



ISSN 1444-1853

Talkin' Strong

KOORI HEALTH RESEARCH

The community newsletter of the VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit.

Issue No. 3 December 2001

What our Unit is doing in Koori Health



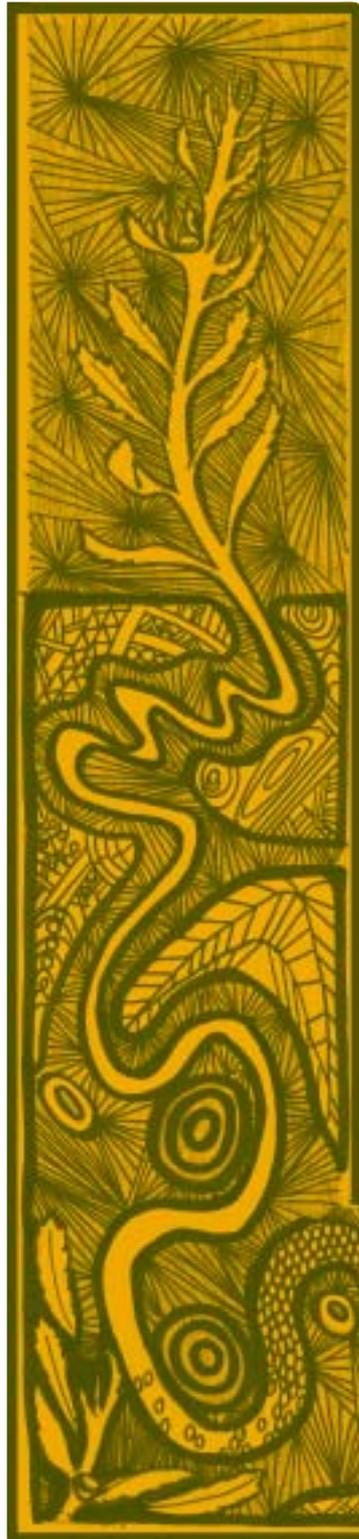
One of the challenges in setting up the Unit was dealing with the historical problems in the relationship between research academics and Aboriginal people and Communities. From the outset it was important that we were sure that the type of work that we did here was not exploitative or paternalistic. For this to be the case the partnership with Victorian Kooris had to be meaningful and real. It is important to build Community development principles into all of our work.

The most obvious reason for taking a partnership approach in developing university research and academic work is to promote Koori self-determination. The partnership approach to research and academic teaching actively encourages and supports Aboriginal participation. This means developing working relationships with Koori Community organisations and structures. In order to strengthen the partnership a Unit Advisory

Committee with a majority Aboriginal membership was set up to oversee the development of the Units activities. With a partnership approach it is hoped that the research work conducted by the Unit will relate to issues that are priorities for Koori Communities. This means that the Unit must also build and maintain good communication with Koori organisations that bear most of the responsibility for the delivery of health services to our Communities.

But it is more than just good communication. From the beginning we hoped that the Unit would be able to link its role in research and teaching with Community development processes. There are a number of reasons for this. If a true partnership is to develop between the Unit and Koori Communities, the Unit has to support the growth of skills and knowledge within Communities – so that Koori people participate on an equal basis. In the past, poor communication and working relationships between research academics and Aboriginal Communities undermined the possibility of quality research outcomes, created antagonism in researched Communities, and lessened the likelihood that research findings will influence the delivery of health services and development of Aboriginal health policy. This means that not only do we need to focus our activities on issues that are of concern to Kooris – but we also need to work collaboratively with other Kooris on these projects. For example, this year we have commenced several new projects:

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What our Unit is doing in Koori Health

(Continued)

- The Oral History of Health Project involves working with the Koori Heritage Trust. It came about because in our consultations with other Kooris it had been pointed out that it was important for our histories to be better documented or written down. For younger Kooris this provides the chance to read about some of the struggles and issues that our elders confronted. For non-Aboriginal people these oral histories will be one way of learning about Koori experiences and perspectives.
- The Ethics Project followed a Community workshop on ethics –where it was clear that there was a lot on interest in developing ways for Kooris to have greater say in research activities. This project is a collaboration between the Unit and VACCHO and will explore different ways to involve community in decision-making about the ethics of particular research projects.

