

Mayi Kuwayu Development: Summary report



The National Study of Aboriginal
& Torres Strait Islander Wellbeing

Our cultures count.



This artwork shows the importance of culture as central to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' health and wellbeing. The colours red, yellow, black, green, blue and white are drawn from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags, and their communities. The blue represents water and its healing powers to nourish the mind, body, spirit and our lands, symbolic of the interrelationship our people have with Country.

Red, white and yellow ochre are used to illustrate the importance of ceremony, dance, stories and spirituality within our diverse cultures, and the strong connection with the land. The centre represents the sun radiating warmth, positivity and connectedness. The pathways and meeting places speak of the long journey that the Mayi Kuwayu Study and our mob will embark on together to yarn, make decisions and create a meaningful and positive future.

Krystal Hurst (Worimi), 2017

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We also acknowledge the input of the Mayi Kuwayu Study team, investigators and partners for their ongoing contribution to the development and implementation of the study, and thank the focus group participants and organisations involved in supporting the development of the study.

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Introduction

The Mayi Kuwayu Study is the national longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander wellbeing. It is the largest longitudinal study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults in Australia. The study was developed over many years and in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from all over Australia. It is overseen by an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander governance committee and community engagement remains an ongoing feature of the study. This report is a summary of the development process of the Mayi Kuwayu Study and includes:

- Literature review
- The survey indicator development: Focus groups
- Proof of concept study

Literature review

An extensive literature search of articles discussing Indigenous cultures, wellbeing and health spanning 20 years (1997-2017) was undertaken. We focused the literature review on exploring the notions of Indigenous cultures (concentrating on Australia, but including other international First Nations' literature) because it is a concept that is often considered difficult to describe and as such, difficult to measure. This work identified six main domains for describing culture specific to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia:

- Connection to country
- Cultural beliefs and knowledge
- Language
- Family, kinship and community
- Cultural expression and continuity
- Self-determination and leadership

Indicator development

Community and partner organisations self-nominated to take part in arranging community member focus groups that informed the development of the survey indicators. Site selection was based on study governance networks and existing relationships with the study team.

The development of the indicators was part of an iterative process involving 29 focus groups held at 15 sites around Australia with 190 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults. At each site, the survey questions were tested and adapted in accordance to community feedback.

We also sought feedback from chief investigators, study partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers at ANU on survey indicators and questions. It was important that some standardised indicators (for example, self-assessed general health) were incorporated in the survey as well as the development of new indicators (for example, cultural practice)

Proof of concept study: Aboriginal rangers

The proof of concept study enabled an opportunity to test and further refine developed and modified measures to ensure participants could answer. This work was a collaboration between Central Land Council, Tangentyere Council and the National Centre for Epidemiology and Population Health, which has led to ongoing partnership in the study.

We worked together to survey 43 rangers and 160 non-rangers (Aboriginal people from central Australia who were not rangers) to compare outcomes on general health, life satisfaction, cultural participation and family wellbeing.

When rangers were compared to non-rangers, we saw:

- An almost doubling of very high life satisfaction reported
- A 50% increase in high levels of family wellbeing

This proof of concept study allowed for engagement with community members and increased awareness of the national study. Media coverage also increased awareness of the study to a broad audience.



Aboriginal rangers complete surveys at Glen Helen Gorge, Northern Territory.

Final survey

Chief investigators, study partners and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander researchers at ANU with expertise across a range of research environment were asked to provide comment on a final list of measures including prioritising measures for inclusion in the final survey. This group was primarily Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. After concluding this process, the senior researchers ranked the measures and was responsible for deciding the final survey items.

A survey company was contracted to produce a machine readable survey that could be scanned for efficiency of data entry. The survey was also developed into an online survey.