



**Australian Government**

**National Health and Medical Research Council**

## **NHMRC Forum: Research excellence through building capacity of Indigenous health researchers**

### **Introduction**

The NHMRC Forum was held in Brisbane on Tuesday 8 April 2014. It brought together about 30 emerging and established researchers and followed on from the 2012 NHMRC Indigenous Scientific Forum and also the 2013 Tripartite Agreement Mentorship Workshop.

### **Aims**

The aim of the Forum was to bring Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers and key stakeholders together to:

- Develop a model to build and strengthen the capacity and research excellence of Indigenous health researchers;
- Encourage applicants to apply to NHMRC schemes; and
- Seek feedback on Chapter 3 of the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*

***Develop a model*** - NHMRC had been considering a model to build capacity and research excellence of Indigenous researchers. Key stakeholders could identify how they are contributing to the mentoring and capacity building of Indigenous researchers.

***Encourage applicants to apply to NHMRC schemes*** – Invited attendees included emerging researchers who are eligible to apply to NHMRC schemes. The Forum was intended to create opportunities for researchers to network with one another, share information, and identify the best ways to encourage applicants from the Indigenous community to apply to NHMRC schemes.

***Feedback on the Code*** – Chapter 3 – *Supervision of Research Trainees*, outlines universities, researchers and supervisors responsibilities to research trainees. Anecdotal evidence suggested that there could be improvements in this area for Indigenous researchers.

### **Background**

Reports from the 2011 NHMRC Indigenous Scientific Forum and 2013 Tripartite Agreement Mentorship Workshop are relevant along with the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan.

From the May 2013 Mentorship Workshop themes that emerged were:

- Cultural safety – participants identified that research institutes and universities were required to provide an environment that was supportive and encouraged learning. This was one of the challenges facing emerging Indigenous researchers.

- Proposed model – to build and strengthen capacity of Indigenous health researchers
- NHMRC schemes – awareness of NHMRC people support scholarship and fellowship schemes and most importantly the successful recipients who can mentor and assist prospective applicants with navigating the application process.
- Research presentations (call for abstracts) – participants were encouraged to provide presentations on their research and also offer insight on their valuable experiences. This exercise itself helped build skills in public speaking, developing an abstract, and delivering an oral and powerpoint presentation.

## **Participants**

Participants were invited to attend the Forum and were selected as previous attendees from the 2012 and 2013 workshops. Recent recipients of the Early Career Fellowships, Career Development Fellowships and program grants were also invited.

Indigenous leaders from Universities also attended along with key Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations. A list of all participants can be found at [Appendix A](#).

## **Forum themes**

Three themes were presented and these were:

### **Theme 1 - Why focus on research excellence and capacity building?**

NHMRC are considering a model to build capacity and research excellence of Indigenous researchers. Some issues for consideration are: what are the systems and frameworks that need to be in place, what are the lessons we can learn from international success and how do these models contribute to the mentoring and building capacity of Indigenous researchers?

Workshop questions:

- What does research excellence and capacity building look like? What are the elements that comprise this?
- Are there some good examples and good case studies, locally, nationally or internationally?

### **Theme 2 – Opportunities and challenges of NHMRC schemes**

NHMRC are finding that there is a low level of application by Indigenous researchers to the NHMRC People Support schemes. However, of the applicants that apply, there is a high success rate. Are Indigenous researchers aware of these opportunities and how can they be encouraged to apply to these schemes?

Workshop questions:

- What are the challenges to applying to NHMRC schemes?
- How can Indigenous researchers be encouraged to apply to NHMRC schemes?
- Who are the good mentors that support Indigenous researchers?

### **Theme 3 – Supporting Indigenous researchers**

Chapter 3, supervision of research trainees, from the *Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research*, outlines universities', researchers' and supervisors' responsibilities to research trainees. Anecdotal evidence suggests that there could be improvements in this area for Indigenous researchers. One of the questions for consideration is how can universities ensure that Indigenous researchers have a valuable learning experience?

Workshop questions:

- What does cultural safety look like and how important is it to Indigenous researchers?
- Are there good examples of cultural safety in Australia?
- What are the challenges facing emerging Indigenous researchers?
- What resources and tools exist to support supervisors and universities?

### **Presenter highlights – Tuesday 8 April**

**Theme 1:** *Why focus on research excellence and capacity building?*

**Presenter:** Professor Alex Brown

**Summary:** Professor Brown described the current health research environment highlighting the strengths of primary care research, cancer research and weaknesses in data linkage, and Social Determinants of Health. He identified some of the present challenges and put forward a proposal for Centres for Indigenous Research Excellence. These Centres would secure tenured funding and also leverage funding. They would develop the next generation of researchers with an understanding of ethics and training and be connected nationally. This would require sustained flexible funding tied to outcomes, to build research practice and lead to excellence. A National Indigenous strategy research and translation plan was also raised.

