

Indigenous Health in All Policies: Project Overview



HEAL



CHIAPRT
Centre for Health in All Policies
Research Translation



THE UNIVERSITY OF
SYDNEY

Introduction

Communities worldwide, including in Australia, face unprecedented challenges including climate change, rapid urbanisation, biodiversity loss, global instability, and growing inequality, which exacerbate health inequities, especially among low-income and Indigenous populations. Multisectoral approaches involve deliberate collaboration of stakeholder groups (e.g. government, civil society, private sector) across sectors (e.g. health, environment, economy) to achieve a common goal. Despite the potential benefits of multisectoral approaches to Indigenous health, this remains an under researched topic. The Indigenous Health in All Policies Project will explore the utility of a Health in All Policies Model to address Indigenous health and wellbeing.

Background

Around the world, Indigenous populations are over-represented amongst the poor and disadvantaged, and have lower life expectancies than their non-Indigenous counterparts (1). In Australia, Indigenous people face poorer health and wellbeing outcomes than the general Australian population as a result of decades of colonisation, dispossession, and discrimination (2). Acknowledging the unique health challenges faced by Indigenous communities, the World Health Organization (WHO) has mandated the development of a comprehensive Global

Action Plan for the Health of Indigenous Peoples at the Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly (3).

These complex issues demand collaborative, multisectoral approaches, such as the Health in All Policies (HiAP) Approach, which enables governments and civil societies to develop integrated public policy solutions for meaningful change. Recognising the critical role of multisectoral action in addressing health inequities, the WHO released a report introducing the HiAP 4 Pillars Model (4). Through four core pillars – **Governance and Accountability, Leadership at all Levels, Ways of Working, and Resources, Financing, and Capabilities** – the model provides a structured framework for integrating health considerations into policies across sectors, ensuring multisectoral approaches to health inequities. The HiAP 4 Pillars Model was also adopted by the Australian Government in their 2023 National Health and Climate Strategy (5). To ensure the HiAP 4 Pillars Model effectively supports Indigenous communities and integrates the health needs of Indigenous Peoples into global and national policies, it must be examined through an Indigenous worldview.

Globally, many Indigenous Peoples conceptualise health and wellbeing as holistic, encompassing not only physical and mental dimensions of health, but spiritual, environmental, cultural, and social dimensions as well (3). Furthermore, as highlighted by the Closing the Gap Strategy, Indigenous health issues are

complex, and are inextricably linked with societal issues such as housing, justice, language, employment, and education.

The HiAP Model is underpinned by holistic thinking and intersectoral collaboration, which appears congruent with these Indigenous concepts of holistic health and wellbeing. HiAP promises to enable collaborative health solutions to the intersecting social, political, economic, and environmental challenges to health equity. However, examination of the available evidence on the model's implementation, and discussion amongst Indigenous stakeholders are required to determine the utility of the HiAP model for empowering Indigenous communities for self-determined health and wellbeing outcomes and long-term, sustained co-benefits.

Project Overview

This seed project is nested within a NHMRC Synergy Grant – **Stronger Together As Unified Nations For Community-led Health (STAUNCH)**. STAUNCH aims to produce new evidence on Indigenous Nation building processes, focusing on holistic health and wellbeing solutions which collaboratively address complex problems.

Within this larger project, the current research will investigate the utility of a Health in All Policies Model to address Indigenous health and wellbeing. This one-year seed project, funded by a Healthy Environments and Lives (HEAL) Network Grant, will have five key phases:

- Phase One: Project Initiation
- Phase Two: Rapid State-Of-Play Review
- Phase Three: Australian Policy Analysis
- Phase Four: Roundtable Discussion
- Phase Five: Project Close

Phase One: Project Initiation

Project activities will commence in January 2025. A research officer (RO) will be employed to undertake the rapid review, desktop analysis, report writing, and project administration. An initial team meeting will be held in order to begin developing relationships between researchers and discussing project plans.

In February, the RO's employment will commence, and work will begin on a detailed project timeline and project protocol.

Phase Two: Rapid State-of-Play Review

A rapid state-of-play review will be conducted to determine what international literature exists detailing multisectoral government approaches to Indigenous health and wellbeing. The review will highlight examples of multisectoral action which address Indigenous health and wellbeing and identify gaps where further action is required.

Preparation of the rapid review search strategy will begin in February. The RO will liaise with a research librarian to develop

logic grids for searching relevant databases. A systematic database search will be conducted at the beginning of March, which will be followed by a screening and selection process carried out by the project team. Articles will be included in the review if they detail a) a **multisectoral** b) **Government** approach which c) addresses the **health and wellbeing** of d) **Indigenous Peoples**.

