

BLACK MEN TALKIN'

FORUM REPORT and EVALUATION

THURSDAY 17TH NOVEMBER 2006

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Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peer Support Network
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Introduction

The North Central Metro Primary Care Partnership (NCMPCP) facilitates meetings of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peer Support Group. In 2006 the group decided that each municipality of the NCMPCP would hold a forum for both Indigenous and Non-Indigenous people highlighting some of the social issues that are impacting on the lifestyle factors that influence Indigenous health.

The aim of the forums is to:

- Raise issues across sectors to provide joint understanding of the interface between health and other issues.
- Participants in forums to take information back to their organizations.
- Forums to help in setting up relationships and ways of working together across sectors.

Darebin Community Health (DCH) undertook to host the first of the forums. They chose the topic of Indigenous men's health issues as this was a work priority for DCH and they had experience and contacts to support them in organising the forum. Working with a small committee it was decided to hold the forum at the Maya Living Free Healing Centre, Thornbury, hosted by Uncle Reg Blow of the Maya Centre and Darebin Community Health Men's Group.

Presentations and key messages from the forum

Two keynote presentations by Aboriginal people were:

Terry Aitkinson "Living Male – did I mention I'm Black?"

Terry related his own experiences as a black man and his work with others to create a safe place for men to come together. Often picked up through the justice system men are introduced into a safe cultural environment where they can obtain professional help but more importantly receive support from each other. The program is based on warrior training adapted from the US Indian program and is currently being adapted for younger men, called 'Where's my uncle?' Older men help support younger men exposing them to cultural men's business, help with behavioural change and ways of surviving modern life.

"Families don't exist without healthy black men".

Mike Adams: What's Happening in Indigenous Men's Health?

Mike noted that on the national scene there is a negative portrayal of men's health. The risks are there: greatest burden of disease, lifestyle factors, men don't seek medical attention and then only late in life.

The *"Framework for Improving Health and Wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Men"* gives guidelines that support existing policies and strategies, which are strengthened for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men. Key points for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men's health include:

- The need for health and empowerment for a positive role and life direction
- Male support programs – self-help, and leadership for other men
- Men taking responsibility for themselves.

Where there is family violence, women and children get taken to a shelter and are supported. Men go to the pub! They need somewhere else to go for support that encourages men to speak out – to each other, a doctor or health worker, to take control of their lives.

Mike also spoke about a current study in which he is involved *"Sexual dysfunction and associated health problems in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander males"*.

Focus groups informed this study and a 30 page survey questionnaire has been used. The survey results have highlighted reasons for sexual dysfunction and the extensive problems it causes, as well as how seldom men seek help.

The questionnaire was expanded to include sexual violence and highlighted that while the focus has been on women and children, the high incidence revealed of sexual violence experienced by men should be considered, as they are unlikely to seek help.

"We need to work to allow Aboriginal men to be leaders of health for their own people".

Panel presentations and discussion, points raised

Panel members:

Uncle Phillip Cooper, VACSAL: *Victorian Koori Men's Issues and Ways Forward*

Ronald Briggs, VAHS, *Aboriginal Men's Health Team: Promoting Health to Indigenous Men*

Troy Austin, Department of Justice: *Justice for Aboriginal Men*

Dixon Patten from Bert Williams Hostel Night Patrol: *A Place Called Home*. Dixon was unable to attend and Uncle Reg Blow provided an overview.

Issues highlighted:

- Men don't seek help.
- Men find it easier to talk to other men.
- Men don't want to talk to females about their health issues (many females are in the health system).
- Need to explore underlying causes of poor health and refer for appropriate help.
- Funding issues for on-going support.
- Women and children get support – men go to the pub where the situation is made worse.
- A cultural connection will help.
- Young Koori groups need something to do that keeps them out of trouble (metro area). There are not enough structured activities.
- Suggest a youth forum to discuss the issues.
- Drugs and alcohol is often cause or related to the reasons for incarceration of Aboriginal men.
- Rate of incarceration of Aboriginal men is increasing; they are 2 ½ times more likely to be jailed than white men.
- Long term program commitment is needed.
- Older men to take responsibility for younger men.
- Men need to develop trust in the organization/people providing services. Organisations need to earn that trust. Work with someone from the community that you are dealing with.
- The health system needs to look at the spiritual connections.

