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Talkin' Strong

KOORI HEALTH RESEARCH

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

Issue No. 6 November 2003

From the Director . . .

Since the last newsletter we have moved into a new building just round the corner from our previous location. We are still settling in to our new offices and we plan to hold a welcome function in the next month or so.

In June our major funding bodies (VicHealth and OATSIH) carried out a review of the first four years work of the Unit. The review team spent two days at the Unit speaking with Unit staff, and key partners from the community, the university and other health agencies.

Also, since the previous newsletter, the Unit has expanded yet again with three new staff members joining in the past few months: Gregory Phillips, Bill Genat and Haifa Sekkouah are the new faces at the Unit. We also welcome Tara Eldridge, who is acting as Community Programs Assistant while Nicole Waddell is on maternity leave.



Tara Eldridge

Please note

We have moved and our new address is

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

REVIEW OF THE VKHRCDU



The purpose of the Unit review was to ensure that the strategic goals of the Unit are being met and to find ways in which we could do things better. Before the review we held a number of community consultations where we invited people to give us feedback on our research, teaching and community development activities so far. This helped us to prepare a report for the funding bodies. When the review team came to the Unit, we invited community members to attend the first day and to participate in discussions with the review team about our past work and our future plans. We thank everyone who came along to the consultations and met with the review team.

One of the challenges in setting up the Unit was dealing with the bad history of relationships between research academics and Aboriginal people and Communities. From the outset it was important that the type of work that we did here was not exploitative or paternalistic. This meant that we needed to build a meaningful partnership with Victorian Kooris and bring community development principles into all of our work.

A partnership approach to research and academic teaching means developing working relationships with Koori Community organisations and structures and actively encouraging and supporting Koori self-determination. The partnership approach aims to ensure that the research work conducted by the Unit relates to issues that are priorities for Koori Communities. Linking research and teaching with community development processes also means supporting the growth of skills and knowledge within communities so that Koori people can participate on an equal basis.

For these reasons, the review of the Unit by a group of senior academics with a broad range of experience in Aboriginal health but who may have been unfamiliar with a research program based on a community development approach was both interesting and challenging at the same time. Our challenge was to show that research and teaching grounded in the principles and practices of Koori community development also produced 'academic' outcomes. The review team were impressed by the community reports and discussion papers the Unit has produced, and by the community workshops we have conducted. We are pleased to be able to report that the review was very favourable and our funding is secure for another round.

With the completion of the review, we look forward to continuing our work with both the community and our funding bodies to strengthen our efforts to find ways to improve Koori health outcomes well into the future.

New Staff



Gregory Phillips

First of all we welcome **Gregory Phillips**, a Waanyi man from Cloncurry and Mount Isa in North West Queensland. Gregory recently completed a Masters in Medical Science (medical anthropology) from the University of Queensland. His recent book, 'Addictions and Healing in Aboriginal Country' is published by Aboriginal Studies Press. The book describes a ground-breaking Aboriginal approach to research in partnership with the 'Big River' (not their real name) community in North Queensland. Gregory brings a wealth of national and international experience in Indigenous education, health, addictions, wellness, spirituality, land, youth and leadership issues. He is currently the Project Co-ordinator for the CDAMS Indigenous Health Curriculum Development Project, a project to strengthen the medical education of doctors around Indigenous health issues (see page 6).

We also welcome **Haifa Sekkovah**, who was initially with us for six months. Haifa is from an Iranian-Philippino background. Her recent work experience includes working with the Northern Territory Health Service in the Laramba Community, Alice Springs. She has also been involved with educational projects in the Nganyantjarra Lands with children in the community schools. Haifa recently graduated with a Bachelor of Science (Neuroscience) from Melbourne University. Haifa has been working alongside Micheal Otim on a study of expenditures on health services for Aboriginal people in the DHS Loddon Mallee region.



