



Improving the care of Indigenous people with cancer

Staffing and Teamwork matters

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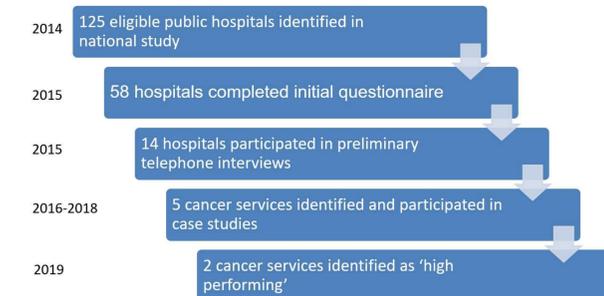
Introduction

Improving health outcomes for Indigenous people by providing person-centred, culturally safe care is a vital challenge for the health sector. Many health services want to provide high quality care, yet struggle with recruiting and retaining Indigenous staff and achieving culturally safe care for Indigenous Australians.

We explored how two health services providing innovative services in cancer care for Indigenous patients supported their Indigenous staff and how Indigenous patients affected by cancer and their families experienced care at these services.

Methods

To find out where Indigenous Australians received cancer treatment, we conducted a survey of public cancer treatment centres across Australia. Results of the survey led to follow-up interviews to explore current practice and programs towards improving cancer care for Indigenous Australians. Finally, centres which reported promising practices were identified, with five services participating in detailed case studies around their specific practices and innovations.



Identification and selection of the two health services

Two services stood out as particularly high performing and were selected for further analysis.

	Urban Service	Regional Service
Location	Major capital city	Large regional centre
Management	Private	State health service
Size	900 beds	800 beds
Total staff	5,700	6,000
Indigenous staff (percent of total)	52 (0.9%)	241 (3.74%)
Catchment	Metropolitan-based, 11%	670,000 people across rural
Indigenous proportion of catchment population	0.8%*	148,000 km ² 8%

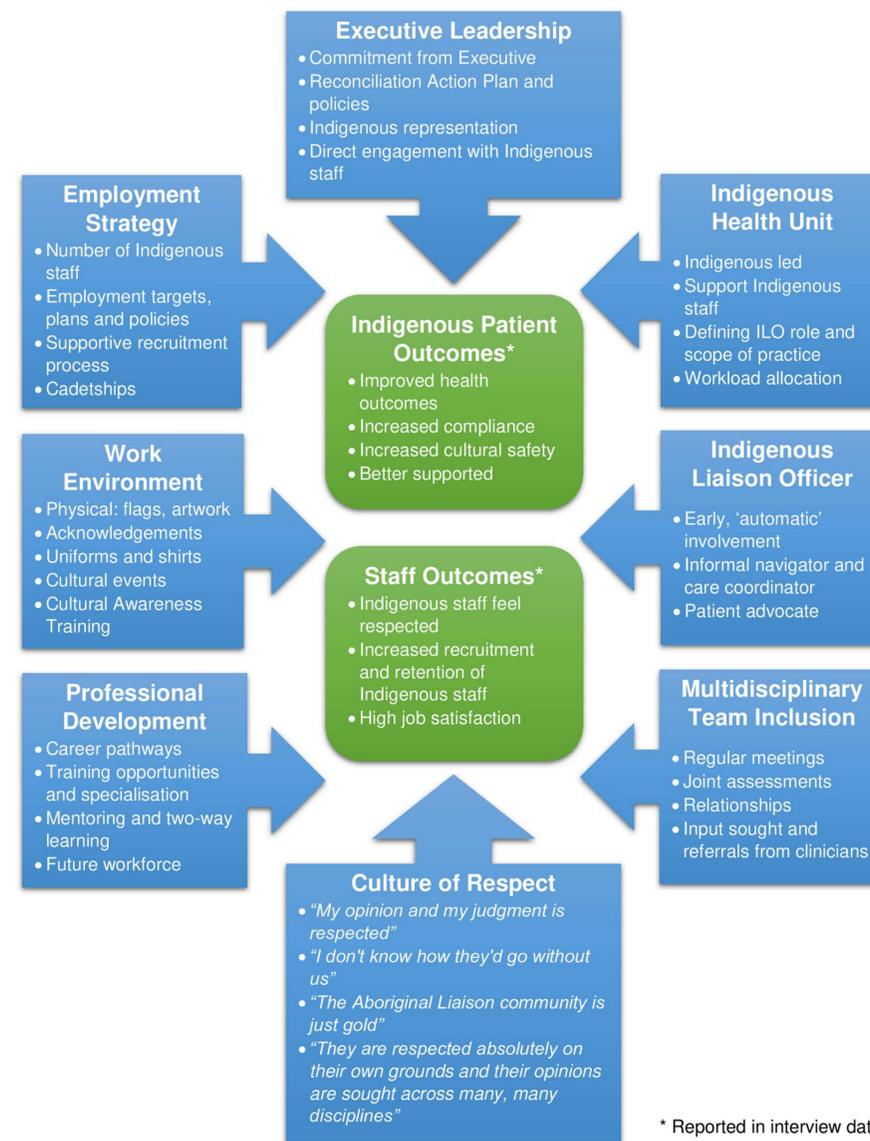
* Proportion of population of the state.

Characteristics of the two high performing health services

We conducted interviews with 24 hospital staff (8 Indigenous and 16 non-Indigenous) and 8 Aboriginal people affected by cancer (5 patients and 3 family members). Staff participants included Indigenous Liaison Officers (ILOs), oncologists, registered nurses, social workers, managers, executives and administrative staff.

Results

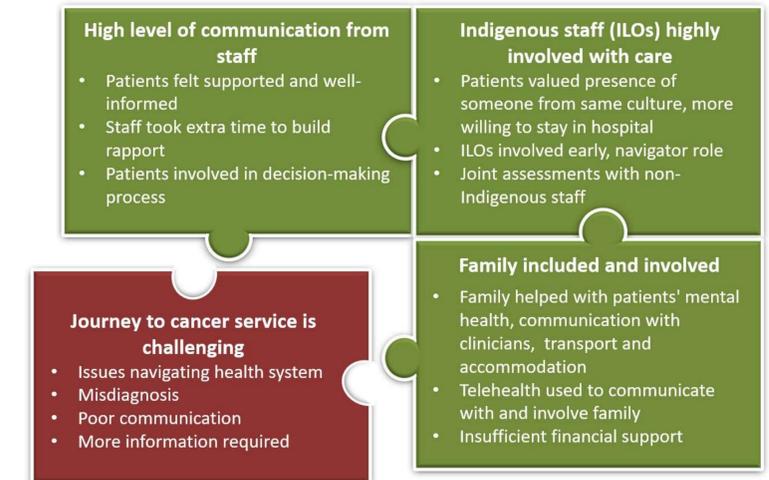
Eight themes were identified from the way that the two services supported their Indigenous workforce. Despite differences in rurality, management and proportion of Indigenous patients, all eight themes were identified within the data from both health services



Indigenous workforce support themes and reported outcomes

* Reported in interview data

Three experiences that were shared by most Indigenous cancer patients and family members interviewed in this study: a positive experience while receiving treatment at the cancer service, a challenging journey to the cancer service and the importance of family support.



Experiences of Indigenous cancer patients and their families

Conclusions

This research demonstrates that with strong leadership, an inclusive and enabling culture, and a culturally appropriate, person-centred approach to care, Indigenous patients and Indigenous health staff can feel supported and respected in large mainstream health services.

Health services have an important role in implementing supportive approaches to overcome challenges for staff and patients and improve health outcomes for Indigenous people.

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