

Partnering to Improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Primary Health Care

ABCD National Research Partnership Project

Strengthening primary health care (PHC) is critical to Closing the Gap in health inequalities between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and other Australians. Having health centres implement continuous quality improvement (CQI) – a systematic way of using data to guide changes to how PHC is organised, structured or designed – is an excellent way of achieving this.

In line with this approach, the Audit and Best Practice for Chronic Disease (ABCD) National Research Partnership was established to bring together health centres, stakeholder organisations and research institutions to support and guide research on improving the quality of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander PHC. It aimed to achieve this through:

- exploring the factors that underlie variations in quality of care between health centres and regions
- identifying specific strategies that have been effective in improving PHC performance
- working with health centre staff, management and policy makers to enhance the effective implementation of successful strategies.

CQI data from the Partnership provide **the most comprehensive picture to date of the quality of PHC** that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people receive around Australia. Our research gives a solid foundation for system-wide improvement of care quality across both government-managed and Aboriginal community controlled health organisations (ACCHOs).

Capacity for CQI at the health centre level has been strengthened in recent years. This reflects a growing management commitment, improved staff skills and enthusiasm, and greater accessibility and availability of CQI tools and resources. At the wider health system level, there is increasing support both in the policy environment and in infrastructure provision for a systems perspective to CQI.

About this project

Between 2010–2014, **175 PHC centres** – including ACCHOs and government-managed health centres (see map overleaf) – provided the Partnership with de-identified clinical audit data derived from the use of CQI tools and processes. This has enabled a better understanding of the quality of care provided to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

The Partnership has brought together almost **60 stakeholder organisations** – ACCHOs, government-managed health centres, research institutions, government health departments, key regional support organisations

ABCD program phases of development



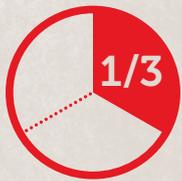
such as Aboriginal community controlled peak bodies and Medicare Locals – from across jurisdictions and all levels of the health system to support and guide research on priority PHC systems issues.

The Partnership built on the successful ABCD program that led to the development of One21seventy (www.one21seventy.org.au), the National Centre for Quality Improvement in Indigenous Primary Health Care. This was established to provide tools and processes, including training, to support PHC providers to carry out CQI using clinical audits, systems assessment, web-based data analysis and reporting. The Partnership provided research and development support to One21seventy, and almost 80% of One21seventy health centres agreed to share their routine CQI data for research purposes.

The **economic benefit of the ABCD program to improved diabetes care** alone in 2012 was estimated to be **\$15m to the NT** and **\$99m value to the rest of Australia**. The economic benefits of the program overall are likely to be several times greater than this as a result of improved care for a range of other conditions.

ABCD National Research Partnership and One21seventy Engagement and Impact

Improving service delivery and health outcomes



Potential for direct contribution to improving service delivery and health outcomes for at least 1/3 of the total Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population of Australia



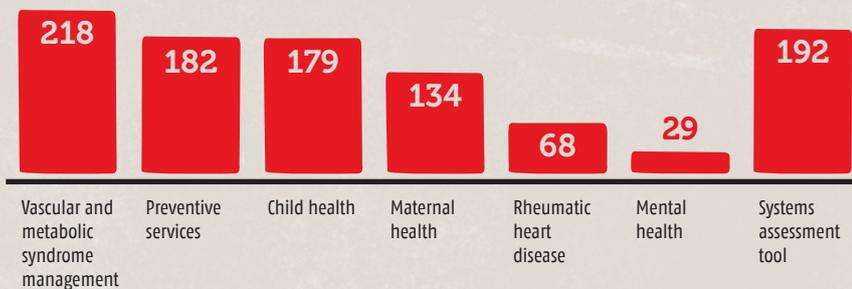
Partnership support has led to new CQI tools, as identified by service providers and stakeholders, in the following areas:

- health promotion
- youth health
- sexual health
- community perceptions of care



More than 72,000 patient records audited by ABCD/One21seventy participating health centres with 56,000 (or 78%) made available for research

The number of health centres using One21seventy audit tools and processes (2005–2014)



WA hub
Geraldton

Knowledge exchange



Researchers presented interim findings to service providers and policy makers at bi-annual Partnership meetings to gather their insights into implications for policy and practice



The project's research is mostly published in open-access journals to encourage a wide readership



The project contributed to the Australian Government commissioning the development, by mid-2015, of a 'National CQI Framework for Indigenous PHC' and an implementation plan

