

Codesign and communication supports a healthier future

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The importance of codesigning First Nations healthcare and health research has been highlighted through insights by 4 researchers from Menzies School of Health Research (Menzies).

Published yesterday in *Insight+*, by the Medical Journal of Australia, First Nations researchers Stuart Yiwarr McGrath and Mark Mayo and non-Indigenous researchers Professor Anna Ralph and Dr Vicki Kerrigan share their experiences in how listening and responding to First Nations collaborators changed healthcare and training for the better.

This forms part of a series of discussions published by *Insight+* which addresses how constitutional change and an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice could impact health.

A key example shared was the development of [Menzies COVID-19 vaccination videos](#). Through consultation and conversation with community, this allowed tailored, reputable and trusted resources to be created by community members, allowing healthcare choices to be genuinely informed.

The article also raised the value of co-designing pathways to support the future of the health workforce.

Established in 2019, the [Menzies Ramaciotti Regional and Remote Health Science Training Centre](#) (Menzies Ramaciotti Centre) has engaged over 100 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students this year. The Centre combines a First Nations and western approach to learning, providing a culturally safe pathway for young people to begin their careers.

As the nation faces an upcoming referendum on the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, this article focuses on the value of building trusted relationships and shared decision making.

Menzies supports the [Uluru Statement from the Heart](#) to achieve justice, recognition and respect for First Nations people and [supports a YES vote](#) in the upcoming referendum to enshrine a First Nations Voice in the Constitution.

Menzies is committed to walking together – Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians – to support better health and better futures.

Read about each of the researchers' codesign learnings:

<https://insightplus.mja.com.au/2023/33/the-voice-to-parliament-creates-an-opportunity-to-codesign-a-healthy-future/>

Quotes attributable to [Stuart Yiwarr McGrath](#), a Gumatj man of the Yolŋu nation, Aboriginal Health Practitioner, Bachelor of Nursing Student and Menzies researcher, on codesigning healthcare:

“Working together or rrambanj djäma, is a concept well known to the Yolŋu people.

“As an Aboriginal Health Practitioner, I work alongside balanda (non-Indigenous) health professionals to care for Yolŋu patients with mental health conditions. Together we address both the biomedical, the social and cultural needs of the patients.

“I help support patients from feeling ostracised, as they know that I understand what they are thinking and feeling.

“When balanda and Yolŋu codesign treatment plans that draw on knowledge from both worlds, the patient benefits.”

Quotes attributable to Menzies Ramaciotti Centre Co-lead, [Mark Mayo](#), on co-designing training:

“Codesigned work that is informed by other cultures means we can develop training models that are robust and compassionate towards individuals.

“The Menzies Ramaciotti Centre has been co-designed by First Nations and non-Indigenous researchers, dedicated to training and developing First Nations peoples and youth in the Northern Territory.

“As part of this, I have drawn on my own lived experience, cultural beliefs, knowledge, and views as a descendant of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

“Our program focuses on leadership development, communication, educational needs, cultural and pastoral care of all the students, collaborating with others to achieve the best outcomes.”

Quotes attributable to Menzies Principal Research Fellow, [Professor Anna Ralph](#), on codesigning healthcare:

“I have learnt that effective intercultural communication for many of my First Nations patients is a dialogue over time that reinforces, re-examines, and draws on metaphors from the natural environment to make sense of a foreign concept.

“When I listen to First Nations voices, like working with Aboriginal interpreters and having more family members in the room contributing to the conversation so my voice is in the minority, that’s when meaningful communication can start.

“Co-designed systems that result in better patient experiences also benefit the healthcare providers.”

Quotes attributable to Menzies Postdoctoral Researcher, [Dr Vicki Kerrigan](#), on co-designing health literacy campaigns:

“Through the codesign process, I learnt the key to successful health communication is to build relationships of trust and reciprocity with leaders who know how best to address community concerns.

“On the flip side, campaigns which instruct people to behave in a certain way without explaining why, impinge on an individual’s sovereignty.

“Rather than leaders attempting to ‘deposit’ information there is a real need for health literacy campaigns to be co-designed, driven by the community.”

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Menzies School of Health Research

Menzies is one of Australia's leading medical research institutes dedicated to improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, and a leader in global and tropical research into life-threatening illnesses. Menzies continues to translate research into effective partnerships and programs in communities across Australia and the Asia-Pacific region.