

Collaborate & Connect:

Designing Health Engagement with First Nations Young People

Scoping Report Summary



Why?

Despite Australia having one of the best health profiles for young people globally, First Nations young people continue to be left behind by mainstream services. Current data (and lack thereof) reveals the disproportionate health outcomes, glaring gaps in action and policy, and lack of co-design within mainstream services and organisations.

While policies like the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Plan 2021–2031 and the National Action Plan for the Health of Children and Young People 2020–2030 acknowledge the importance of improving mainstream services, and identify First Nations young people as a priority population, there is a notable absence of specific research, resources & policy targeting the health of First Nations young people, indicating a critical oversight in the sector and beyond.

This report lays the foundation for the Collaborate & Connect project to engage First Nations young people optimally, and to contribute to the small pool of research and resources on mainstream engagement with First Nations young people.

The Importance of First Nations Young People's Health

Adolescence is a critical developmental stage in which the foundations of health and wellbeing are laid to ensure the health of the young person, their health in later life, and the health of the next generations. This is particularly significant as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population has a significantly young age structure. First Nations young people are currently experiencing significant barriers to all aspects of healthcare. It is thus integral that First Nations young people are meaningfully involved in the design and delivery of mainstream services and organisations.

Mainstream Services/Organisations

Significant barriers for First Nations young people exist within mainstream healthcare services and organisations due to a multitude of complex and systemic factors. These barriers contribute to reluctance among many First Nations people to seek mainstream services. This, coupled with overall lack of continuity and communication across the Australian healthcare system, heavily impacts First Nations people's access to healthcare and thus their health outcomes.

Current national policy highlights where mainstream services are not meeting the needs of First Nations people and calls for improvement in this area. These policies are important and offer a foundation for a focus on mainstream service improvement. However, there remains no policy specific to improving the health of First Nations adolescents or young people.

The need for improvement in all areas of healthcare for First Nations young people is unequivocal. Moreover, the need for direct involvement of First Nations young people in all levels of design, delivery and decision making, is undeniable.



51%

of the First Nations population are under 25



32%

First Nations young people have a disability



62%

have a long-term health condition



Association for the Wellbeing of Children in Healthcare

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Intersectionality

An intersectional approach is particularly relevant to First Nations young people's health and understanding the innumerable nuances that influence healthcare access, usage, relationships, and navigation. Similarly, it is highly relevant to engagement with First Nations young people, offering an approach to engagement that is accessible, nuanced, and effective.

First Nations young people experience higher rates of disability, psychological distress, long-term health conditions (both physical and mental), mortality, and hospitalisation. These disparities in health are due to a host of reasons, many of which are informed by various identities including race, disability, gender, sexuality, and age. This report examines various intersections experienced by First Nations young people such as disability and chronic illness.

“Addressing Indigenous adolescent health will require a greater prominence of adolescents in policy...

Without a **specific focus** on adolescents, Australia **will not address** health inequalities for Indigenous people.”

Azzopardi et al., 2018

Considerations for Collaborate & Connect

There are many considerations necessary for effective and meaningful engagement with First Nations young people. In this section, existing resources are examined in order to draw out key considerations for the Collaborate & Connect project.

Key Themes

- Beyond cultural competence
- Social & historical context
- Genuine & meaningful engagement
- Honouring intersectional lived experience
- Feedback loops & information provision
- Continuous work & learning

Gaps in Existing Data & Resources

- Lack of Policy
- Out-of-Date Data
- Lack of Data Continuity
- Gaps in Engagement Resources

Next Steps for the Project

- Connecting with First Nations organisations & stakeholders
- Advisory Group
- Recruitment & workshops
- Feedback & evaluation
- Continual work and learning

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