Health Masculinity and Well Being of Desert Aboriginal Men

Dr Brian McCoy, a non-Indigenous man spoke of his experience and understanding of the Aboriginal culture in the Kimberly Ranges, WA, in developing good health programs.

He explained "Kanyirninpa" (holding), meaning held up, protected, supported by culture.

First the mother gives birth to the child, feeds and protects the child; the father stands with her to do this.

Second is the nurturing of the child. As well as the parents older people are looking over, and teaching the younger people.

Third, the young people grow in independence but need the links to their country, the older people and to stay together. Team sport such as football is a good way to learn support for each other. Young men are looking for older men to pull them back.

Finally the mother hands over the boy to the father to grow up and be looked after by the men.

Sending young men to prison breaks the hold.

The road ahead is in Kanyirninpa - 'holding'.

" Men feel held in the company of other men"

Summary of key points highlighted throughout the forum

- The importance of safe space for men
- The gathering of men—and a range of men across the generations
- Importance of culture and history (personal and big picture)
- Need for holistic approach because of the complexity of issues – it can't be seen as health in isolation from education, employment , family connection, cultural connection etc
- Importance of men taking responsibility
- Importance of men working together and within family and community
- Access to culturally relevant services
- Men working with men
- Men don't seek health services early and reluctant to talk about health
- Need for ongoing funding for culturally appropriate funding.

Forum evaluation

Questionnaires were distributed at the end of the forum for completion. A summary of the results follows.

Attendance: 37 people registered at the forum.

24 male

13 female

25 evaluation responses

Aboriginal or non-Aboriginal

Nine people were Aboriginal and 15 were non-Aboriginal. There was one no response. This evaluation form was included with the non-Aboriginal responses, total = 16.

Participants were nearly evenly divided between those working or living in the Darebin area and those who were not. See below.

Living/working within the Darebin area

	Yes	No	No response	Total
Aboriginal	3	6	-	9
Non Aboriginal	8	6	1	16
Total	11	13	1	25

Knowledge and understanding of Indigenous Men's Issues

Most participants stated that their knowledge and understanding of Indigenous men's issues prior to attending the forum was good. After the forum most rated their knowledge and understanding as very good or excellent (see Table 1). For fifteen respondents this indicated an improvement in knowledge/understanding of the issues, for nine there was no change and one rated knowledge/understanding as poorer (see Table 2).

Table 1: Knowledge and understanding of Indigenous men's health issues (n=25)

<i>Rating of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous men's issues prior to attending forum</i>					
	Poor	Good	Very good/ Excellent	No Response	Total
Aboriginal	-	5	4	-	9
Non Aboriginal	4	10	4	-	16
Total	4	15	6	-	25
<i>Rating of knowledge and understanding of Indigenous men's issues after attending the Forum</i>					
Aboriginal	-	-	9	-	9
Non Aboriginal	1	3	11	1	16
Total	1	3	20	1	25

Table 2: Change in rating of knowledge/understanding of Indigenous men's issues after attending the Forum (n=25)

	Higher	Same	Lower	Total
Aboriginal	6	3	-	9
Non Aboriginal	9	6	1	16
Total	15	9	1	25

Rating of addresses by the keynote speakers

Both keynote speaker's addresses were well rated by most respondents at very good or excellent, (see Table 3).