700+

More than 700 responses received through an innovative dissemination process in which stakeholders are involved in interpreting aggregated CQI data and identifying priority gaps, barriers, enablers and strategies to improve care

Over the past 10 years ABCD-related research has generated:

1/4 of all peer-reviewed publications in Australia related to CQI or collaboratives in PHC

2/3 of all peer-reviewed publications specifically related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health CQI or collaboratives in PHC

Over the past five years ABCD-related research has generated:

83 conference presentations and posters
24 peer-reviewed publications
23 reports and evidence briefs

Collaborations

175

175 participating PHC centres provided data derived from use of CQI tools and processes for Partnership research



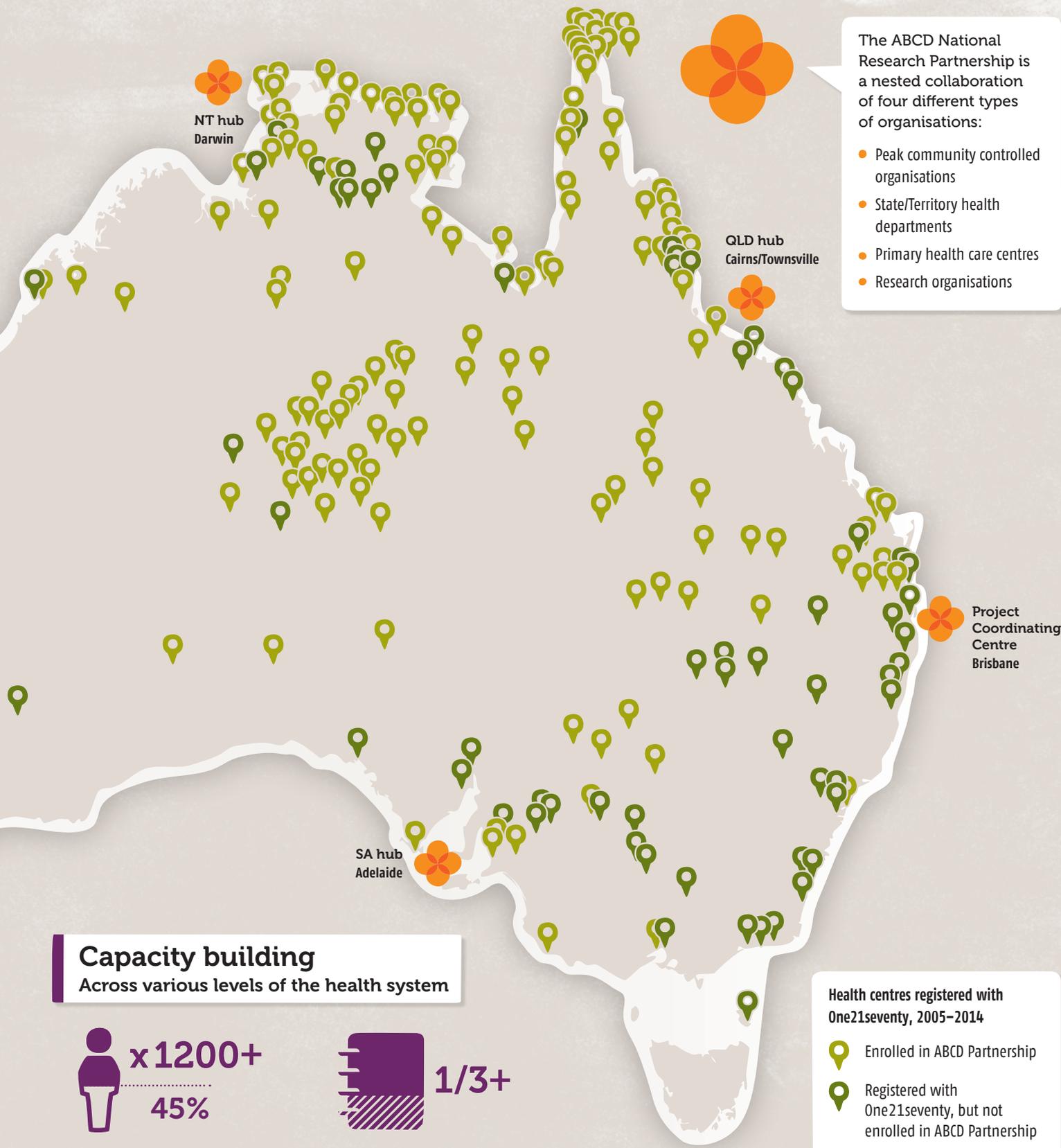
Researchers from 8 institutions around Australia conducted independent rigorous analyses of CQI data and published results collaboratively