Haifa Sekkovah

Bill Genat is the other new person at the Unit. Bill has returned to Victoria after living in Western Australia for many years. Previously, Bill facilitated a curriculum project in primary health care at the Centre for Aboriginal Studies at Curtin University. He recently completed a collaborative doctoral study with a group of Aboriginal Health Workers at an Aboriginal health service. The project was about their client-centred holistic practice. Bill is working on a curriculum project that will identify the gaps in Aboriginal health teaching within Master of Public Health programs. Based on the findings of this study the Unit will be teaching some new subjects in Aboriginal health in 2004.



Bill Genat

Tara Eldridge ...

Lastly we would like to congratulate **Nicole Waddell** on the arrival of baby Chloe Tara and send our best wishes to Nicole and her family.



Tara Eldridge



Nicole, Shania and new baby Chloe



Collaboration with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation

As part of the Unit's partnership with the Victorian Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation, one of our staff, Priscilla Pyett, is working part-time for VACCHO to provide research advice and support to VACCHO staff and member organisations. She is currently developing some projects with the Sexual Health Team and the Health Training Unit at VACCHO. Priscilla is a Public Health researcher who has skills in social research, action research and evaluation. She is available to assist communities with research projects such as:

- Needs analysis
- Evaluation
- Developing a community profile
- Client needs
- Client satisfaction
- Surveys
- Documenting a program that is going well

One community organisation has asked Priscilla to help them develop a plan for an independent review of their health service. Working with communities will help Priscilla learn what works for Koori communities. Both VACCHO and the VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit will learn about better models of collaborative research. If you have a project you would like some research advice or support with, or if you have an idea for some research that would benefit your community, you can contact Priscilla at VACCHO on Wednesdays on 03 9419 3350 or by email priscillap@vaccho.com.au. You can also contact Priscilla at the Unit on 03 8344 0885 or by email pmpyett@unimelb.edu.au.

Improving the teaching of Indigenous Australian public health

Over the years there has been a great deal of ignorance among many public health professionals (doctors, nurses, specialists, health managers, policy-makers and planners) concerning Koori people and culture. As a result, often Koori clients feel unlistened to, talked down to, not respected and unwelcome in some health agencies. The VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit together with the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University decided to undertake a project that would review what health professionals are being taught about Aboriginal cultures. Then, with the help of members of the Indigenous health workforce, the team will develop new subjects to give mainstream health professionals more understanding.

What is currently being taught in the area of Indigenous Health to health professionals within Masters of Public Health (MPH) courses **and how it is taught** will be reviewed. The Masters of Public Health is the course that doctors, nurses, dieticians, social workers and other health professionals study after their bachelor degree when they decide to work in the area of community health. The outcomes of the review will be discussed at a specially convened workshop at the Public Health Association of Australia conference in September. The aim of the workshop will be to find out about existing coverage of Indigenous health and to identify

key gaps in what is being taught. Participants at the workshop will include representatives of the Indigenous public health workforce and university departments of public health.

An outcome of the workshop will be to develop an agenda for curriculum development in Indigenous public health. The VKHRCDU will develop new subjects for the MPH course at the University of Melbourne and will work with the Institute of Koorie Education at Deakin University to adapt and develop the subjects in their MPH course. The new subjects and ways of working within these two programs will be passed on to other MPH programs around Australia.



Bill Genat

Over the next few months, Bill Genat from the VKHRCDU will interview staff members and their supervisors from all universities teaching Indigenous health components in MPH courses.

For further enquiries, please contact Bill:

Ph: 03 8344 9375 or email:
bgenat@unimelb.edu.au

CDAMS

INDIGENOUS HEALTH

CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

PROJECT

This project is specifically about doctors and what they are learning about Aboriginal health during their training. The VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit and the Committee of Deans of Australian Medical Schools (CDAMS), have initiated this project in partnership with the Commonwealth Department of Health and Ageing – Office of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health (OATSIH). The Project is based here at the Unit.

The Project's goal is to develop a nationally agreed curriculum framework for the inclusion of Indigenous health into core medical teaching. It will do this over twelve months by:

1. auditing existing medical curricula for Indigenous health content;
2. drawing together key stakeholders in a national workshop to develop the curriculum framework; and,
3. establishing an ongoing network to lead and encourage curriculum implementation after the project ceases.