Table 3: Rating keynote speakers (n=25)

	Poor			Good			Very Good/ Excellent			No Response		
	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total
Living Male – Did I mention I'm black?	-	1	1	2	1	3	6	10	16	1	4	5
Indigenous Men's Health – What's happening?	-	1	1	2	2	4	6	11	17	1	2	3

Rating the panel speaker presentations

All panel speakers rated well, the respondents' rating of very good or excellent ranged from 13 to 18. Overall participants rated the panel discussion well, 14 rated it as very good or excellent, nine said it was good and only one rated it as poor, (see Table 4).

Table 4: Panel discussion (n=25)

	Poor			Good			Very Good/ Excellent			No Response		
	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total
Victorian Koori Men's Issues and Ways Forward	-	1	1	3	3	6	3	10	13	3	2	5
Promoting Health to Koori Men	-	2	2	3	2	5	6	11	17	-	1	1
Justice for Aboriginal Men	-	2	2	2	1	3	6	12	18	1	1	2
A place to call home	-	2	2	2	1	3	5	10	15	2	3	5
Rating the panel discussion	-	1	1	2	7	9	6	8	14	1	1	2

Presentation: Health Masculinity and Well Being of Desert Aboriginal Men

The presentation on the experiences on developing good health programs from the Kimberly Ranges in WA rated very well with participants with 20 rating it very good or excellent (see Table 5).

Table 5: Presentation Health Masculinity and Well Being of Desert Aboriginal Men (n=25)

	Poor			Good			Very Good/ Excellent			No Response		
	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total
Health Masculinity and Well Being of Desert Aboriginal Men?	-	-	-	1	3	4	7	13	20	1	-	1

Overall rating of the Forum

The venue for the forum rated very well with 20 participants rating it very good or excellent. The catering also rated well with 15 participants rating it very good or excellent (see Table 4).

Overall the forum was rated very good or excellent by 18 respondents. Only one rated the forum as poor, see Table 6). Twenty indicated that they would like to be notified of similar forums on health and social issues for Indigenous people. One commented that they would only be interested in Indigenous only future events. One indicated that they would not be interested in notification, (see Table 7).

Table 6: Rating the Forum (n=25)

	Poor			Good			Very Good/ Excellent			No Response		
	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total	Ind	N-I	Total
Venue	-	-	-	1	4	5	8	12	20	-	-	-
Morning tea/lunch	-	-	-	1	7	8	8	7	15	-	2	2
How would you rate the overall Forum	-	1	1	2	3	5	7	11	18	-	1	1

Table 7: Want to be notified of similar forums on health and social issues for Indigenous people (n=25)

	Yes	No	No response	Total
Aboriginal	8	-	1	9
Non Aboriginal	12	1	3	16
Total	20	1	4	25

Comments from participants

Indigenous

- The information disclosed has been enlightening to non-indigenous people who attended and also indigenous employees not working directly with the health sector, but issues from the health sector impacts on their work.
- Indig Men's Health discussions can get very sad, depressing, next time have some lighter moments incorporated into the program.
- Excellent job – well done guys
- Very good
- I feel that the notion of inviting non-Indigenous men and women, and Koori women to come and be a part of Indigenous Men's Health Issues is a powerful initiative!
- A very good forum, just wondering what is planned for the future? And how we can assist.
- When is the next Secret Mens Business forum? Do we men need a Strategic Planning forum with delegations to persons/workers: to do so that "Secret Mens Business" is taken seriously and not just another Talkfest?

Non-Indigenous

- Just like to say that all the speakers were excellent – as there was a range of different perspectives and issues that with an overall understanding of the basis for development in working with Indigenous males.
- Ron was excellent
- The forum was successful as a start. Needs to be ongoing.
- Mentoring was mentioned briefly - I think that young men at school age sometimes lack a male they can talk to about issues outside the school and the immediate family group – DULIN provided a good service- what chance of getting something similar going again at Maya? Guidance when young with smoothing the transition from youth to young adult.
- Congratulations for organising this – I look forward to being able to help in the future.