



Improving mental health and drug and alcohol service outcomes for Nyoongar peoples

What is the project about?

The project aims to positively change the way mental health and drug and alcohol services are delivered to Nyoongar peoples living in the southeast metropolitan region of Perth, Western Australia. The project uses a research approach that actively involves both the Nyoongar community and service providers in determining the direction and outcomes of the research process.

What has happened?

Since 2010, the project team led by Nyoongar man, Dr Michael Wright, has worked closely with Nyoongar families, community members, and service providers in the region to identify and understand the:

- ✿ needs of Nyoongar families living with mental health and drug and alcohol concerns, and;
- ✿ factors which make a mental health or drug and alcohol service culturally secure for Nyoongar families.

From listening to stories told by Nyoongar people it is clear that Nyoongar families need non-Aboriginal people to recognise, understand and show respect for Nyoongar cultural practices, knowledge and history.

Here are some key points service providers need to know and understand:

- ✿ Nyoongar culture has survived and is continually adapting despite the disruptive impact of colonisation.
- ✿ Nyoongar law and culture is still practised, and connection to the land and family keeps Nyoongar people strong.
- ✿ The Nyoongar community is diverse, and establishing a network of relationships with Nyoongar families is the key to staying in touch with the community.
- ✿ Elders are the holders of Nyoongar knowledge and culture and are leaders in their community.



The Elders are key

The most effective way to learn about Nyoongar culture and people is to listen to the stories of the Elders and share cultural experiences with them. The project has created opportunities for mental health and drug and alcohol service providers to experience Nyoongar culture 'on country' and to connect and build relationships with local Nyoongar Elders.

By building trusting and respectful relationships, we've laid the foundation for the service providers and Elders to develop new ways of working together to create meaningful and

sustainable change. The aim of this work together is to transform the practices, policies and structures of services participating in the project to ensure Nyoongar peoples' voices are heard and responded to by staff at all levels of an organisation.

Who's involved?

- ✿ Nyoongar Elders and community members from the Kwinana and southeast metropolitan regions of Perth, Western Australia.
- ✿ Twelve mental health and drug and alcohol organisations from the public and non-government sectors, including the Western Australian associations that support and advocate for mental health and drug and alcohol services.
- ✿ Project partner, Ruah Community Services, a Perth-based, non-government service provider.
- ✿ Project funders: Centre for Research Excellence in Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing, Telethon Kids Institute, University of Western Australia, Lotterywest, Mental Health Commission (WA), and Curtin University.

What has come out of the project so far?

Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart Framework for Engagement

Minditj Kaart-Moorditj Kaart ('sick head, good head') emphasises connection to culture, family and country as being the key to mental wellbeing for Nyoongar people. It explains how service providers must develop an understanding of and respect for Nyoongar cultural ways by building meaningful relationships with Nyoongar Elders. By engaging in this way, non-Aboriginal and Nyoongar peoples can start to work together to change the way services respond to Nyoongar families.

Open Hearts, Open Hands: A Spiritual Journey of Change Handbook

The Handbook will guide service providers through:

- ✿ Their personal journey of reflecting on and transforming their own way of seeing the world to recognise and include Nyoongar ways of understanding the world.
- ✿ The development of an action plan for working together with the Elders to make their service more accessible and responsive to the needs of Nyoongar families.



Where will this take us?

From 2015 to 2017 the Nyoongar Elders and participating service providers will continue working together to create the following:

- ✿ **A new way of delivering culturally secure services**, which responds specifically to the needs of the Nyoongar community, but can also be adapted for use in other communities and contexts.
- ✿ **A way to implement this model** so it is meaningful for all stakeholders involved and can be maintained long into the future.
- ✿ **A way to measure how well this model is adopted** by service providers and meets the needs of Nyoongar families.

Want to know more?

Contact Lead Researcher, Dr Michael Wright, on 0404 055 435 or at the office on (08) 9489 7760 or by email Michael.Wright@telethonkids.org.au or m.wright@curtin.edu.au.