Each of the 12 medical schools in Australia has a unique approach to teaching doctors, so the project will not be able to develop and implement one curriculum to fit all. Rather, the intention is to develop a curriculum framework which is flexible to adaptation, and which includes the content and principles that are likely to result in meaningful learning experiences for the students and staff involved.

If you are interested in the Project, would like to know more, or have some feedback and suggestions, please feel free to contact Gregory Phillips, Project Co-ordinator, at gphil@unimelb.edu.au.

ACTIN' IT UP PROJECT

Dick Sloman (who is an Associate of the Unit) with Shaun Ewen and Angela Clarke from the Unit have been involved in a joint project with Indigenous actors from the Ilbitjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Theatre Co-operative and other organisations, to improve consultations between doctors and Indigenous patients.

During their training, medical students have to practice with pretend patients (called simulated patients) long before they get to work on real sick people. People pretending to be patients are told what illness they are pretending to have and what symptoms they should describe to the student doctor. Then the student doctor has to try and work out what the illness is in a mock consultation. Sometimes these pretend patients are used in exams for doctors. For some time now, people at the Unit have thought that medical students should be learning more about Aboriginal patients during their training.

The aim of this project is for Indigenous actors to learn what is needed to act as Indigenous patients in role-play consultations with medical students and GP registrars. These mock consultations will be part of Aboriginal health teaching in the University of Melbourne Medical Faculty and in Victorian GP registrar training. The project is funded for 2003, as part of the GPET Innovations Program. GPET (General Practice Education and Training Ltd) is the Commonwealth Government organisation that funds Australian general practitioner training system.

The Unit has been working with a big crowd of other organisations and people involved in the 'Actin' it up' project, including:

- Kim Kruger and Wesley Enoch from the Ilbitjerri Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Theatre Co-operative;
- Dr Kathryn Robertson Co-ordinator of the Simulated Patient Program in the University of Melbourne Department of General Practice, and Dr Ed Poliness, a GP registrar at the same department and the Victorian Aboriginal Health Service;

- Marlene Drysdale, Associate Professor in Indigenous Health at the School of Rural Health, Monash University;
- Gail Harradine and Dr Dick Sloman from VACCHO; and
- Dr Morton Rawlin from General Practice Education Australia, the Royal Australian College of General Practitioners' training organisation.

Over May and June, Kim Kruger from Ilbitjerri and Gail Harradine from VACCHO co-ordinated 6 days of workshops (some half days, some whole days) involving two directors, Chris Thomson and Rachael Maza, 6 Indigenous actors, Kamarra Bell, Lou Bennett, Jack Charles, Phil Haby, Margaret Harvey, and Ramon Sailor, and 3 doctors, Ed Poliness, Kathryn Robertson, and Dick Sloman. The workshops involved developing an understanding of the role of simulated (pretend) patients in training medical students and doctors, developing cases for the simulated patients to portray, then training in consistently portraying these cases and giving feedback to medical students and doctors about what it was like to be the patient in mock consultations.

The last section of this part of the project was the actors' participation in the afternoon section of 3 one-day Aboriginal health workshops for Melbourne GP registrars held in June, at the new Koorie Heritage Trust building at 295 King Street in the city. The actors' participation as simulated patients in mock consultations in the workshops went very well, and the feedback from the registrars, educators and actors was very positive.

Planning is now underway to develop more cases with the actors who have been trained, to train more Indigenous actors and the educators who will work with them, and to organise more participation by the actors in Aboriginal health training for GP registrars and medical students. It is hoped that what is developed this year will be further supported and expanded next year.

The Royal Children's Hospital Koori Family Support Study: Economics Issues



The Family Support Unit (FSU) of the Royal Children's Hospital (RCH) together with the VicHealth Koori Health Research and Community Development Unit are carrying out a study to assess the costs involved in providing support to Koori families who use the Royal Children's Hospital services. This support is in the form of telephone call reminders to families to keep hospital appointments, accommodation for these families, and assistance in organising transport to and from their places of residence when needed.

