

“Yarning with Indigenous workforce: Understanding Stress and Staying Strong”

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Abstract

INTRODUCTION:

This presentation will report findings from the Understanding Stress and Staying Strong project which explored challenges faced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and human services’ workforce and the individual and collective ways workforce stay strong.

METHOD:

The project was Aboriginal-led and guided by a national governance panel of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce representatives. Qualitative data was collected during interviews and yarning circles with 112 workers in metropolitan, regional and remote locations across Australia. Expert roundtable discussions with more than 50 experts were used to interpret findings and generate multilevel strategies to address challenging workplace conditions and support Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce to stay strong.

RESULTS:

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce reported several systemic issues which present persistent and ongoing challenges such as overt and covert racism; tension between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ways of doing, being and knowing; imbalances of work, life and culture; and workplaces operating with inadequate understandings of Aboriginal cultures leading to tokenism. To keep themselves strong at work, workforce draw on many practices such as individual self-care strategies (e.g., art, music, exercise), debriefing with colleagues and connecting with family, kin and country. Key elements of supportive workplaces were identified: opportunity for collective self-determination, cultural safety, supportive workplace conditions and policies, support for holistic wellbeing, growth opportunities, recognition of staff contributions, aligned organisational vision values and culture, and commitment and accountability.

CONCLUSION:

The identified challenges and strengths of workforce informed the development of guides for workers, managers and organisations to drive improvements in the working lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander workforce across health and human service sectors.