

Tripartite Agreement – Mentorship Workshop Report

My vision is that Indigenous researchers and their communities are proud of what Indigenous peoples have contributed to the research process.

Established researcher and workshop participant

Introduction

The Mentorship Workshop was held in Melbourne from 23-24 May, 2013. It is one of three research initiatives identified by the NHMRC, CIHR and HRC NZ from the letter of intent signed on 11 June 2012. The Tripartite Agreement is a five-year agreement.

Overall Goal

To advise the three research Councils on the development of mentorship programs aimed at attracting, retaining and better supporting emerging Indigenous health researchers, and thereby developing a cadre of Indigenous researchers ideally poised to address health problems affecting Indigenous people in Australia, New Zealand and Canada.

Specific Objectives

To advise the three research Councils on the development of either (1) a joint mentorship program with cross-appointed mentors in all three countries or (2) country-specific mentorship programs that would include mechanisms to promote collaboration and sharing of best practices among all three countries. The aim of such mentorship program(s) would be:

- To identify mechanisms to better establish, support, and mentor the next cadre of Indigenous researchers;
- To increase the capacity of Indigenous researchers to undertake high-impact research;
- To better empower young Indigenous researchers to become tomorrow's leaders in their respective fields of inquiry;
- To increase the quality, interconnectedness, and impact of Indigenous researchers conducting action-oriented health research; and
- To encourage opportunities for researchers to build international teams and to exchange research data where relevant.

Participants

This *Mentorship Workshop* included both established mentors and promising new investigators or emerging leaders. Each country nominated approximately ten (10) Indigenous researchers – 7 to 8 mentors and 2 to 3 promising new investigators or emerging leaders to attend the *Mentorship Workshop*.

The mentors nominated included researchers who are Indigenous as well as researchers who have extensive experience in undertaking research in Indigenous communities. They would have a well-established track record of mentoring Indigenous Doctoral and or Post-Doctoral students. Mentors included community mentors and researchers. Also, attendees all had a track record working on collaborative projects, some with international partners. All participants came together to focus on the challenges of mentoring Indigenous students and the strengths of different mentoring models. A list of all participants can be found at [Appendix A](#).

Workshop themes

Several Workshop themes were agreed upon and these are as follows:

1. Identification of challenges facing young Indigenous researchers;
2. Identification of research gaps for which Indigenous research capacity is needed;
3. Definition of attractive career tracks for young Indigenous researchers;
4. Environmental scan of existing mentorship programs and tools to assist in identification of mentors;
5. Applicability of existing models to Indigenous-specific challenges;
6. Pros and cons of trans-cultural (tri-partite) mentorship elements;
7. Program proposal.

Presenter highlights – Thursday 23 May

Topic: *Workshop aims and objectives, current landscape and plans for the future*

Presenters: Professor Warwick Anderson (Aus), Professor Khyla Russell (NZ) and Dr Nadine Caron (Can)

Summary: Building Indigenous researcher capacity is important to reduce Indigenous health inequalities. It is important to have Indigenous peoples involved at all levels of research. Assessors should understand Indigenous worldview. A balance of academic and community expectations is required. Being the first in a field is a double-edged sword, it is great but embarrassing in terms of timing, that it should have been sooner. We should be encouraging Indigenous and non-Indigenous mentors as there are too few Indigenous mentors.

Topic: *Indigenous researchers: Challenges facing emerging Indigenous researchers*

Presenters: Dr Cheryl Smith (NZ), Kalinda Griffiths (Aus), Dr Anita Benoit (Can)

Summary: The question was raised as to “do we know what we are getting ourselves in for?” The 2009 Lowitja Institute publication *Supporting Indigenous researchers: a practical guide for supervisors*, identified the needs of emerging Indigenous researchers. Some of the challenges included: language and power, conducting ethical research, awareness of education and research pathways, and maintaining connection to community. Strategies and solutions were: reflexive skills such as having critical discussions, engaging new community partners and supportive research (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) partners.

Topic: *Indigenous researchers: Definition of attractive career tracks for emerging Indigenous researchers*

Presenters: Dr Emma Wyeth (NZ), Associate Professor Noel Hayman (Aus), Dr Carrie Bourassa (Can)

Summary: Presenters reflected on their own career pathways into research. From a young age, education was important. They always had a science-oriented mind. Cultural responsibilities were also an important part of growing up and retained and practised with family today. Pathways are many and varied. Mentors and role models are important in any area of one's life. A vision that Indigenous health is everyone's responsibility is essential.