This study was requested by the FSU at the RCH because of the need to justify its level expenditure in the hospital. As the RCH is a specialist hospital it provides services to children from all around Victoria (as well as other parts of Australia). Kooris coming from rural and regional Victoria often experience financial difficulties because of the additional costs of being away from their homes.

This study hopes to highlight the need for better access to the Children's Hospital services for Koori people, and the need for more culturally appropriate hospital experiences for Kooris. To do this, we are reviewing published and unpublished evidence for the continued need for support for Koori families to access the Children's Hospital services. The evidence will involve issues such as high rates of unemployment and low income in Koori families, and the effects of dispossession and the history of poor health service provision to Koori families in the past. We will also be examining access issues (as shown by low rates of use of mainstream health services by Kooris) and equity issues (low investments in Aboriginal health by the State and Commonwealth given the very poor health indicators in Aboriginal communities).

This study will also provide a snapshot of the costs associated with the provision of support to Koori families, such as accommodation, transport, telephone calls, and what the situation would have been had these families missed their hospital appointments. The benefits of the service provided by the FSU will be highlighted as well.

This study is a collaborative effort between the VKHRCDU and the Department of Social Work at the RCH. Michael Otim from the VKHRCDU will lead the team that will be involved in this study. Angela Clarke will provide an advisory role, together with Jane Miller and Brooke Nam (from the RCH).

EVENTS

- Most of the Unit's staff were privileged to be at the **Health Workers' graduation ceremony** on Wednesday 17th July. Congratulations to the Health Workers and also to VACCHO for a great graduation event, but special congratulations to those Health Workers who celebrated their successes and achievements.

- The **Koorie Heritage Trust** has been an integral part of the teaching of medical students at the University of Melbourne for some years now. Last semester the first year medical students were fortunate to have a lecture from Mr Jim Berg and follow-up tutorials from staff from the Koorie Heritage Trust. The feedback from the students has been overwhelmingly positive about this opportunity, and next year it is hoped to take the students to the Trust, instead of the Trust coming to the University. It is hoped that the relationship with the Trust will continue to grow and strengthen over the years to come, as the input is invaluable for the medical students. Unit staff were pleased to attend the launch of the new home for the Koorie Heritage Trust in King Street, Melbourne (see page 10).

- **Addictions and Healing in Aboriginal Country**, the new book by **Gregory Phillips**, had its Melbourne launch in the Gryphon Gallery at the University of Melbourne on Wednesday, 9th July, as part of Victorian NAIDOC celebrations. It was a tremendous success with many community, academic and policy-makers attending. The book is a result of the work Gregory did for his research masters thesis in Queensland. It focuses on unresolved traumatic stress syndromes, healing strategies, and those more likely to produce positive outcomes. The book also outlines in detail more appropriate research methodology for working with Indigenous communities. The book is published by Aboriginal Studies Press at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra. Order forms are available from the Unit, or you can order direct from AIATSIS by emailing sales@aiatsis.gov.au



Deborah Mailman, star of 'The Secret Life of Us' and high school mate of Gregory, launching his book.

LAUNCH OF THE KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST CULTURAL CENTRE



On September 2nd, 2003 the Koorie Heritage Trust Cultural Centre was formally launched by the Governor of Victoria, John Landy, AC, MBE to an audience of over 550 guests.

'The event was the highlight of the Koorie Heritage Trust's year - and the culmination of over seventeen years of hard work,' said CEO Shannon Faulkhead. 'It's been a long time coming, to actually have somewhere that represents all aspects of Aboriginal culture - not just a gallery and a permanent exhibition, not just a museum. We've got everything - a Library, Oral History Unit, Retail Shop and a diverse range of collections representing south-eastern culture'.

Other speakers at the Launch included The Hon. Gavin Jennings - Victorian Minister for Aged Care and Aboriginal Affairs, Troy Austin - Victoria Commissioner of ATSIC, Terry Garwood and Rob Moodie - CEO of VicHealth.