Some of the activities that have been developed within the Unit's Community Development Program have involved the development of Community workshops on issues particularly relevant to research and evaluation. For example: we held workshops on research ethics, and also discussed some of the tools, such as protocols, that can be used to develop effective research collaborations.

The other important issue for the Unit is to focus our work on projects that can lead to change. We have successfully tendered, in collaboration with the Institute of Primary Health Care at La Trobe University, for a project that examines the way in which hospitals record information on Koori patients and whether this has any impact on the way in which hospital services are provided to Koori patients. This will potentially provide information that can be built into the accreditation (or official endorsement) of hospitals.

Working in partnership with Victorian Kooris, and with our key partners, such as VACCHO, research work over the next five years has been focussed on five main areas.

1. Historical Research

One of our first areas of research will be focusing on the history of Koori health and Koori health care, including the history of health policy and health research relating to Koori people. We believe it is important to document Koori people's past and current experiences of health and health care. Some of this can be done by looking at historical records, research reports and policy documents. Some of it can best be done by talking to people. Our research will involve talking to Koori people and to non-Koori people as well and also Koori and non Koori health care providers. The research will document good and bad experiences of health care. The aim of our historical research is to help prevent governments and health organisations from repeating mistakes of the past, and to build on past successes.

2. Researching Research

We are also looking at the way health research and the evaluation of health programs have been conducted, in order to develop better methods, ethics and protocols for Koori health research and evaluation. We will be working together with Koori Communities to develop better models of collaborative research and evaluation practice. This will involve the ethics of researching Koori health, the importance of negotiating collaborative partnerships (and developing

memoranda of understanding), appropriate ways of protecting confidentiality, managing the ownership of data and the way results are reported. We will also be looking at ways of increasing the research and evaluation skills of people in Koori organisations and Koori Communities.

3. Koori Health and Well-being

This research will involve finding out about Koori understanding of health and well-being, and Koori people's perceptions of health care and service delivery. We will aim to find out, what the main health problems for Koori people, where health services for Koori people are most needed, and what sort of health services Koori people would choose. This will lead to a greater understanding of health and well being from a Koori point of view. We will interview Koori people in country and urban areas as well as Koori and non-Koori health providers. This information can be used to guide health policy and service provision.

4. Economic Issues

Some of our research will be looking at the problems Koori people face in accessing health services. These problems may be related to financial difficulties, the costs of health care, or the difficulty of getting transport to a health service.

5. Health Services Research

Health Services Research: Our research program will also include specific evaluations of Koori primary health care and related health promotion programs.

Finally, if Koori health research is to be developed in a way that is useful to those working in Koori health – it also needs to make an impact on the teaching of people in mainstream health sciences. That is one reason why we have a focus on history work. Many people in the Victorian Community have commented how difficult it is to get health care providers to understand the historical content of health issues of Koori Communities here in the south east. The Unit also tries to link our Community development and research work with teaching and curricula development.

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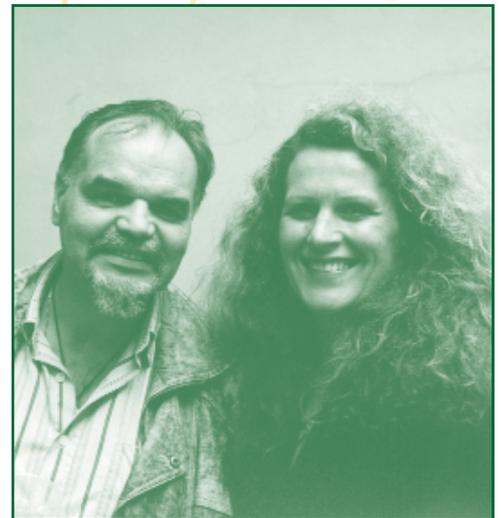
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Our logo was designed by Michelle Smith and Kevin Murray, and additional artwork is by Shawana Andrews