60

Almost 60 different organisations were involved in bi-annual Partnership meetings, audit tool reviews, steering committees, research partnerships and projects

15/24

Of the 24 peer-reviewed publications there were 15 different lead authors



Capacity building Across various levels of the health system



More than 1200 health centre staff participated in One21seventy training, with 45% of those attending in 2014 identifying as Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander



More than 1/3 of the project's publications and presentations had a student or project officer as lead author



13 students were supported from 7 organisations to work on related research projects (including 7 PhD and 3 Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander students)

Number of health centres registered for ABCD Partnership and/or One21seventy, by governance type, 2005–2014

	ABCD Partnership	Total One21seventy (inc. ABCD Partnership)
ACCHOs	38	98
Other health centres*	137	172
Total health centres	175	270

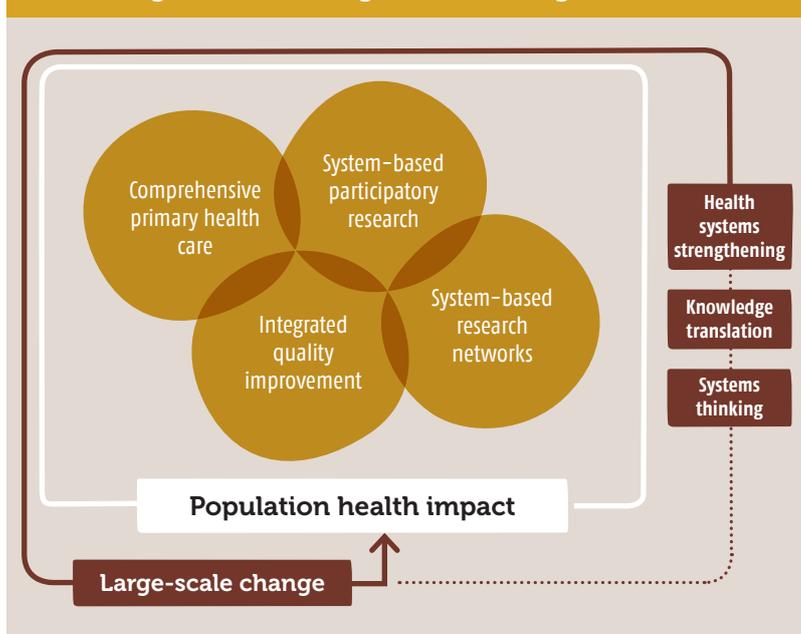
*These are predominantly government-managed health centres but also include other services such as 8 Medicare Locals/DGPs that are working with a number of health, criminal justice and youth services

ABCD Partnership model for large-scale change

The Partnership can be described as a learning model for large-scale change (see figure). It shows how large-scale change can lead to improved Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population health outcomes through the interaction of comprehensive PHC, integrated CQI, system-based research networks, and system-based participatory action research. The model led to the wide-scale engagement of researchers, practitioners, managers and policy makers in scaling-up and spreading effective quality improvement programs. It provides mechanisms to strengthen the capacity of a health system to work towards continually improving its performance.¹

¹ Bailie, R., Matthews, V., Brands, J. & Schierhout, G. 2013, A systems-based partnership learning model for strengthening primary healthcare, *Implement Sci*, 8:143. Available at: www.implementationscience.com/content/8/1/143

A learning model for large-scale change



Future directions

The ABCD National Research Partnership has been vital to our success in securing funding for a new Centre of Research Excellence for Integrated Quality Improvement based at the Menzies School of Health Research...

... which will bring together a wider range of service providers, policy makers and researchers in a strategic research program. The aim of the program is to increase the benefits of CQI work for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the PHC centres on which they rely through providing rigorous policy- and practice-relevant evidence.

Our vision for further work in this area – formulated by delegates at our final Partnership meeting in late 2014 – is ensuring that CQI is:

- embedded in all elements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander primary health care delivery
- led by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisations with strong consumer engagement
- championed by leaders in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health
- supported by effective systems at local, regional and national levels
- proactive in responding to need with minimal variation in the quality of care between health centres and jurisdictions.

Acknowledgments

The support, enthusiasm and commitment of the many partners involved, especially the 175 participating PHC centres that have provided de-identified audit data, has been vital to the success of the ABCD National Research Partnership.

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