



HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL TERTIARY STUDENTS IN THE INNER EAST – *UNDERSTANDING THE PICTURE*

Short Report – November 2015

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are a high number of tertiary institutions in the Inner East region of Melbourne (comprising the Local Government Areas of Boroondara, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse). These are Monash University, Deakin University, Swinburne University, Swinburne TAFE, Box Hill Institute, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and Federation Training.

The aim of this project was to develop an initial understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East including both Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary student support services and local community services. This project aimed to examine how Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) could assist with resourcing or supporting these agencies. It was anticipated that if Aboriginal students are well supported to participate and succeed in their studies, this will also ultimately benefit their longer term health and wellbeing.

This project involved collating information on tertiary institutions in the Inner East, conducting a review of relevant literature and consulting with the following to determine services provided to Aboriginal tertiary students and the gaps in service: Aboriginal and mainstream staff at tertiary institutions in the Inner East, mainstream community service workers, Aboriginal organisations and former Aboriginal tertiary students.

The literature review found that there is a positive correlation between level of education and social wellbeing for Aboriginal people, but there are a number of barriers which are faced by Aboriginal students impacting on their ability to enter and succeed at tertiary study. Having Aboriginal specific support on campus is very important and has positive impacts on student access, retention and success.

This project has found that whilst all tertiary institutions had Aboriginal workers, not all had a dedicated Aboriginal space and some campuses did not have an Aboriginal worker on site, leading to a gap in services for students attending those campuses. It was found that Aboriginal workers on campus provide a flexible and wide-ranging service to Aboriginal students which is very valuable to them.

There is a relatively low usage rate of mainstream tertiary and community services by Aboriginal students and the barriers to using these services is discussed. Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary services are keen to enhance and develop partnerships with local community services and a number of partnership opportunities are identified, which can be supported by IEPCP. Given that some campuses struggle to provide student services due to funding issues or limitations to services, partnering with other organisations is one way to fill gaps in services they may otherwise not be able to provide to students.



BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR PROJECT

The idea for this project arose out of a conversation (S Missing 2015, pers. comm. 11 June) between Dr Harry Majewski, Chief Executive Officer of Inner East Community Health Service (IECHS) and the Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) Executive team, regarding the challenges of conducting a Koolin Balit project in the Inner East region due to the low Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (the term “Aboriginal” will be used from here on). Of the 591,098 residents in the Inner East, 1042 or 0.2% identify as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The IEPCP Executive team identified that there are a high number of tertiary institutions in the Inner East and were interested in determining if the IEPCP could provide better support to community organisations assisting Aboriginal students attending these tertiary institutions.

This project was funded by Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Koolin Balit funding. (Koolin Balit is the Victorian Government’s strategic directions for Aboriginal health for 2012 to 2022). The Project Plan was approved by the Regional Manager Aboriginal Health, Southern and Eastern Metro Health, DHHS and a Project Officer was employed at 0.6 EFT from July – November 2015.

Project Aim and Objectives

The aim of this project was to develop an initial understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East region of Melbourne (comprising the Local Government Areas of Boroondara, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse), including both Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary student support services and local community services. This project also aimed to examine how the IEPCP could assist with resourcing or supporting these agencies, with a focus on assisting agencies to work in partnership and collaboration to enhance the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal tertiary students. It was anticipated that if Aboriginal students are well supported to participate and succeed in their studies, this will also ultimately benefit their longer term health and wellbeing.

The objectives of this project were to:

- Gather information on the population of Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Identify the health and wellbeing services available to and utilised by Aboriginal students in tertiary institutions within the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Identify whether there is a need for improved links between local services to maximise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal students in tertiary institutions in the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Explore what IEPCP could do to assist services supporting Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East
- Summarise project findings and issues identified, making recommendations for change where applicable.



METHODOLOGY

The project methodology included the following:

- Collating information on tertiary institutions in the Inner East
- A review of relevant literature
- Consultations with 32 key stakeholders using semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data.

Staff from the following organisations were interviewed during the project:

- **Tertiary institutions in the Inner East:**
 - Box Hill Institute (Box Hill campus)
 - Deakin University (Burwood campus)
 - Federation Training (Chadstone campus)
 - Holmesglen Institute of TAFE, Student Services (Chadstone campus)
 - Monash University (Clayton campus)
 - Swinburne University/Swinburne TAFE (Hawthorn campus).
- **Community organisations in the Inner East:**
 - Headspace, Hawthorn
 - Melbourne East General Practitioners Network (MEGPN), Burwood East
 - Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre, Eastern Treatment Services, Box Hill
 - Gateway Local Learning & Employment Network, Box Hill
 - EACH Youth and Family, Inner East, Nunawading
 - Whitehorse Youth ConneXions, Box Hill
 - Link Health and Community, Glen Waverley.
- **Aboriginal Organisations:**
 - Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc., Northcote
 - Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, Croydon.
- **Aboriginal former students:**
 - Interviews were conducted with three Aboriginal former nursing students.



PROJECT OUTCOMES

The 'Health and wellbeing services supporting Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East – Understanding the picture' project, funded by Koolin Balit has achieved the following outcomes:

- Identified the support services available to Aboriginal tertiary students studying in institutions in the Inner East, including those available to students both on and off campus.
- Increased understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East.
- Identified the gaps in service for Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East.
- Incorporated input from Aboriginal former university students into a project that aims to improve services for Aboriginal tertiary students.
- Encouraged local community services to think about how they might improve referral rates of Aboriginal people to their service.
- Identified an opportunity for tertiary institutions and local community services in the Inner East to partner with each other to improve services for Aboriginal tertiary students and reduce duplication of service.
- Provided an opportunity for Inner East Primary Care Partnership to support the creation and sustainability of partnerships between tertiary institutions and community organisations in the Inner East.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- IEPCP and its partners facilitate at least one forum involving staff from Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary support services and local health and wellbeing services to increase awareness of respective services and allow for the opportunity for networking and discussion regarding potential partnerships.
- The Project Officer employed to further this project in 2016 consult with members of the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) to obtain input into the project and facilitate partnerships.
- The Project Officer employed to further this project in 2016 liaise with local GPs in the area, utilising the networks established by Melbourne East GP Network and Eastern Melbourne PHN to ensure GP services are accessible to Aboriginal tertiary students.
- Tertiary institution campuses without any visible Aboriginal service on campus explore making the campus more culturally safe for Aboriginal students.

