

Building Culturally Safe Responses to Family Violence in the Health Sector: Policy and Practice Report

The Centre of Research Excellence to promote Safer Families (Safer Families Centre) is the first dedicated Centre to lead research into the health effects of domestic violence and abuse and the health sector policy and practice responses needed to improve the safety, health and well-being of women, children and young people.

Safer Families Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy and practice round table - Adelaide 20 May 2019

The purpose of the round table was to bring people together with common and shared interests and influence to contribute to building and enhancing safer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and families through research, policy and practice. Topics were discussed within a South Australian context although relevance to other states in Australia were acknowledged. An important feature was to enable strong Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's voices. The round table enabled meaningful engagement and information sharing about respectful research, and provided translation and exchange opportunities among policy makers, practitioners, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and researchers.

Those represented at the round table included senior representatives from Aboriginal Health Council of SA; Kornar Winmil Yunti Aboriginal Corporation; Nunga Mi:Minar; SA Departments of Aboriginal Affairs, Health Networks, Human Services, Drug and Alcohol Services and Treasury. Also in attendance was the Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young people, Commissioner for Aboriginal Engagement, Manager Women's Safety Strategy and researchers from Safer Families Centre, University of Melbourne, University of SA and South Australia Health and Medical Research Institute (SAHMRI).

South Australian context:

Aboriginal communities in SA are highly concerned about child removal rates. This concern can be a barrier to community and family engagement when researching family violence. Needs and safety of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, children, men, parents, families and communities are paramount. Currently, there are no SA Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander researchers in this space.

Key principles for research, policy and practice

Following is a list of principles for effective research, policy and practice to support safer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families. These were developed as an outcome of discussions from the round table.

1. Outcomes focused research and implementation that is relevant and useful with bottom up approaches utilised.
2. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander leadership essential at all levels of decision making including co design and translation of findings into policy and practice; Self-determination and doing research the 'right way' (Accord 2014); Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voice first.
3. Build capacity and capability of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people at community, researcher, business, specialist worker, policy and practice levels, including research skills such as data collection methods. Education and training in cultural competency and experience for non-Aboriginal people involved in research and implementation.
4. Strong collaborations needed at every level across communities, researchers, service providers, government and non-government. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people and services working together with shared understandings proactively reducing tensions such as those arising from competition.
5. Policy development processes that are responsive and evidence based and not reactive, with intersectoral collaborations inclusive of community and frontline worker expertise.
6. Strengths based approaches, trust and relationship building for undertaking effective research, policy and practice; really listening with intent and getting the language right.
7. Practice that is responsive to local needs and delivering intended outcomes.
8. Both men and women involved in solving family violence.
9. Research, policy and practice setting up Aboriginal parameters at the point of early engagement, including measurements and accountability at all levels including back to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Suggested focus for research topics:

1. Develop consistent and appropriate language and terminology that adequately reflects the lived experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and their families and communities.
2. Consider three concepts that affect the dynamics of relationships-community, violence, racism.
3. Develop targeted policy and practice frameworks that account for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's and men's gendered experience of family violence, including implementation plans.
4. What would healing spaces and programs look like for women, men and children?
5. Identifying needs for early engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander LGBTQI peoples.
6. How policy and practice decisions improve outcomes for the child in their own right (children are unique).

Next steps from this round table:

What participants said they could do back in their workplaces:

- Advocate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander input into current and future work.
- Challenge colleagues to practice and continue to learn.
- Acknowledgment of Country at the bottom of all emails.
- Sharing and speaking up more about projects and supporting difficult conversations.
- Facilitate connection between individual organisations' objectives and SA Health policy directive.
- Opportunity for participants and organisations to attend and contribute to government-run early intervention codesign workshops.
- Promoting the key principles arising from the round table.
- Incorporating this information into the Safer Families Aboriginal Leadership Group and the broader Centre.
- Developing consistent key messages to inform further research, policy and practice.
- Recruiting Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander PhD Scholar to help develop and test health sector responses needed to improve the safety, health, resiliency and well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families and communities.
- Identifying other community priority research projects.
- Exploring interest in SA to form a working group to help progress this work.

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Aboriginal Communities and
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