Topic: *Indigenous researchers: Identification of research gaps for which Indigenous research capacity is needed*

Presenters: Dr Te Kani Kingi (NZ), Professor Sandra Eades (Aus), Dr Lee Wilson (Can)

Summary: Some of the gaps identified are addressing retention and attrition issues, connecting science, social science and health science, and addressing mentorship and connecting environment and health. There should be a focus on identifying potential researchers, retaining current researchers and locating good mentors.

Presenter highlights – Friday 24 May

Topic: *Mentorship programs: case studies and identification of best practice – environmental scan of existing mentorship programs, applicability of existing models to Indigenous specific challenges, tools to assist in identification of mentors*

Presenters: Dr Mera Penehira (NZ), Dr Chelsea Bond (Aus), Dawn Martin Hill (Can)

Summary: Mentoring is led from the back. The mentoree is out front and the mentor is guiding from behind. Mentoring Maori style, which can be applied to Canada and Australia, is about:

- Reciprocity of teaching and learning;
- Relationships of leadership and followership that are fluid according to situation, expertise and growth; and
- Gender specific mentoring-similar at times, yet different at times.

Students need to be identified at an early age, exposed to new ideas and options and encouraged to aspire to attend university. Enticements or incentives such as scholarships and investment in individuals are required, with flexibility in the system. Engagement with research networks and empowerment through mentoring will ensure success.

Topic: *Mentorship program: Program proposal (what does a tripartite mentorship program look like (elements and pros and cons)*

Presenters: Dr Paul Reynolds (NZ), Professor Warwick Anderson (Aus), Dr Jeff Reading (Can)

Summary: Friends at university provided support and that network of contacts has sustained me over the years. Cultivate a diverse group of friends, who have their own life and provide support as well. Questions to ask ourselves are: what is the vision for 10-20 years ahead, where would people be drawn from and what would we be celebrating? Let us work to ensure that we have leaders drawn from all the sciences.

There is a call for postgraduate scholarships to help Indigenous students complete their study. Writing fellowships would address a lack of publications by Indigenous researchers at all academic levels. The system was not set up to fund Indigenous researchers and collaboration with others. Encouraging others to participate and learn the system is necessary, along with sharing knowledge of grant writing and the importance of language.

Identify the common elements to all three countries and build on these. Identify the core elements while embracing the unique environments, strengths and opportunities. Create an environment and connect the mentor with the mentee. Build in a strong evaluation of a mentorship program.

Topic: *Development of a Workshop Program*

Presenters: Dr Madeleine Dion Stout (Can), Dr Clive Aspin (NZ)

Summary: Mentorship is an opportunity and challenge. We have opened up vistas for everyone. The pace of change binds mentors and mentees through spiritual contacts and social contracts.

Protocols for working together include but are not limited to: Indigenous leadership; capacity building and training opportunities; and establishing and maintaining relationships with other Indigenous networks.

Outcomes

Participants identified the 3 most important components of an international mentorship program as being resources, both financial and human and program delivery.

Financial Resources

Funding was identified as an essential ingredient for the development and delivery of a program. The formation of a consortium of partners to lead this was supported as their role would be to develop a business model with an identified product.

Participants identified a yearly workshop and a summer school as essential to building capacity on an ongoing basis. The workshop and summer school would include skills and training for Indigenous researchers from grant application through to peer review.

Human Resources

Having more Indigenous people as researchers, peer reviewers and grant panel members is a desired outcome. The aim is to have more Indigenous Chief Investigators who act as leaders and decision-makers in developing the research agenda and selecting members of the team. Prior to this, identifying outstanding students who are ready and academically prepared for the rigour of the work is required. Community mentors must not be forgotten as they have a lot of wisdom to impart and their inclusion must be a part of the network.

