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CLOSE THE GAP RESOURCES: CLINICIAN'S SUMMARY MARCH 2014

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CLOSE THE GAP RESOURCES: CLINICIAN'S SUMMARY – A quick skip through some essential reading for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health

MARCH 2014

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March 20th 2014 is Close the Gap day. General Practitioners and the teams in which we work are at the forefront of the work to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. This work needs to be backed up by good information and good evidence. We hope this document is useful in highlighting some of the evidence that can improve the work of GPs in this area. Access to all the articles is available through the RACGP library, though you may need a log in. Contact the library or the National Faculty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health if you would like further reading.

The statistics

The Indigenous Health InfoNet is the best one-stop website for information and publications relating to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. This document is a succinct summary of the statistics across all the areas of Indigenous health. It provides information about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander populations; the context of Indigenous health; various measures of population health status; selected health conditions; and health risk and protective factors.

MacRae A, Thomson N, Anomie, Burns J, Catto M, Gray C, Levitan L, McLoughlin N, Potter C, Ride K, Stumpers S, Trzesinski A, Urquhart B (2013). *Overview of Australian Indigenous health status, 2012.* Available from <http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au/health-facts/overviews>

The following two papers report the health status in a slightly different format. Vos et al show the spread of the gap in Indigenous people living in urban or remote areas, and the contribution of different lifestyle factors to the gap.

Vos T, Barker B, Begg S, Stanley L, Lopez AD. Burden of disease and injury in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples: the Indigenous health gap. *Int J Epidemiol.* 2009 Apr;38(2):470-7. doi: 10.1093/ije/dyn240. Epub 2008 Nov 30. PubMed PMID: 19047078. Available from <http://ije.oxfordjournals.org/content/38/2/470.long>

The analysis by Zhao, shows that socio-economic status explains a large part of the health gap.

Zhao Y, Wright J, Begg S, Guthridge S. Decomposing Indigenous life expectancy gap by risk factors: a life table analysis. *Popul Health Metr.* 2013 Jan 29;11(1):1. doi: 10.1186/1478-7954-11-1. PubMed PMID: 23360645; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3585166. Available from <http://www.pophealthmetrics.com/content/11/1/1>

Causes

The following three articles confirm the effect that poverty has on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. Zhao et al show that poverty explains a large number of hospital admissions for Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory. Cunningham et al show a similar finding for poverty being related to diabetes.

Zhao Y, You J, Guthridge SL, Lee AH. A multilevel analysis on the relationship between neighbourhood poverty and public hospital utilization: is the high Indigenous morbidity avoidable? BMC Public Health. 2011 Sep 27;11:737. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-11-737. PubMed PMID: 21951514; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3203263.

Available from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/11/737>

Cunningham J. Socio-economic gradients in self-reported diabetes for Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians aged 18-64. Aust N Z J Public Health. 2010 Jul;34 Suppl 1:S18-24. doi: 10.1111/j.1753-6405.2010.00547.x. PubMed PMID: 20618286.

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<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=20618286&site=ehost-live>

Shepherd et al demonstrate similar findings, though the evidence across the board is less robust, and there are likely to be additional other explanations, relating to historical and current exclusion

Shepherd CC, Li J, Zubrick SR. Social gradients in the health of Indigenous Australians. Am J Public Health. 2012 Jan;102(1):107-17. doi: 10.2105/AJPH.2011.300354. Epub 2011 Nov 28. Review. PubMed PMID: 22095336; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3490556.

Available from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3490556/>

The following two studies show the link between racism (experienced by 93% of Aboriginal people in the Ziersch paper) and poor health.

Paradies YC, Cunningham J. The DRUID study: racism and self-assessed health status in an indigenous population. BMC Public Health. 2012 Feb 14;12:131. doi: 10.1186/1471-2458-12-131. PubMed PMID: 22333047; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3305656.

Available from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1471-2458/12/131>

Ziersch AM, Gallaher G, Baum F, Bentley M. Responding to racism: Insights on how racism can damage health from an urban study of Australian Aboriginal people. Social Science & Medicine. 2011 Oct;73(7):1045-1053.

