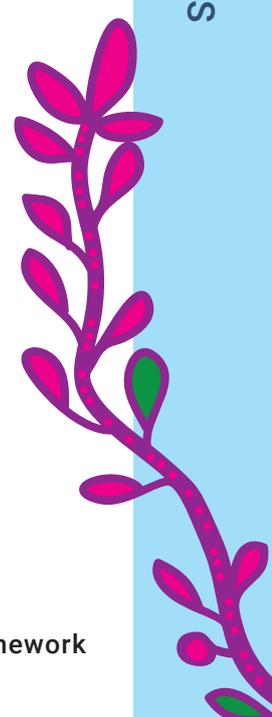
ANTAC first provides a contact point for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people seeking Ngangkari healers and services and promotes access to Ngangkari services. Referrals are directed to ANTAC by SA Health sites including hospitals, health services and clinics and the Ngangkari work through individual healing sessions and clinic scheduled appointments for which they receive remuneration through the brokerage program fund.

Second, by developing best practice for Ngangkari services delivery including protocols for protecting the Ngangkari from infection while in health care settings; how Ngangkari might work best in acute settings; how Ngangkari are recognised. This work involves close work with clinicians and health service staff to ensure all stakeholders are aware of the Ngangkari and how to work with them in a culturally safe and respectful and clinically appropriate way. This can include by ensuring they are accompanied by Aboriginal liaison officers in hospital and other clinical settings, and in settings where their work might be misunderstood or language a potential barrier.

The value of the Ngangkari in health service settings is illustrated in an interview with Mr Kurt Towers, Executive Director of the Watto Purrinna Aboriginal Health Service that provides services across four sites in Adelaide's northern and central metropolitan regions. 'Watto Purrinna' is a Kurna term meaning 'the branch of life'.



Mukayi Baker, co-founder of ANTAC and senior Ngangkari, providing healing treatment.



Interview with Kurt Towers



We really value ANTAC and the Ngangkari services Watto Purrunga can access through them for our clients. In fact, the Ngangkari now provide a regular clinic at all four of our sites across Adelaide. At these, clients can access the Ngangkari with a referral from a clinician

- a doctor or an Aboriginal Health Practitioner. But we also respond to direct requests from an Aboriginal person or their family or kin, for treatment.

By these referral pathways, we can arrange for Ngangkari to visit people in emergency departments and hospital settings, aged care settings, alcohol and drug rehabilitation settings, in palliative care, and in mental health clinics. Sometimes our belief systems require the Ngangkari to visit a person's home in order to treat or heal their entire living environment and even work with their family.

I believe we still have a bit more to go in terms of promoting Ngangkari services not just to doctors, health services and the hospital system - but to our Aboriginal patients. I believe that just as it is standard practice for Aboriginal liaison officers to attend to our people in hospital, so too the option for Ngangkari services should also be made available.

In the Northern Adelaide Local Health Network in which Watto Purrunga operates, it's mandatory for all staff to undertake cultural learning, and we use this opportunity to celebrate the role of the Ngangkari. We also have quite a stringent evaluation after every Ngangkari service episode – qualitative and quantitative. We anticipate publishing the results in the near future. What I can confirm for now is that by using our traditional healers, our health system has engaged Indigenous consumers in new ways that have a host of flow on benefits not the least of which being greater use of those services in the first place. Further, that Ngangkari treatments are entirely complimentary to the hospital and western clinical treatments.

To find out more please contact ANTAC: www.antac.org.au

- i. NPY Women's Council Aboriginal Corporation (2013). *Traditional Healers of the Central Desert : Ngangkari*. Magabala Books.
- ii. Panzironi, F. (2013). *Hand-in-Hand. Report on Aboriginal Traditional Medicine*. Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Lands (APY): Anangu Ngangkari Tjutaku Aboriginal Corporation. www.antac.org.au/shopping/hand-in-hand-report-on-aboriginal-traditional-medicine-book