EACH case study
Working with Aboriginal organisations to improve access to services

The Chronic Care Model element highlighted in this case study is community linkages. Delivering effective care for people with chronic conditions requires community health services to work in partnership with other service providers, community organisations and people with chronic conditions.

Background
EACH Social and Community Health provides an integrated range of health, disability, counselling and community mental health services across Australia.

A number of years ago EACH identified that only a very small percentage of the Indigenous population that live in the Eastern metropolitan region of Melbourne were accessing their services.

What they did
With the support of the Board and Executive Management an EACH Indigenous Liaison Worker was employed in 2000 and partnerships with local Indigenous organisations began to be developed.

Highlights include:
• A partnership with Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) which began in 2005 resulted in a memorandum of understanding signed in 2007. A memorandum of understanding is currently being developed with the Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service.
• EACH and MMIGP undertook to jointly deliver the Aboriginal Health Promotion and Chronic Care (AHPACC) Program in 2006. This enabled EACH to deliver outreach services to MMIGP and other Aboriginal organisations such as Worowa Secondary College. Multiple EACH services are involved in outreach depending on community needs. Services involved in outreach include primary health, dental, mental health and recovery services. The AHPACC program was also responsible for initiating a food bank at MMIGP that is an important source of healthy food for the community.
• Health check days are delivered at EACH, with the organisation taking care to create a culturally safe environment that has helped build trust with the community. Flexibility to provide out-of-hours sessions in partnership with MMIGP, and evening and Saturday morning EACH dental sessions have also enabled increased access for community members.
• An EACH-wide Aboriginal policy was developed in 2008, and a reconciliation action plan in 2013. Organisation-wide policies and procedures promote cultural safety and cultural competency.
• Priority access and fee waiver to all services for all Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander People regardless of program funding guidelines.
• EACH Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander-specific staff positions have played a critical role in the linkages with community. Community members are employed in clinical delivery, community development and management or coordination roles. These positions have been essential to support the deepening of community relationships and support non-indigenous staff to increase their cultural competency.
• Establishment of the EACH Aboriginal Health and Wellbeing Committee to guide development of the reconciliation action plan has provided ongoing opportunities for EACH management, clinicians and community members from partner organisations. The committee explores emerging needs and issues and identifies strategies for resolution. Identification of new capacity building initiatives within broader service areas of EACH such as employment has resulted from this process.
Outcomes

- A positive impact of this investment in community relationships and linkages can be identified through the increased access and identification of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members. There was a 200 per cent increase in the number of community members accessing EACH services in the first 12 months following the setting up of the AHPACC program. A steady increase of community members accessing EACH over the past seven years has led to three per cent of EACH clients identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander in 2015, compared with only 0.03 per cent in 2007. This is from a population group estimated to represent less than one per cent of the Eastern metropolitan region population. In 2015 approximately 810 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander clients registered with EACH, half of those were aged between 12–25 years of age.
- In addition to the change in client access, EACH formed 30 linkages with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations or businesses, and targeted services working with the community. In the year 2000, only one organisation was specifically identified.

Current activity

The approach that EACH has taken with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community and organisations is one of a long-term commitment to working in partnership. These are living relationships that are dynamic and require an investment by all involved.