

## **Ensuring Value in Research: Capacity Building in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research**

Authors:

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### **Background**

Through a variety of policy changes, the NHMRC has committed to researcher capacity-building (RCB) for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, to redress the glaring gaps in health outcomes experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and communities. Specifically, the NHMRC has initiated the Population Health Capacity Building Grants to increase the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research workforce, to considerable success. Similarly, Universities and research organisations across Australia have developed policies and programs to build Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research workforce capacity in health and medical related disciplines. As a process in the research enterprise, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RCB can be as important as the outcome, because it ensures not only equitable and ethical employment but also value in research translation due to the cultural awareness, community connectedness, and authentic leadership that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander personnel bring to health research.

### **Objectives**

To present the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RCB story of *Maridulu Budyari Gumal* – a Sydney-wide consortium of research and health organisations – in its partnership based at Western Sydney University. The Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Clinical Academic Stream (AHWB-CAG) is an Aboriginal-led research unit that explores the processes and impacts of research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and its translation through model methods of partnership, engagement, education and capacity-building. In synergy with University policies and programs already in place to target and retain Aboriginal personnel, the AHWB-CAG aims to be an exemplar in RCB and valuable research translation.

### **Method**

To present a contextualised case study of two Aboriginal research staff – one Research Fellow and one Research Assistant, narrating the experience and impact of their employment and mentor-mentee relationship through the AHWB-CAG's capacity-building program. In holistic Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing research and practice, knowledge is gained through the sharing of stories. A reflective/reflexive narrative methodology will be used to discuss how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RCB ensures value in research translation.

### **Results**

Over a period of 18-months, the fruits of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander RCB can be seen in the appointment of two Aboriginal research staff within a collaborative team with other researchers; the targeted mentoring and career development programs for the research assistant, and her expressed aspirations to now progress a career as an academic researcher. Themes of empowerment and change emerge in the narrative case study, which speak to a strengths-based paradigm of health research, showing the inculcation of Aboriginal world views across the Research endeavour enhances the often slow progress in health inequity.