Former CEO Jim Berg said the opening was a very emotional event, due to his involvement over the years. 'The Trust has now been opened to the public,

and the rest of the community, and it's something that we have to move forward with, because we are now on public show,' he said. 'It's now to be accountable to our ancestors, to the present generation, to the future generations of our mob, to the general public, and to our supporters who have supported us in the past. It brings our past to the present and so we can get on with the future, and I think that's important.'

In 1997 Jim Berg commissioned a piece of music to be created for the Launch of the never-to-be-opened Lonsdale Street premises from composer Christine McCombe. Christine's work 'Three Pieces' was performed by David Dryden (Yorta Yorta) and Kevin Atkinson (Moiradu) on Didjeridoo, Emma Viskic on Clarinet and Bass Clarinet and Roseanne Hunt on Cello.

Uncle Sandy Atkinson and Uncle Kevin Coombs hosted the Dedication of the Permanent Exhibition to Elders on Level 1, accompanied by performances from the Aboriginal Community Elder Services (ACES) Choir and the Baranjuk Dancers, who also entertained the audience during the official launch.

THE KOORIE HERITAGE TRUST CULTURAL CENTRE

Address: 295 King Street (corner Little Lonsdale Street), Melbourne, Victoria 3000

Telephone: 03 8622 2600

Web: www.koorieheritagetrust.com

Open: Monday to Friday 10am to 4pm (Weekends by Appointment)

Admission: Gold Coin Donation

THE KOORI COURT



In September we were privileged to have a seminar at the Unit on 'Health and Justice: Insights into the Justice system and the implications for health and well-being of Indigenous people'. Speakers included Rosemary Smith, Legal Policy Officer in the Department of Justice, Terrie Stewart, Aboriginal Justice Worker from the Koori Court in Broadmeadows, and Daniel Briggs, Aboriginal Justice Worker from the Shepparton Magistrates Court

The speakers gave us a lot of information about the Koori Court and how it works. We thought we would share it with you.

What is the Koori Court?

The Koori Court has been created under the Magistrates Court (Koori Court) Act 2002. It is a division of the Magistrates Court which sentences defendants who have pleaded guilty.

The Koori Court provides an informal atmosphere and allows greater participation by the Koori community in the court process. A Koori Elder or Respected person, the Aboriginal Justice Worker, Koori defendants and their families can contribute during the court hearing.

It reduces perceptions of cultural alienation and tailors sentencing orders to the cultural needs of Koori offenders.

The Koori Court aims to:

- Increase Koori ownership of the administration of the law.
- Increase positive participation by Koori offenders
- Increase the accountability of the Koori community, families and offenders
- Encourage defendants to appear in court.
- Reduce the amount of breached court orders.
- Deter offenders from re-offending
- Increase community awareness about community codes of conduct and standards of behaviour
- Explore sentencing alternatives prior to imprisonment.
- Increase community safety.

How will the Koori court operate?

- The court will be informal. The Magistrates will sit at a large table with all other participants, not at the bench
- The defendant will sit with his or her family at the table, not at the dock.

- Participants will talk in 'plain' English rather than using technical legal language.

Why create a separate court for Koori People?

- Koori people are greatly over-represented within the criminal justice system, more so than any other racial group. Koori people are 12 times more likely than non-Indigenous people to be placed in an adult prison. Koori contact with police has increased by 31.5 per cent in the last 5 years.
- Numerous reports, such as the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in custody and the 'Bringing Them Home' Report have recommended that the legal system be modified to make it less culturally alienating and more tailored to the needs of Aboriginal offenders and their community.
- The Victorian Aboriginal Justice Agreement is an agreement developed between the State Government and the Victorian Koori Community. One of the major recommendations has been the need for a Koori Court.

What sentencing orders are available?

- The Magistrate will retain all sentencing alternatives, including the power to send defendants to prison, as in the conventional Magistrates Court. However, the primary goal of the court is to create sentencing orders that are more culturally responsive to Aboriginal offenders, thereby reducing the rate of re-offending. The Koori Court therefore benefits not only the Koori Community, but also the wider community.

Are you on our mailing list?



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE



VicHealth

Where you will find us

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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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