

Call for focus on Aboriginal strengths

April 15 2013



The review found that nationwide research into Aboriginal issues has tended to describe them in terms of deficits, disadvantage and dysfunction. Credit: bloodstone/iStockphoto

Australia needs a new way to view the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, with a focus on their strengths, empowerment, resilience and achievements, a new study has proposed.

A review carried out for the CRC for Remote Economic Participation (CRC-REP) project exploring the links between education, employment, health and wellbeing finds that nationwide research into Aboriginal issues has tended to describe them in terms of deficits, disadvantage and dysfunction.

CRC-REP researchers say there is a need to develop a wellbeing framework that accurately represents education, employment, health and

wellbeing and the interplay between them. This framework should recognise the strengths and [resilience](#) of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and clearly represent their own values and local perspectives.

These include issues such [kinship](#), empowerment, inclusive communities and resilience, which their report finds to be of particular importance to wellbeing in Aboriginal society.

"The evidence so far also suggests that wellbeing is most often achieved when strong [cultural identity](#) and empowerment is combined with relevant education and available jobs," says project leader Associate professor Sheree Cairney.

She says that CRC-REP's research aims to develop a wellbeing framework that represents what is important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote communities in relation to education, employment, health and wellbeing – and use these indicators to measure progress.

"There is quite a lot of evidence that having a job or livelihood and good training leads to [better health](#) and wellbeing for the individual. We want to understand how these things tie together in the context of remote Australia, so improvements can be made in all of them," she explains.

The report adds that there continues to be a challenge ensuring true involvement and participation by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people who have for so long been marginalised and spoken on behalf of.

Its first recommendation is that a wellbeing framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in remote Australia must have strong input from the people themselves in its design, monitoring and

interpretation and must represent their values, perspectives and priorities.

Secondly, it urges a move away from models that focus on deficit and dysfunction for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, towards a framework that identifies and promotes successes and strengths.

"Thirdly, we want to take a whole-of-system approach," AProf. Cairney says, adding "When education, employment, health and so on are normally considered, it is often in isolation from one another – yet all these things come together to affect the well-being of the individual, and we think it is very important to understand how that system works, so we can enhance it."

The research will focus on four key themes of particular relevance to Aboriginal people in remote Australia – kinship, empowerment, safe and inclusive communities and resilience.

The full report by Oanh K. Nguyen and Sheree Cairney is titled "Working towards an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing Framework."

Provided by CRC

Citation: Call for focus on Aboriginal strengths (2013, April 15) retrieved 5 October 2023 from <https://medicalxpress.com/news/2013-04-focus-aboriginal-strengths.html>

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