National research partnership to improve primary health care performance and outcomes for Indigenous peoples

Researchers (including clinicians and post graduate students) with quantitative or qualitative data and analytic skills and demonstrated interest in Indigenous health may be interested in participating in a national research partnership that aims to improve the quality of primary health care for Indigenous peoples. Possible research topics include health policy in Indigenous primary health care; understanding implementation of service-researcher partnerships; and issues related to quality of primary care services for specific conditions such as diabetes, coronary heart disease, rheumatic heart disease, child and maternal health, mental health and preventative care. The partnership is able to provide researchers with previously collected datasets derived from clinical audits and possibly opportunity to conduct additional empirical data collection with agreement from participating health services. The focus of the partnership is to understand the factors which influence variation in the quality of care (between individual clients, between practitioners, health centres/practices and regions), to identify potential for quality improvement and to explore specific strategies that have been effective in improving clinical performance. Proposed research topics will need to go through internal project approval processes to ensure they address priority research questions for the partnership and meet ethical requirements. There is no funding attached to this research opportunity. However, the research partnership provides a network of researchers and health service organisations to facilitate the conduct of high quality research and we expect this will enhance the potential to attract funding support from other sources.

Further information on the Partnership project is provided below.

Background
Strengthening primary health care is critical to reducing health inequity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. The Audit and Best practice for Chronic Disease Extension (ABCDE) project has facilitated the implementation of modern Continuous Quality Improvement (CQI) approaches in Indigenous community health care centres across Australia. The project demonstrated improvements in health centre systems, delivery of primary care services and in patient intermediate outcomes. It has also highlighted substantial variation in quality of care. Through a partnership between academic researchers, service providers and policy makers, we are now implementing a study which aims to 1) explore the factors associated with variation in clinical performance; 2) examine specific strategies that have been effective in improving primary care clinical performance; and 3) work with health service staff, management and policy makers to enhance the effective implementation of successful strategies.

Methods/Design
The study will be conducted in Indigenous community health centres from at least six States/Territories (Northern Territory, Western Australia, New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland and Victoria) over a five year period. A research hub will be established in each region to support collection and reporting of quantitative and qualitative clinical and health centre system performance data, to investigate factors affecting variation in quality of care and to facilitate effective translation of research evidence into policy and practice. The project is supported by a web-based information system, providing automated analysis and reporting of clinical care performance to health centre staff and management.
Discussion
By linking researchers directly to users of research (service providers, managers and policy makers), the partnership is well placed to generate new knowledge on effective strategies for improving the quality of primary health care and fostering effective and efficient exchange and use of data and information among service providers and policy makers to achieve evidence-based resource allocation, service planning, system development, and improvements of service delivery and Indigenous health outcomes.

Key research areas:
- Quality of care for prevention and management of chronic disease (diabetes, hypertension, coronary heart disease, renal and other chronic diseases)
- Quality of preventive care for healthy adults
- Quality of maternal health care
- Quality of child health care
- Quality of primary mental health care
- Quality of care for prevention and management of rheumatic heart disease
- Enhancing the quality of practice in health promotion
- Systems-based continuous quality improvement
- Application of modern quality improvement methods to other aspects of comprehensive primary health care in Indigenous communities in Australia and in low and middle income countries internationally

Further information:
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For any enquiries regarding the project in general or participation of services in other regions contact the ABCD National Research Partnership Project Manager, Cynthia Croft (email ABCD@menzies.edu.au).