

Collaborate & Connect Toolbox for Non-Indigenous Organisations to Better Engage with First Nations Young People

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Background/Purpose:

Health inequities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander young people are well documented, particularly within non-Indigenous, or “mainstream”, health systems. While many First Nations young people engage with these services, non-Indigenous organisations often lack the skills, confidence, and frameworks to engage effectively and respectfully. Building on AWCH and HCNSW’s 2022 *Walking the Talk* project, which developed youth engagement resources for health services, *Collaborate & Connect* emerged in response to feedback calling for a project designed specifically with First Nations young people. The purpose of this project was to co-design practical, culturally grounded tools to support non-Indigenous staff and organisations to embed authentic engagement with First Nations young people across planning, design, delivery, and evaluation of projects, programs, services, and so on.

Approach:

The project was co-designed through a series of workshops planned and facilitated by a First Nations facilitator, in partnership with a non-Indigenous project officer. Seven First Nations young people contributed lived experience insights, reflections, and guidance throughout all project stages. Their perspectives shaped the *Collaborate & Connect Toolbox*—a comprehensive resource designed to build cultural capability and shift engagement practice within non-Indigenous services.

Outcomes/Impact:

The project produced the *Collaborate & Connect Toolbox*, centred on the *Collaborate & Connect Model for Engagement* and accompanying *Handbook*. These resources introduce three core Foundations: Cultural Humility, Intersectionality, and Decolonisation, alongside practical tools, activity sheets, and templates. Early feedback indicates that the Toolbox strengthens organisational reflection, supports culturally safe practice, and enhances opportunities for First Nations youth leadership in health design.

Innovation and Significance:

This project demonstrates how co-design with First Nations young people can move beyond consultation toward shared decision-making and systems change. By positioning engagement as a process of mutual learning and cultural humility, *Collaborate & Connect* offers a model for equitable, intergenerational investment in youth health and wellbeing.

Disclosure of Interest Statement:

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