

Day One - Tuesday 12 May

BUILDING A 'ONE STOP SHOP' FOR ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER ENVIRONMENTAL HEALTH PRACTITIONERS ON THE AUSTRALIAN INDIGENOUS HEALTH/INFONET

Sonja Carmichael, Queensland Health, and Jane Burns, Edith Cowan University

Sonja Carmichael

Firstly I would like to respectfully acknowledge the Wongatha Traditional Owners of the land where we are meeting this week. It's great to be launching our web resource here which is a 'one-stop information shop' for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health practitioners. We now have a valuable new tool to help with environmental health work and sharing of information with our colleagues. This resource is a direct result of recommendations from the 2007 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Conference held in Cairns which was well attended by over 200 delegates.

Firstly, to give some background, a key recommendation from an earlier conference in New South Wales was to conduct a post conference workshop of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander delegates. That was requested to give Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people a chance to talk freely and openly in a forum where issues could be raised by delegates. A number of issues were identified and a motion was put forward by the group to establish an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Practitioners' Association.

Everyone agreed that such an association would help improve communication between delegates and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Practitioners that were unable to attend the conference from across the country. This could also enable issues raised to be progressed with strategies to inform the national environmental health agenda. So a recommendation was put forward, proposing that such an association be established independent of the Working Group on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health (WGATSIEH), Environmental Health Australia (EHA) and enHealth, although there could be some common membership across those groups.

The recommendation to establish the association was published in the *2007 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Environmental Health Monograph* and is now one of the key activities under the WGATSIEH work plan. A small focus group was established to consider similar models and governance arrangements and we came up with two possible options.

The first option would require a lot of work e.g. the development of a constitution, an election of officer bearers, establishing reporting arrangements, accountability and governance, taking into account what capacity there is, by who and for who to contribute financially or in kind to such an association. Consideration was also given to where members might be based, differences in location, population, remoteness and access, all of which can affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health practitioners in various community settings.

Secondly, we looked at establishing an informal association administered by WGATSIEH and getting some agreement on the best structure to manage issues identified by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health practitioners.

The first step has been to progress the development of our website to make this resource readily accessible with up-to-date information and networking opportunities on-line for all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health practitioners. This need for better information and resources was also recognised by WGATSIEH which delegated the Western Australia Department of Health to have a look at what resources could make it possible. Investigations showed that the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet is already undertaking similar research in developing and maintaining such an evidence base. We have since been concentrating our efforts on building this web resource as a 'one stop info shop' in partnership with Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet.

The content of the web resource and yarning space has been guided by an informal focus group of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander environmental health practitioners from around the Country. Once this resource is up and running and the dedicated yarning place is in place everyone will be able to join and stay connected to share information. It is hoped that this will also assist with managing issues identified which could, in turn, form the foundations of where we go from here with the establishment of an association. Initially however the goal is to progress the development of this web resource to enable effective communication links with environmental health practitioners across the country.

I now invite Jane Burns, Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet to share more with us about the web resource and yarning space.

Jane Burns

I would also like to acknowledge the Traditional owners of this land. The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet is a massive website. It is a 'one stop info shop'; we gather information and package it according to need. So if you want a fact sheet, if you want a report, if you want to know about a health promotion resource or you want to have a yarn with someone, we aim to provide the details.

We want to provide quality, up-to-date information. A recent development is the provision of electronic yarning places. These are discussion boards and listserves, if you want to get a message out - say you have produced a report or you are launching a health promotion resource - the yarning place is the place to do it. We have found that, if we get over 300 people using a yarning place, we get what is called a snowball effect, such as for our general listserve, the e-message stick, where we get several messages per day and this is what we will aim for with the Environmental Health Practitioners' yarning place.

On the index page of the new Indigenous Environmental Health Practitioners' web resource there are various sections including:

- Environmental health; this heading is not set in concrete so if you have any other suggestions let us know and we will try and develop the information that you need.

Another is:

- Resources and equipment; for most of you this information is vital. You need to know where to find the information about what

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works, sometimes people have great ideas like how to build a piece of equipment that is used for a particular need. But you need to share that knowledge.

Indigenous people have been sharing knowledge for thousands of years. 'Environmental health' is a topic that has just recently come to the forefront, but caring for country has always been part of the Indigenous way of life. As depicted in Josie Boyle's beautiful painting of the Seven Sisters (the conference logo), Indigenous people have established environments and cared for them afterwards.

By gathering knowledge and information and putting it into one spot, it shows where the gaps are and where more information is needed. We want to know about your programs and projects, so tell us what's frustrating or what's working well. You can share your stories on the HealthInfoNet.

The total bibliography on the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet website contains over 16,000 publications so for example, if you are studying and you need to find something on Indigenous environmental health, have a look at our downloadable bibliography.

I will be here for the duration of the conference and tomorrow Professor Neil Thomson, Director of the HealthInfoNet will also be here. Come and see us if you have anything you want to add to the website. We have to bear in mind copyright restrictions so I will need to get copyright permission from the person responsible if items need to be copied on the website.

Now to the exciting bit where I will hand back to Sonja to launch this new web resource.

Sonja Carmichael invited the focus group to come to the stage. Sonja introduced Thaddeus Nagas to officially launch the website.

Thaddeus Nagas

Firstly, I would like to thank this group of people standing before you. Last National Conference we were fortunate enough to have our Indigenous workshop at the end of the conference. At that meeting we decided that we needed to keep these meetings alive and talk about our own issues about what's important to us.

I was fairly emotional as the conference was held in Cairns; my family is from Cairns, my father is from Cairns. I'm really a Murray but I live in Koori country out in Broken Hill on the far West of NSW.

The only reason I came home was to finish my traineeship and be with my family. Everybody in this room is my family as far as I am concerned. Adam is from similar country from where I was born a lot of the NSW trainees in NSW Health come from the far West NSW Region but we are all brothers and sisters, aunties and uncles together .

We needed to put something together that we could identify with in one place. Being an old fellow trying to study I couldn't find anything on the internet. I didn't know where to find anything - that was the hardest part.

I agree with everyone we need to make some changes we need

to bridge the gap and when I finish my presentation on Thursday I am going to invite you all on a trip. It is a long journey, write down the address and please participate! I would like to officially open this website and I encourage everybody to pass on the information and utilise it. It is a powerful tool, we are catching up. We have always spoke and passed on our history; it's never been written down before so welcome to the electronic age! We Murrays and Kooris like a little joke; things have just not been the same since we went electric!

FOR MORE INFORMATION

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