

New resources to improve nutrition communication in remote communities

Friday, 28 November 2014

A new resource package focused on improving health communication and practices in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander remote communities will help to strengthen efforts to support good nutrition, health and wellbeing.

With funding from The Fred Hollows Foundation, the Menzies School of Health Research has developed the teaching and learning resource entitled, *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures*.

Dietary improvement for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians remains a priority for reducing the health gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. Poor quality diets are a significant risk factor for three major causes of premature death: cardiovascular disease, cancer and type 2 diabetes.

Research Fellow with Menzies' Nutrition Team, Dr Susan Colles said that many factors influence dietary intake including cultural heritage and beliefs, food marketing, and food availability and access to healthy and affordable foods.

"One of the aims of *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures* is to open readers up to new perspectives on health and wellbeing," Dr Colles said.

"Health professionals who work in remote Aboriginal settings must communicate in a meaningful way across cultures, and across different worldviews. Communication is enhanced when parties understand the potential challenges of cross-cultural communication and behaviour change, and make informed, conscious efforts to overcome them.

"Due to many possible challenges, especially during cross-cultural communication, we cannot assume that efforts will not always be successful."

The resource package provides practical guidance to support strength-based approaches, critical reflective practice and the participatory process of health and nutrition communication. These qualities are relevant in the community health setting, and also in public health strategies.

Manager of The Fred Hollows Foundation's Indigenous Australia Program, Ms Jaki Adams-Barton, said: "the project contributes to The Foundation's vision of a world where no person is needlessly blind and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians exercise their right to good health."

"Being fully informed about your health care is the right of all Australians, but often this is not the experience of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

"The *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures* resource is a valuable tool to guide practitioners to meaningfully engage with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people about their health. This means moving beyond 'educating' about health from a Western, biomedical perspective, toward shared, two-way communication."

The guide holds potential relevance for a range of health professionals and workers who spend time in remote Indigenous settings including nutritionists, health promotion staff, health workers and nurses.

Ms Adams-Barton added that The Fred Hollows Foundation sees the resource as having application beyond the food and nutrition sector.

“It will be a useful tool for all health practitioners working with remote Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities,” she said.

The *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures* project was designed in collaboration with a series of co-researchers, key advisors, community-based organisations and public health nutritionists.

A number of hard copies of *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures* are available by contacting Karen Black on Ph: 08 8946 8550 E: karen.black@menzies.edu.au

This resource is also available to download from: www.menzies.edu.au/foodacrosscultures

Media note:

Dr Susan Colles is a research fellow with the Menzies School of Health Research. Susan led the *Food and Health Communication Across Cultures* project, incorporating strategies in cross-cultural communication and education, community and health development, personal development, and aspects of food within culture, eating behaviour, nutrition, obesity and diabetes management.

Interviews are available with:

Dr Susan Colles, Research Fellow, Menzies School of Health Research
Jaki Adams-Barton, Manager, Indigenous Australia Program, The Fred Hollows Foundation

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Menzies Background

Menzies School of Health Research is Australia’s only Medical Research Institute dedicated to improving Indigenous health and wellbeing. We have a 29-year history of scientific discovery and public health achievement. Menzies works at the frontline, partnering with over 60 Indigenous communities across Northern and Central Australia. We collaborate to create resources, grow local skills and find enduring solutions to problems that matter.

The Fred Hollows Foundation Background

The Fred Hollows Foundation was established in 1992 as an international development organisation, focusing on blindness prevention and improving Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s health and eye health. The Foundation is inspired by the life and work of Professor Fred Hollows (1929-1993) who was an internationally acclaimed eye surgeon and activist for social justice who championed the right of all people to high quality and affordable eye care and good health. The Foundation continues that work, as partners and leaders, in remote and underserved communities in the Northern Territory, the Kimberley, Pilbara and Goldfields regions of Western Australia, the Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara (APY) Lands in South Australia, western New South Wales and south-east Queensland.