Publications Launch



Just a year or so after the official opening of the VKHRCDU the Unit launched its first publications on 23 March 2001. Over 50 people crowded in to the courtyard at the Centre for the Study of Health and Society in order to hear Professor Terry Nolan (from the School of Population Health at the University of Melbourne) and Ms Karlene Dwyer (then CEO of VACCHO) officially launch the publications. In reply, Associate Professor Ian Anderson (the Director of the VKHRCDU) talked about the work of the Unit and its publication program. Ian emphasised the need for the Unit to reach outwards towards both Koori and non-Koori health professionals and researchers working within both mainstream and community-based organisations. The Unit's publications, he said, are designed to be accessible and informative, they also focus on issues of relevance and importance to effectively addressing Koori health issues.

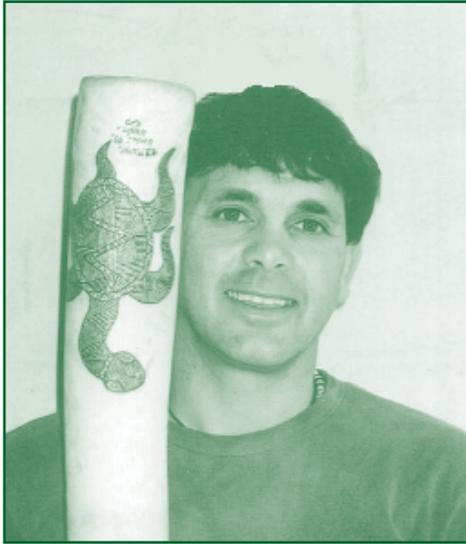


The publications launched included two Discussion Papers, two Community Reports and one book. The Unit's temporary Web Site, constructed in collaboration with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Clearinghouse at Edith Cowan University in WA, was also launched.

www.cshs.unimelb.edu.au/Koori/index.htm



Diversity@work



Large private sector organisations are employing more Indigenous people; especially now that Diversity@work has made it easier for them.

Diversity@work provides a link between large companies and the Indigenous community by circulating vacancies and promoting applicants to the employers. Diversity@work is funded by the Federal Government to assist corporations to increase the number of Indigenous people that they employ.

They have also developed a cross-cultural awareness package that addresses some of the classical stereotypes that employers may hold in relation to Indigenous employment. The training package also raises the consequences of European settlement on Indigenous culture and how this needs to link into the company's employment policies. Managers and future co-workers can thus develop a better understanding of the benefits of diversity and the skills needed to employ Indigenous people successfully. Diversity@work then links them up with suitable candidates as jobs become available.

Ron Murray, Liaison Manager with Diversity@work said, "Many companies would like to employ more Indigenous staff, but they don't know about cultural differences or are influenced by racial stereotypes. They also don't know where to start looking for candidates."

Ron normally provides the training for companies either on-site or at the Botanical Gardens.

"Sometimes, Indigenous people, for many reasons, don't get the chance to go for a job they would like. Our free service helps employers find the right person for the job and helps Indigenous people to find a job that suits them," Ron said. Diversity@work can also advise job seekers how to find services in their local area and give advice on jobs or industries they'd be suited to.

Diversity@work is already working with organisations such as Parks Victoria, Coles Supermarkets, Eurest, National Australia Bank, Telstra the State and Federal Governments, as well as local councils. Jobs range from casual positions through to Traineeships and Senior Management roles.

"Employers give us the job vacancy, and we send it out to Aboriginal organisations, Job Network offices, TAFEs, Universities and other services throughout Victoria," Ron explained. "Interested people send their resume to us, and we forward the applicants with the skills and experience to do the job to the employer. They then conducts interviews and lets us know the result"

Diversity@work can also keep the jobseekers' resumes on file and they also provide a professional resume writing service, free of charge for Indigenous jobseekers.

"We can help with part time, full time or casual jobs and traineeships." Ron said. "Creating more opportunities means more jobs for Indigenous people - and that's our aim."

Diversity@work will also provide ongoing support for either party once a placement is made. The companies are encouraged to adopt an Indigenous Employment Policy, to ensure Indigenous people are included in the development and implementation of Human Resource planning.

