

Making healthy choices for ourselves: partnerships for healthy eating and physical activity in Aboriginal communities

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Throughout Australia, nutrition-related diseases, particularly type 2 diabetes and cardiovascular disease, are major causes of illness and death amongst Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. There is a shortage of evidence for effective interventions in this context, particularly in urban communities. When working with Indigenous people, a methodology is needed that will foster Indigenous participation and contribute to change rather than just describe the problem. Participatory action research (PAR) is, thus, an ideal approach.

This thesis describes a PAR approach to strengthening the capacity of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous health professionals to work in partnership on health promotion initiatives around nutrition for Victorian Aboriginal communities. The project will facilitate training for Aboriginal health workers (AHWs) in nutrition and cultural awareness training for non-Indigenous dietitians. Two-way mentoring partnerships between AHWs and community dietitians will then be established and supported in four sites for the collaborative development and implementation of local community nutrition initiatives. A central focus of this project is fostering the transfer of skills and expertise 'both ways', so that AHWs may more fully take control of their own community health initiatives, and non-Indigenous health service providers may better understand and respond to the needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

This project is informed by the NATSINSAP priorities, with a focus on building the capacity of the Indigenous nutrition workforce to implement effective community-based nutrition programs relevant to Aboriginal people living in urban areas and regional centres. By employing a PAR approach and using a capacity building framework, it is the intention of this project to unite AHWs and dietitians and provide some much-needed evidence on which to base good practice in promoting accessible and nutritious food for Victorian Indigenous communities.