Engaging an Aboriginal Reference Group for a PhD study

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The story of our logo:
The logo uses the central symbol of a head to represent the field of mental health. It is surrounded by large circles which symbolize the organisations and community groups which contribute to a combined effort to improve mental health in Australia. The smaller circles in between the larger circles represent the individuals affected by mental ill-health and their families. The roads in the outer section of the logo symbolize the many pathways that lead to mental ill-health and back to restored mental health.

The logo was designed by Allison Bellottie, an Aboriginal artist belonging to the Malgana and Nanda tribal groups from the Shark Bay area of Western Australia.
This study is also supported by a grant by The Nurses Memorial Trust
Background

• ↓↓ engagement of Aboriginal Australians in mainstream mental health and substance use services (Berry & Crowe, 2009; Garvey, 2008; Westerman, 2004).

• Marginalisation by mainstream mental health services & increased risk to unnecessary mortality and morbidity (Westerman, 2004).

• Cultural respectful response by staff
Purpose

- This study investigates the facilitators and barriers to the provision of culturally respectful mental health care to Aboriginal Australian in mainstream mental health services
ARGs

• As a non-Indigenous person the establishment of an Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) was essential to maintain cultural safely during the research process (Shahid, Bessarab, Howat, & Thompson, 2009).

• However, little research on ARG for PhD study purposes.
Ethical considerations

• NHMRC’s (2003) Values and Ethics: Guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research & updated – 2007.  

• NHMRC’s (2005) Keeping Research on Track: A guide for Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics. *Companion to 2003 guidelines.*  

• NHMRC 2010. The *NHMRC Road Map II*: A strategic framework for improving the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people through research.  
Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

The six values that are central to these guidelines are:

• Spirit and Integrity
• Reciprocity
• Respect
• Equality
• Survival and Protection
• Responsibility
• Team investigator with NHMRC Capacity Building Grant.

• Consultation with Indigenous and Non-Indigenous research fellows and liaison with the grant cultural consultants
Purpose of ARGs

• What is the purpose of ARGs
  – In general
  – For this study?

The aim of this research Reference Group is underpinned by the National Health and Medical Research Councils (NHMRC, 2003)
Driving principles

– Recognition and respect for Aboriginal knowledge & experience.
– Capacity Building
– Advocacy
Method

- Initial consultation with BMW group, Aboriginal & Indigenous academics and cultural consultants.
- Industry stakeholders.
- Networking to identify potential recruits for the ARG
- Cold invitations
- Inaugural ARG meeting
- Terms of reference and aims ARG decided
• Active membership – male/female
• Timing/frequency of meetings; modes of communication; decided by group.
• Agendas
• Minutes & notes recorded.
• Discussion audio-taped
• Membership remains open “by invitation”
Strengths & Opportunities

• Strengths
  – Open, collaborative, stakeholders involved.
  – Consolidate themes, ideas & direction of data analysis
  – Point of reflection for researcher
Strengths & Opportunities

- Opportunities
  - Limited literature: No instruction manual for establishing an ARG for PhD study.
  
  - Protocols are frameworks to provide guidelines to consider ethical behaviour and reflectivity.
Strengths & Opportunities

– Juggling time demands for all involved

– Opportunities for interested parties to be part of final dissemination of information & “plan” for translation

– Working beyond western academic research “currencies”

– Opportunity to scope role of ARG use in PhD study.
Where to now?

• Continued consultation and collaboration with ARG during final stages of study.
• Dissemination of information to stakeholders & industry
• Translation to “best” practice in collaboration with ARG.
  – Professional bodies; Industry; Clinicians; Educators.
  – Stimulus for practice/policy/orientation/paradigm shift
Acknowledgements

• ARG reference group members
  – Mr George Hayden
  – Mr John Vandergiezen
  – Dr. Julie Hoffman
• Mr Michael Mitchell
• Associate Professor Dawn Bessarab
• Professor Dianne Wynaden
References


References

NHMRC’s (2003) Values and Ethics: Guidelines for ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research

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