Available from the Library on request, please email library@racgp.org.au

Interestingly, as doctors, we often reach for genetic explanations for health differences, this BMJ paper shows that genetics explains almost none of the health differences seen in different populations

Pearce N, Foliaki S, Sporle A, Cunningham C. Genetics, race, ethnicity, and health. BMJ. 2004 May;328(7447):1070-1072.

Available from <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC403856/>

Policy

As GPs and primary health care professionals, we work in the context of different government policies. The current policies under the Closing the Gap umbrella have been very influenced by the Close the Gap campaign, the RACGP being a member of the steering committee. This campaign came about as a result of the following document, which was responsible for a change in policy to thinking about health as a human right.

Achieving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health equality within a generation - A human rights based approach From the 2005 Social Justice Report, produced by the Australian Human Rights Commission.

The government published its Closing the Gap Report and the Close the Gap campaign published its Progress and Priorities report. These set out the progress so far and make recommendations for future policy direction

Closing the Gap Prime Minister's Report 2014

Available from <http://www.dpmc.gov.au/publications/index.cfm>

Close the Gap - Progress and priorities report 2014

Available from <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/publications/close-gap-progress-and-priorities-report-2014>

The following two articles, one by a GP working in the Northern Territory, and one by a prominent public health physician who has worked for the WHO and UK government both write viewpoints with similar conclusions – that we must work on the social causes that contribute to the poor health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Tait PW. How can Australia do better for Indigenous health? Med J Aust. 2011 May 16;194(10):501-2. PubMed PMID: 21644891.

Available from <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2011/194/10/how-can-australia-do-better-indigenous-health>

Marmot M. Social determinants and the health of Indigenous Australians. Med J Aust. 2011 May 16;194(10):512-3. PubMed PMID: 21644897.

Available from <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2011/194/10/social-determinants-and-health-indigenous-australians>

In Practice

We are used to reading about descriptions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health but there have been some good articles demonstrating simple changes in our practices that we can all make to improve the health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

These two articles describe some of the interventions carried out in non-Aboriginal medical services. The first is in private general practice, and the second is in a state health service.

Johanson RP, Hill P. Indigenous health - a role for private general practice. Aust Fam Physician. 2011 Jan-Feb;40(1-2):16-9. PubMed PMID: 21301687.

Available from <http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/201101/41186>

Hayman NE, White NE, Spurling GK. Improving Indigenous patients' access to mainstream health services: the Inala experience. *Med J Aust.* 2009 May 18;190(10):604-6. PubMed PMID: 19450218. Available from <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2009/190/10/improving-indigenous-patients-access-mainstream-health-services-inala-experience>

Crucial to improving the way we work with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, is knowing who our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are. These articles describe the attitudes of patients (Scotney et al) and doctors (Kehoe & Lovett). (You can see the RACGP Position paper here: <http://www.racgp.org.au/yourracgp/faculties/aboriginal/guides/identification/>)

Scotney A, Guthrie JA, Lokuge K, Kelly PM. "Just ask!" Identifying as Indigenous in mainstream general practice settings: a consumer perspective. *The Medical journal of Australia.* 2010 May;192(10). Available from <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2010/192/10/just-ask-identifying-indigenous-mainstream-general-practice-settings-consumer>

Kehoe H, Lovett RW. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health assessments -barriers to improving uptake. *Aust Fam Physician.* 2008 Dec;37(12):1033-8. PubMed PMID: 19142280. Available from <http://www.racgp.org.au/afp/200812/29329>

There are some very interesting studies telling us about the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing health services.

The papers by Durey et al and Peiris et al are well worth a read for their quotations from Indigenous people using health services. The descriptions of people's adverse experiences are eye-opening, and the solutions described by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people themselves will make us think about our own services.