**Theme 2:** *Opportunities and challenges of NHMRC schemes*

**Presenters:** A/Prof Gail Garvey, Dr Simone Reynolds, Dr Sarah Ellis, Dr Sandra Campbell

**Summary:** Panel members shared their career and research journeys. They described how mentoring was important to their career development as was gaining skills through sitting on research and ethics panels. A broader discussion revealed tips on how to navigate the research sector. Some of these tips included:

- Be proactive, find that grant, identify criteria and work to respond to it.
- Collaborate with people who are already NHMRC funded.
- Increase your publications, and develop a track record.
- Be on multiple grants, apply to NHMRC, ARC and so on.
- Surround yourself with good people who will provide you with support and direction.

### **Theme 3: *Supporting Indigenous researchers***

**Presenter:** Professor Steven Larkin, Charles Darwin University

**Summary:** Professor Larkin described the many roles that Indigenous students are required to perform. He added the requirements of successful supervision as the following attributes: 2 supportive supervisors; good match between supervisor and researcher; develop a researcher that is employable; the researcher gains skills and knowledge about the work of others; and contributions continue beyond the work of training. He called for a whole of university approach to support Indigenous students. Also, the National Indigenous Research and Knowledge Network (NIRAKN) is there to develop and support Indigenous students.

### **Outcomes**

The Workshop group discussions raised several key areas of consideration. These were grouped as follows:

- Research excellence and capacity building model
- Researchers' capacity building and mentoring
- Cultural Safety
- NHMRC Schemes
- Role of Mentors
- Role of Individual Researchers
- Role of Community

Presentations and photos of the day are available from the NHMRC website at - <http://www.nhmrc.gov.au/media/events/2014/national-forum-research-excellence-through-building-capacity-indigenous-researcher>

### **Next Steps**

Theme 1 – the recommendations related to this theme would be considered by PCIC, RC and Council and be developed as a NHMRC funding proposal.

Theme 2 – Recommendations would be fed back to the NHMRC for consideration and implementation.

Theme 3 – Initial feedback on suggested improvements to Chapter 3 of the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research would be passed on to the relevant NHMRC section and Committee for further consideration.

Overall the suggested next steps, post-workshop are as follows:

1. Prepare a report on the workshop outcomes (this document)
2. Circulate the report to participants and the PCIC
3. Action the report with PCIC

An Action Plan with key recommendations for the NHMRC has been drafted and is being considered by the NHMRC and will be discussed with the Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus.

**Participants – NHMRC Forum: Research excellence through building capacity  
of Indigenous health researchers, 8 April 2014**

Professor Ross Andrews, Menzies School of Health Research  
Dr Chelsea Bond, University of Queensland  
Ms Lisa Briggs, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation  
Professor Alex Brown, NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus  
Dr Sandra Campbell, James Cook University  
Professor Kathleen Clapham, University of Wollongong  
Associate Professor Juli Coffin, Combined Universities Centre for Rural Health  
Ms Heather D'Antoine, Menzies School of Health Research  
Mr Michael Doyle, University of New South Wales  
Dr Sarah Ellis, Peter MacCallum Cancer Centre  
Ms Catrina Felton-Busch, James Cook University  
Professor Bronwyn Fredericks, Central Queensland University  
Associate Professor Gail Garvey, Menzies School of Health Research  
Ms Kalinda Griffiths, The University of Sydney  
Dr Kali Hayward, Australian Indigenous Doctors Association  
Dr Tammy Kimpton, NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus  
Professor Steve Larkin, Charles Darwin University  
Ms Vanessa Lee, The University of Sydney  
Dr Ray Lovett, Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies  
Dr Tamara Mackean, NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus  
Mr Mark Mayo, NHMRC Principal Committee Indigenous Caucus  
Professor Adrian Miller, Griffith University  
Mr Romlie Mokak, Australian Indigenous Doctors Association  
Ms Kim O'Donnell, Flinders University  
Dr Simone Reynolds, Queensland Institute of Medical Research  
Professor Cindy Shannon, University of Queensland  
Dr Mervyn Thomas, NHMRC Research Committee  
Mr Scott Winch, University of Wollongong  
Dr Jeannette Young, NHMRC Council  
Ms Catherine Wright, National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health  
Organisation