Program delivery

The mentorship program must be for Indigenous mentees only. It should be guided by and based on the needs of the developing researchers. The program would incorporate an evaluation from the development stage. Protocols would be included as a necessary part: also to share and learn from one another. Protocols would

identify common ground and country specific issues. The creation of a supportive environment was important to the success and sustainability of the program. Terminology and use of language relevant to all three countries was a concern. Finally, the positioning of Indigenous health research as legitimate, of substance, and an attractive career option is at the core of a program.

Barriers – what is getting in the way?

A number of barriers were identified. Some of these included:

- Lack of funding as a researcher - research is not seen as an attractive career option. Financial burden when you have to pay mortgage and bills and the lack of a career pathway.
- Identification of Indigenous researchers – no way to identify Indigenous researchers, when there is no central database. Researchers not identifying as Indigenous. Some of the reasons for this may be no advantage to identify, Indigenous health careers seen as second class and high demands on researchers time at each stage of their career.
- Lack of political will from governments – as this is required along with funding to ensure the development and sustainability of such a program.

Facilitators – what do we already have, that we can build on?

There were already some key things happening. The idea was to look at what we can build on. Overall the health workforce is evolving and the health research workforce is growing. Researchers are at different stages of their journeys and we have a combination of emerging and established researchers. We could be utilising this group of Indigenous health professionals. With further research training and support, they could add incrementally to our Indigenous health research capacity.

Social media brings us closer together and allows us to connect in ways that we could not possibly imagine just a few years ago. These communication tools allows for international collaboration.

Strong international networks already exist such as the:

- INIHKD – International Network on Indigenous Health Knowledge and Development
- IGIHM – International Group for Indigenous Health Measurement
- PRIDOC – Pacific Region Indigenous Doctors' Conference
- HOSW – Healing Our Spirit Worldwide
- INIHPP – International Network of Indigenous Health Promotion Professionals (IUHPE)
- IIWGHA – International Indigenous Working Group on HIV & AIDS
- WIPCE – World Indigenous Peoples Conference on Education

We can build on these and create new networks. These international gatherings could be used to link with these organisations to share time and space for planned mentorship activities. People are passionate and there are good experienced mentors already. The importance of the community cannot be under rated. They play an important role in research and mentees must spend time within the community.

Expected Outcomes

The expected outcomes of a successful international mentorship program will show an increase in the number of Indigenous researchers; an increase in the success of Indigenous researchers in the research process and an increase in the impact of Indigenous research.

The creation of a mentorship scheme, followed by the evaluation of such a scheme through collaboration and the use and application of Indigenous methodology would see benefits for researchers such as more publications, research grants and recognition. The outcomes may be small numbers to begin with but the journey is meaningful.

Intangible outcomes would also include the strengthening and supporting of community and advancing our roles as Indigenous peoples. A strong community would be a safe environment. Another potential advantage is that through raising the profile and perceived value of Indigenous mentors, they may guide more mainstream researchers in their Indigenous health research. This added value would only be realised if the cadre grows.

Closing Comments

Dr Jane Aubin, from Canada and Associate Professor Noel Hayman from Australia provided the closing comments. They indicated that the workshop had raised key principles that could be taken to respective federal funding agencies.

They concluded that the challenges and issues discussed were similar across all three countries and that together we can capture the opportunities presented by this initiative.

Associate Professor Hayman concluded by stating that he would share the outcomes with the NHMRC and encourage the development of a mentorship program.

Appendix A

Australia

A/Professor Noel Hayman
Dr Chelsea Bond
Ms Yvette Roe
Mr Michael Doyle
Professor Sandra Eades
Ms Kalinda Griffiths
Mr Mark Mayo
Professor Warwick Anderson
Ms Virginia Hart
Ms Samantha Miles
Ms Samantha Faulkner
Mr Leith Dewis

New Zealand

Dr Clive Aspin
Dr Amohia Boulton
Ms Rachel Brown
Dr Paul Reynolds
Dr Te Kani Kingi
Dr Mera Penhira
Prof Khyla Russell
Dr Cheryl Smith
Dr Emma Wyeth

Canada

Dr Jane Aubin
Dr Judith Bartlett
Dr Lee Wilson
Dr Anita Benoit
Dr Nadine Caron
Mr Jacques Dalton
Dr Madeleine Dion Stout
Dr Jeff Reading
Dr Francois Gros-Louis
Dr Dawn Martin Hill
Dr Catherine Cook
Dr Carrie Bourassa