

Reversible contraceptive use high among Aboriginal women in Western desert

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Researchers from The University of Western Australia have documented a high use of long-acting reversible contraceptives (LARCs) among Aboriginal women in WA's Western Desert region.

LARC methods are considered best practice in the medical industry due to their reliability and low rate of side effects, however the uptake of LARC methods in Australia has lagged behind other countries.

Lead UWA researcher Dr Emma Griffiths from the Rural Clinical School of Western Australia and Kimberley Aboriginal Medical Services Ltd completed the study between 2014 and 2015, using prescription data from medical records and face-to-face interviews with women in the Western Desert communities.

Of the 566 Aboriginal women who participated, 34 per cent had used contraception between 1 November 2010 to 1 September 2014, and of those with current contraception at the census date, 77 per cent were using the etonogestrel implant (a form of LARC).

Continuation rates for use of the etonogestrel implant were 87 per cent after one year, 72 per cent after two years and 51 percent after 3 years, which are high rates compared to other studies of LARC use across Australia and internationally.

Dr Griffiths said the high uptake of the etonogestrel implant in the region was likely due to both the long-term presence of a dedicated

sexual health coordinator to provide counselling and referrals, and an approach to sexual health that prioritised community engagement, continuity of care and integrated health promotion.

She said that while the research provided new insights into sexual and reproductive service delivery, more work needed to be done to support the sexual and reproductive health of women in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

"Only one-fifth of women in the participating communities had a current method of contraception documented, compared to the two-thirds of all Australian women aged 18-49 years using contraception in 1998," she said.

"This indicates possible ongoing unmet contraceptive needs. The [women](#) interviewed identified the need for young people to be healthy and old enough when becoming pregnant. They also said that dealing with partner pressure to cease [contraception](#) was an important issue to address."

Dr Griffiths said she believed the findings showed a positive result from their approach to sexual and reproductive [health](#) service delivery.

More information: Emma K Griffiths et al. Uptake of long-acting, reversible contraception in three remote Aboriginal communities: a population-based study, *The Medical Journal of Australia* (2016). [DOI: 10.5694/mja16.00073](https://doi.org/10.5694/mja16.00073)

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