

Using research evidence and community knowledge to address local priorities: Community-directed development of a diabetes prevention program for young Aboriginal people

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Background

Type 2 diabetes is a global health concern. In Australia, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are most affected, starting at younger ages. Lifestyle modification can prevent diabetes. This evidence needs to be translated in real-world settings.

Objectives

We aimed to contribute to diabetes prevention among young Aboriginal people in Derby, a remote town in Western Australia.

Method

This project was based on an existing relationship with Derby Aboriginal Health Service (DAHS) and local priorities. A mixed methods approach, including quantitative data from primary health care records and a range of qualitative data, was used. A systematic literature review, interviews with individuals who had made healthy lifestyle changes, focus groups with community members including young people, and guidance from DAHS staff were used to develop a diabetes prevention program. A pilot study was conducted to assess feasibility.

Results

Diabetes and pre-diabetes are common in Derby; of 151 people aged 15–39 years, screened using HbA1c in 2015, 15 (10%) had incident diabetes and 38 (25%) had incident pre-diabetes. Community members support a comprehensive prevention program, including stress management and healthy lifestyle skills. Participants reported enjoying and learning from the program, but experienced barriers to sustained attendance. Community members expressed a desire for increased preventive opportunities. By translating previous research findings with strong community direction, we created an evidence-based, culturally-relevant local program. The pilot study helped refine the program and highlighted challenges with resourcing and competing demands. Reporting this process will aid the development of other appropriate, sustainable prevention programs.