After the screening process, included articles will be data extracted, and information pertaining to study characteristics, level of implementation, and alignment with the HiAP 4 Pillars Model will be recorded and synthesised.

The review will be presented as a narrative report, providing an overview of the current literature base on multisectoral government approaches to Indigenous health & wellbeing, and highlighting gaps that future research should aim to address.

This phase of the project will conclude at the end of April.

Phase Three: Australian Policy Analysis

The third phase will explore the Australian Government's commitment to multisectoral action as a means to tackle complex societal issues. Evidence of this commitment will be sourced from policy documents and annual reports found in the State and Federal Departments of Health, Environment, Aboriginal Affairs, and Prime Minister/Premier & Cabinet.

Beginning in May, a comprehensive protocol and search strategy will be developed in liaison with a research librarian. Throughout May and June, a systematic search of policy documents from these departments will be carried out in order to identify policies which detail multisectoral action. Policy documents from 2019 to 2025 will be considered eligible for inclusion. Content analysis will be conducted in order to identify policy documents which detail multisectoral action. Frequency analysis will be used to determine the number of included policy documents which apply multisectoral action to Indigenous health issues.

Following this, annual reports for each of these departments from 2020 to 2025 will be searched. Annual reports will be analysed to determine the extent to which funding was allocated to and spent on the implementation of included policies.

Included documents will undergo a data extraction process which will assess policies' focus on Indigenous health and wellbeing, their alignment with the HiAP 4 Pillars Model, and their level of implementation.

This analysis will be presented as in narrative review format and will provide an overview of the Australian Government's commitment to the development and implementation of multisectoral approaches to complex societal issues.

Analysis and presentation of findings will conclude in July.

Phase Four: Roundtable Discussion

The fourth phase will consist of a roundtable discussion, engaging approximately 20-30 participants, including Indigenous leaders, academics, and policy makers from around Australia. Using the HiAP 4 Pillars Model as a reference, participants will be asked to review the findings from the rapid review and Australian policy analysis and provide their expert insights into best practices for integrating Indigenous health and wellbeing into whole-of-government public policy.

Ethical approval for this event will be sought from an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research ethics committee as part of a larger application by the STAUNCH project team.

Once ethical approval is obtained (approximately June), recruitment for the roundtable will commence. Purposive and snowball sampling will be used to recruit participants, including

- STAUNCH Project CI's
- Indigenous Nation Leaders
- Former and current government employees from the departments of Health, Environment, Aboriginal Affairs, and Prime Minister and Cabinet, ranging from executives to policy makers

The roundtable discussion is anticipated to be held in September in Adelaide. Following the event, audio transcription and data analysis will take place, allowing

the research team to report on the insights provided by participants.

Phase Five: Project Close

To conclude this project, a report will be developed which will summarise the findings of the rapid review and Australian policy analysis and present the outcome of the roundtable discussion. This will include best practice recommendations for multisectoral government approaches which address Indigenous health and wellbeing. This report will be written in November and December and disseminated at the end of 2025.

Conclusion

This project provides an opportunity to assess the current state of play of multisectoral government approaches to Indigenous health and wellbeing – both nationally and internationally – before developing best practice recommendations for aligning the HiAP 4 Pillars Model with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Embedded within the larger STAUNCH project, which will trial the adapted HiAP 4 Pillars Model in an Indigenous Nation Building context, this project aims to strengthen multisectoral action on complex societal issues.

References

1. Durey A, Thompson SC. Reducing the health disparities of Indigenous Australians: time to change focus. BMC Health Serv Res. 2012;12:151.
2. Australian Government Productivity Commission. Closing the Gap Annual Data Compilation Report 2024 [Available from: <https://www.pc.gov.au/closing-the-gap-data/annual-data-report/closing-the-gap-annual-data-compilation-july2024.pdf>].
3. World Health Organization. Global Plan of Action for the Health of Indigenous Peoples 2023 [Available from: <https://www.who.int/initiatives/global-plan-of-action-for-health-of-indigenous-peoples>].
4. World Health Organization. Working together for equity and healthier populations: sustainable multisectoral collaboration based on health in all policies approaches 2023 [Available from: <https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240067530#:~:text=It%20provides%20practical%20examples%20on,%20Resources%2C%20financing%20and%20capabilities>].
5. Department of Health and Aged Care. National Health and Climate Strategy: Australian Government; 2023 [Available from: <https://www.health.gov.au/our-work/national-health-and-climate-strategy>].