



The impact of including an Aboriginal Psychologist and Social Worker within an established Indigenous health service

Michelle Combo (Psychologist)

Lesley-Ann Clements (Social Worker)

Southern Qld Centre of Excellence in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
Primary Health Care (Inala Indigenous Health Service)

Acknowledgement to Country



We wish to acknowledge the traditional owners of the land we are gathered on today, and pay our respects to the Elders – past, present and future.

In the beginning...

- 1995: Dr Noel Hayman (Aboriginal GP)
- 1996: Nola White (Aboriginal Clinic Nurse)



Additions of Allied Health staff

- 1998 Dietitian role added to the clinic
- 2011 Social Worker employed as part of the Healthy Mob – Strong Community pilot project, 2-year secondment
- 2012 Psychologist employed as part of the Healthy Mob – Strong Community pilot project, 1.5-year secondment

*2013 – Evaluation of adding Social Worker & Psychologist roles to this service.

Hepworth J, Askew D, Foley W, Duthie D, Shuter P, Combo M, Clements LA. *How an urban Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care service improved access to mental health care.* Int J Equity Health. 2015;14:51.

- Research began in 2013 and was published in 2015.
- Client access/attendance: first year saw 537 occasions of service for the Psychologist, and 447 for the Social Worker.
- Referrals: primarily from in-house GPs and other staff of this service, also had external referrals through word-of-mouth.

Key success factors

- 3 key themes identified in the research:
 - 1) *Responsiveness to community needs,*
 - 2) *Trusted relationships, and*
 - 3) *Shared cultural background & understanding.*

In conclusion

Improving social and emotional wellbeing is crucial to addressing the health inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This study demonstrates the benefits of integrating culturally safe mental health services into primary health care.

Personal Reflections

- As Aboriginal allied health professionals, what is it like to work in an established primary health care service for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients?
 - Better cultural understanding (staff and clients)
 - Being able to advocate for clients for better outcomes
 - Opportunity to work directly with Indigenous clients regarding mental health/SEWB issues
 - Providing a culturally safe and appropriate service (that clients may not otherwise receive)
 - Flexibility within the working environment as appropriate
 - Being part of a team that is passionate about Indigenous health

Questions?