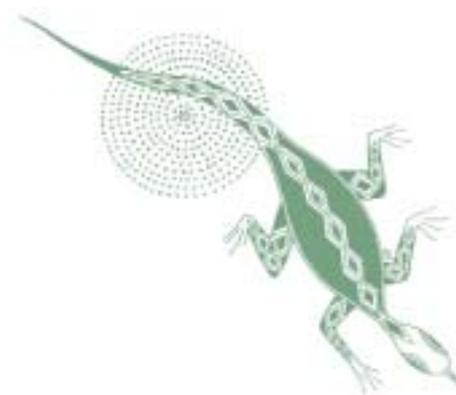
There are many reasons why some of Australia's largest companies are actively recruiting Indigenous staff, apart from the obvious benefits to the community. They include: wanting a more diverse workforce that brings a new perspective to the company; clearly demonstrating a commitment to the reconciliation process; seeking new markets for products and services; developing a more stable and dedicated workforce, particularly in remote locations; and minimised opportunity for litigation through a demonstrated commitment to Equal Employment Opportunity.

Ron hopes that Aboriginal people moving into large corporations will become role models for future generations.

"Getting more role models is a way of showing young people the value of staying at school and going on to tertiary study," Ron said.

If you are looking for staff or work, please contact Ron, Noelle or Olivia on (03) 9608 0900

COLLABORATIVE PARTICIPATORY RESEARCH IN KOORI HEALTH



Background to the Project

The Unit wanted to know what makes good collaboration work, where it is happening in a way that is meaningful and how collaboration can benefit the Community. We hope to develop guidelines for good research collaboration with the Koori Community.

We've been talking about this Project for about 12 months, with our Advisory Committee and with VACCHO. We received Project money (NHMRC) for a researcher's salary for 4 years. Priscilla Pyett is the researcher working on this project.

While Priscilla has experience working collaboratively with community organisations she didn't have any experience with the Koori Community mainstream until she joined the Unit staff. She feels that she has learned some skills that could be of benefit to the Koori Community.

Aims of the Project

- Find out about collaboration
 - what works
 - ways of doing it better
 - ways of benefiting the Community
- Build capacity in the Community
 - strengthen research skills
 - support collaborative research projects
 - document successful collaboration
- Develop guidelines and recommendations

Outcomes of the Project

This Project is really a process of learning. Its real outcomes will be:

- Community reports
- Community workshops
- Other resources for the Community.

Suggestions for ways to proceed

We have some ideas about the way this Project might work, but no set ideas. We want to make it as participative as possible. We have asked some people to join an Advisory Group for the project and we had our first meeting in February. This is what was suggested:

- Talk to wide range of people in Community
 - people who've had good and bad experiences of research
 - start with Advisory Group members
 - ask who else would be good to talk to
 - talk with some non-Indigenous researchers

If you are interested in this Project or would like to know more about it contact Priscilla Pyett on 8344 0885 or email pmpyett@unimelb.edu.au

Talking Oral History at Sunraysia TAFE

In May this year staff of the VKHRCDU and the Koorie Heritage Trust travelled to Swan Hill in order to conduct an information session on oral history. This session was designed for students in the Koori Unit at Sunraysia TAFE.

Angela Clarke and Kim Humphery from the VKHRCDU and Genevieve Grieves from the KHT ran an afternoon session with 18 Koori students in the Certificate 1 course in Koori Education – Coorong Tongala. The team were invited by Alan Walsh, of the Koori Unit at the Swan Hill campus, and course coordinator, Fiona Cocks.

There is a lot of Koori community interest in oral and family history and the students who attended the session spoke about their own experience of 'history' and the importance of documenting the past, particularly through talking with Elders. Many of those present already had experience in doing oral and family history and wanted to know more about how to increase their skills.

