



RACP Foundation Research Awards

FINAL REPORT

Project Title	Investing in land management and culture to enhance Aboriginal health and wellbeing	
Name	Dr Rosalie Schultz	
Award Received	2017 Vincent Fairfax Family Foundation Research Entry Scholarship in Rural Health	
Report Date	1 February 2018	
Chief Investigator / Supervisor	Associate Professor Sheree Cairney	
Administering Institution	Centre for Remote Health	
Funding Period	Start Date:	1 January 2017
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PROJECT SUMMARY

The Interplay project was focused on wellbeing of Aboriginal people in remote Australia, as a goal of human and service development. We sought to better understand how services can work with Aboriginal people to enhance their health and wellbeing.

We worked with government and community members to develop a framework of wellbeing, which included the government priorities of health, education and employment, with the addition of community priorities of community, empowerment and culture.

Collection of qualitative data – stories – enabled people to define what wellbeing means for them. The story of the importance of culture for people's wellbeing has permeated throughout the research. Employment that enhances people's participation in cultural activities provides many benefits. A startling finding was that employment in land management – such as through Ranger programs – may be an opportunity to reduced the devastating and growing burden of injury and related criminality through interpersonal violence. Education that enhances people's culture would promote participation of community members in schools to ensure that there was two way education and that non-Aboriginal employees were able to learn important Aboriginal knowledge and skills such as language, ecological knowledge and caring for country.

We analysed quantitative data from the surveys through structural equation modelling. This is a relatively new statistical technique that enables the creation of models of abstract concepts such as physical and mental health, participation in cultural activities, use of Aboriginal languages, and empowerment. Quantifying relationships between these constructs and wellbeing can suggest opportunities for services to increase their impacts on wellbeing. For example, in the model of health and wellbeing, the construct of physical health has no direct correlation with wellbeing. However there are significant correlations between physical and mental health, and between mental health and wellbeing. The model therefore suggests that a stronger focus on mental

health may have greater impact on wellbeing than the health service emphasis on physical health.

Overall close work with Aboriginal researchers and community members, and focus on wellbeing has led to striking new findings, and for me as an entry level researcher profoundly changed my understanding of relationships between health professionals and Aboriginal communities. Rather than seeing Aboriginal people, particularly those in remote communities as suffering immense burdens of disease and illness, I am now much more aware of their chosen lifeways, values and aspirations, and how this can contribute to development of services, communities and Australia as a nation that colonized Aboriginal lands.

PROJECT AIMS / OBJECTIVES

SIGNIFICANCE AND OUTCOMES

The Closing the Gap strategy is currently under review so there is great opportunity for research into wellbeing to contribute to policy change in relation to services provided for Aboriginal people.

The fundamental goals of closing the gap were narrowly defined and reflected mainstream economic indicators rather than Aboriginal aspirations. While the health goals of life expectancy and child mortality may be more difficult to challenge, the Closing the Gap goals to increase employment of Aboriginal people in the mainstream economy may not reflect how Aboriginal wish to live their lives.

My research focus on land management is particularly interesting in this respect. Land management is a source of employment that can meet aspirations of both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities. It can provide the significant health and wellbeing benefits of employment, in addition to strengthening other priorities of the Interplay wellbeing framework of empowerment, culture and community. This is described in the article published in Health Promotion Journal of Australia: Injury prevention through employment as a priority for wellbeing among Aboriginal people in remote Australia.

Representatives of the Department of Prime Minister are already using this work which integrates goals in the Departments of Environment and Energy, Health and Prime Minister and Cabinet.

PUBLICATIONS / PRESENTATIONS

1. Schultz R, Abbott T, Yamaguchi J, Cairney S. Injury prevention through employment as a priority for wellbeing among Aboriginal people in remote Australia. Health Promotion Journal of Australia. 2018:1-6.
2. McRae-Williams E, Yamaguchi J, Wilson B, Schultz R, Cairney S. Interplay Wellbeing Framework: Community Perspectives on Working Together for Effective Service Delivery in Remote Aboriginal Communities. International Indigenous Policy Journal. 2018;9(1):In press.
3. Schultz R. Re: Implementation of policies to protect planetary health. Lancet Planetary Health. 2018;In press.
4. Schultz R, Abbott T, Wilson B, Quinn S, Cairney S. Culture and the interplay of services for bodies and minds improves wellbeing. Lowitja Institute International Indigenous Health and Wellbeing Conference; 8 to 10 November; Melbourne 2016.

5. Schultz R. The excess burden of severe sepsis in Indigenous Australian children: can anything be done? *Med J Aust.* 2017;207(1):45-6.

6. Schultz R. Response to: Tackling antimicrobial resistance globally. *Medical Journal of Australia.* 2018;In press.

7. Schultz R, Cairney S. Caring for country and the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians. *Medical Journal of Australia.* 2017;207(1):8-9.

Conference presentation at Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) National Indigenous Research Conference 2017: Impact, engagement, transformation entitled Using Aboriginal research to inform policy and practice in Aboriginal health development. I met representatives of different Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and interested government departments.