Durey A, Thompson SC, Wood M. Time to bring down the twin towers in poor Aboriginal hospital care: addressing institutional racism and misunderstandings in communication. *Intern Med J.* 2012 Jan;42(1):17-22. doi: 10.1111/j.1445-5994.2011.02628.x. PubMed PMID: 22032537. Database access available from <http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=22032537&site=ehost-live>

Peiris D, Brown A, Howard M, Rickards BA, Tonkin A, Ring I, Hayman N, Cass A. Building better systems of care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people: findings from the Kanyini health systems assessment. *BMC Health Serv Res.* 2012 Oct 28;12:369. doi: 10.1186/1472-6963-12-369. PubMed PMID: 23102409; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3529689. Available from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/12/369>

Stating that cultural competence is required to improve care in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander seems obvious. This paper strengthens the evidence behind that statement.

Liaw ST, Lau P, Pyett P, Furler J, Burchill M, Rowley K, Kelaher M. Successful chronic disease care for Aboriginal Australians requires cultural competence. *Aust N Z J Public Health.* 2011 Jun;35(3):238-48. doi: 10.1111/j.1753-6405.2011.00701.x. Review. PubMed PMID: 21627724.

Database access available from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=21627724&site=ehost-live>

There is some debate about what should be included in education about culture, and the consensus is that it needs to move beyond a focus on medical conditions, or a focus purely on teaching “the other” culture. It must include learning about our own cultures, and tackling racism head on. These are two of the best articles in this area.

Durey A. Reducing racism in Aboriginal health care in Australia: where does cultural education fit? Aust N Z J Public Health. 2010 Jul;34 Suppl 1:S87-92. doi: 10.1111/j.1753-6405.2010.00560.x. PubMed PMID: 20618302.

Database access available from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=20618302&site=ehost-live>

McDermott DR. Can we educate out of racism? The Medical Journal of Australia. 2012 Jul;197(1):15+ Available from <https://www.mja.com.au/journal/2012/197/1/can-we-educate-out-racism>

Some of the research contributes to this by asking non-indigenous people about their attitudes. For example, Durey et al interviewed non-Indigenous health care practitioners in WA, and describe unconscious attitudes which prevent effective care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Durey A, Thompson SC. Reducing the health disparities of Indigenous Australians: time to change focus. BMC Health Serv Res. 2012 Jun 10;12:151. doi: 10.1186/1472-6963-12-151. PubMed PMID: 22682494; PubMed Central PMCID: PMC3431273.

Available from <http://www.biomedcentral.com/1472-6963/12/151>

Other research describes the mismatch in assumptions about cultural barriers. Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people in Mount Isa have different ideas about how to overcome barriers. Non-Indigenous people concentrated on the policies and procedures and posters and pamphlets. While these were important to Aboriginal people, they were meaningless if they weren't accompanied by a therapeutic professional relationship with staff in the service. As GPs, this is something that we are all able to aim for, however.

McBain-Rigg KE, Veitch C. Cultural barriers to health care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders in Mount Isa. Aust J Rural Health. 2011 Apr;19(2):70-4. doi: 10.1111/j.1440-1584.2011.01186.x. PubMed PMID: 21438948.

Database access available from

<http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=mnh&AN=21438948&site=ehost-live>

Finally, for a more comprehensive summary of the evidence about effective interventions, read this.

What works in Indigenous primary health care health reform? A review of the evidence Produced by the University of South Australia, Health Economics and Social Policy Group, 2012.

Available from

<http://www.unisa.edu.au/Global/Health%20Sciences/Sansom/Documents/What%20works%20in%20Indigenous%20health%20reform.pdf>

Guideline sources

The RACGP and NACCHO have developed the National Guide to a Preventive Assessment in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

This is the evidence based guideline giving specific clinical recommendations on the preventative health interventions which are effective in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Available at <http://www.racgp.org.au/yourracgp/faculties/aboriginal/guides/national-guide/>

ClinicalInfoNet

This is a web portal funded by the Department of Health and run by the Indigenous HealthInfoNet. It links through to clinical guidelines and patient information for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in priority clinical areas.

Available at <http://www.clinicalinfolnet.net.au/Pages/default.aspx>