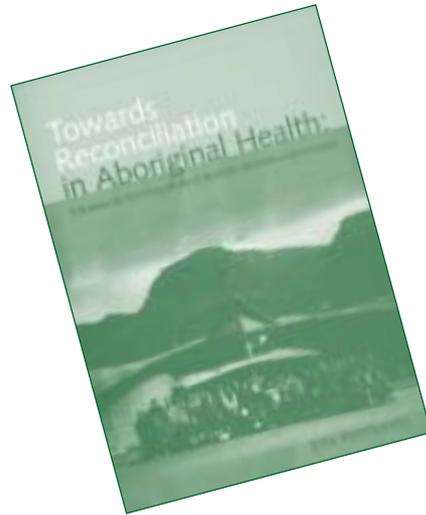
The session was run as a discussion forum rather than a 'lecture' and this made it enjoyable for all involved. Kim Humphery spoke about the work of the VKHRCDU on the history of Aboriginal health and Genevieve Grieves talked about her role as an oral historian with the KHT and on the 'Bringing Them Home' oral history project.

Everyone involved in this session said that they were keen to do more work like this in the future, particularly in country areas where access to this kind of information is difficult for Koori community members. The Swan Hill trip heralds the beginning of the VKHRCDU to develop a community-focused teaching program on the 'how to' of doing social and historical research.



VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit Publications

The VKHRCDU sees communication as one of its most important functions. We thus put out a range of publications that include Community Reports, Discussion Papers and longer Reports or books. These publications are designed to be of use to a whole range of people working within government departments, health institutions, Universities and community-based organisations. Our publications report on research or workshops undertaken by the VKHRCDU and/or on health issues of general concern to the Koori community. All of our publications are distributed free to Aboriginal community-organisations, but for individuals and institutions we make a small cost recovery charge on some items. As of August 2001 the following publications are available:



VKHRCDU Books

Towards Reconciliation in Aboriginal Health: Initiatives for Teaching Medical Students about Aboriginal Issues, by Lisa Rasmussen (\$25.00)

Also Available from the Unit:

Forgetting Compliance: Aboriginal Health and Medical Culture, by Kim Humphery, Tarun Weeramanthri and Joseph Fitz (Northern Territory University Press and Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal and Tropical Health) (\$30.00).

VKHRCDU Community Reports

We Don't Like Research... But in Koori Hands it Could Make a Difference
(Distributed Free)

Research – Understanding Ethics
(Distributed Free)

Teaching Koori Issues to Health Professionals and Health Students
(produced in collaboration with VACCHO and the Department of Rural Health, Melbourne University)
(Distributed Free)

VKHRCDU Discussion Papers

(All \$8.00)

Discussion Paper No 1

Aboriginal Primary Health Care in Victoria: Issues for Policy and Regional Planning, by Ian Anderson, Harriet Young, Milica Markovic and Lenore Manderson

VKHRCDU Discussion Paper No 2

Indigenous Health and 'Western Research', by Kim Humphery

VKHRCDU Discussion Paper No.3

The Beginnings of Aboriginal Health Research in Australia, by David Thomas

VKHRCDU Discussion Paper No.4

Indigenous Health Economics and Policy Research, by Michael Otim



Are you on our mailing list?



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



VicHealth

Where you will find us

VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit

The Centre for the Study of Health and Society
University of Melbourne
209 Grattan Street
Parkville
Victoria 3052

Phone: **03 8344 0813**

Fax: 03 8344 0824

Email: koori@cshs.unimelb.edu.au

Melways Map Reference: 2B D8

If you would like to receive our newsletters, and to be informed about workshops, seminars and courses that we run at the Unit, please fill in this form and mail or fax it to the address below. All questions are optional but it would help us to know what aspects of our work you might be most interested in.

PLEASE PRINT

Name.....

Organisation.....

.....

Address.....

.....

.....Postcode.....

Phone(.....).....Fax(.....).....

Email.....

Are you Koori? Yes No

Do you currently work in a Koori community organisation?
 Yes No

Are you a student? Yes No

How would you describe your current area of work or study:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Does your work/study involve any of the following: (Please as many as apply)

Health service delivery

Health policy

Health research

Other research

Koori education

Other education

Koori community service

Other (please specify)

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.....
.....

Do you have any particular interests that we might be able to help you with? (eg. children's health, evaluation, research methods, Koori history)

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