



THE UNIVERSITY OF
MELBOURNE

Department of
Rural Health

University Department of Rural Health

Excellence and equity in Rural Health through education, research and engagement

Aboriginal Health

Employment

The University Department of Rural Health (UDRH) in Shepparton has a strong commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health. We currently employ seven Indigenous staff, of whom five are academics providing education and undertaking research in Aboriginal health.



Education

PhD: The UDRH currently supports four Aboriginal students in Shepparton to undertake their PhD through the University of Melbourne. Three of these students are jointly funded by the UDRH and POCHÉ Centre.

Masters of Public Health: The UDRH is supporting five Aboriginal students who live and work in rural Victoria to undertake their MPH through the University of Melbourne. In addition, two Aboriginal students based in Shepparton recently graduated with their MPH in 2018 (pictured), following three students who graduated in 2014.

Nursing: The UDRH is currently supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to undertake their nursing training. Two students completed their Diploma of Nursing in 2017 and are currently working in the region while four other students are enrolled in the Diploma at GO TAFE. Two additional students transitioned in 2018 to a Bachelor of Nursing at La Trobe University.

New courses in Aboriginal Health in Rural Communities: The UDRH is developing both a Graduate Certificate and a Specialist Certificate to be run from the Shepparton campus by the UDRH.



Community Engagement

Ngar-wu Wanyarra Aboriginal Health Conference: For the past three years, the UDRH has held an Aboriginal Health Conference with more than 100 delegates attending each year. Noted speakers from across Australia along with local presenters showcasing the strength of Aboriginal communities have inspired Indigenous and

non-Indigenous audiences. This year a new conference is being delivered in Ballarat.

Aboriginal Advisory Committee: The UDRH has an Advisory Committee to support its work in Aboriginal Health. This committee ensures community consultation and cultural oversight by traditional owners.

NAIDOC Activities: Each year, the UDRH organises and supports a range of NAIDOC activities in Shepparton, Ballarat and Wangaratta. From family days to art shows, musical events, lunches and historical walks, we support events desired and informed by the local community in partnership with others.



Research

Our research projects include:

- Prosperity in Aboriginal communities
- Maternal and child health
- Australia's Aboriginal Health policy,
- Development of a toolkit for how mainstream rural health services can be culturally inclusive
- Keeping Aboriginal Health Workers strong

Research Paper

Perspectives of Aboriginal issues among non-Aboriginal Residents of rural Victorian communities

by

Lisa Bourke, Christina Malatzky, Daniel Terry, Raelene Nixon, Karyn Ferguson & Peter Ferguson

UDRH Team Publication: Australian Journal of Social Issues 2017; 52(3): 278-293

Aims: Studies have found that experiences of racism impact on physical and mental health (Paradies et al., 2008). This paper examined attitudes towards Aboriginal people and issues held by non-Indigenous residents of four rural Shires in Victoria.

Methods: A questionnaire was mailed to randomly selected households in the shires of Greater Shepparton, Moira, Wangaratta and Central Goldfields. Obtaining a 34% response rate, 1269 questionnaires were received of which 1244 were from non-Indigenous respondents (analysed here).

Results: When asked about racism locally, there was variation in awareness of racism, observing a racial incident and knowledge of traditional owners across the four shires. Respondents were asked a series of attitudes and response to these attitudes varied:

- 90% of respondents indicated they would sit next to an Aboriginal person on a bus; 86% stated they treat all people the same, regardless of race/skin-colour/gender/sexuality;
- 2/3 agreed Aboriginal people should be recognised in the Australian constitution;
- 64% agreed that Aboriginal people receive more benefits than non-Aboriginal people;
- 6/10 agreed that Aboriginal people do not live as long as non-Aboriginal people;
- 1/4 would worry if their son or daughter was in a relationship with an Aboriginal person.

Conclusion: Perspectives identified a lack of knowledge of Aboriginal issues but an awareness of racism. Perspectives varied across regions and among different types of individuals. The paper concludes that attitudes are 'everywhere different' (Dunn & McDonald 2001). The awareness and observation of racism has implications for the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal residents of these shires. There were few clear patterns of who holds specific attitudes which makes targeting pro-Aboriginal campaigns difficult. This suggests racial attitudes are subtle, complex and difficult to change.

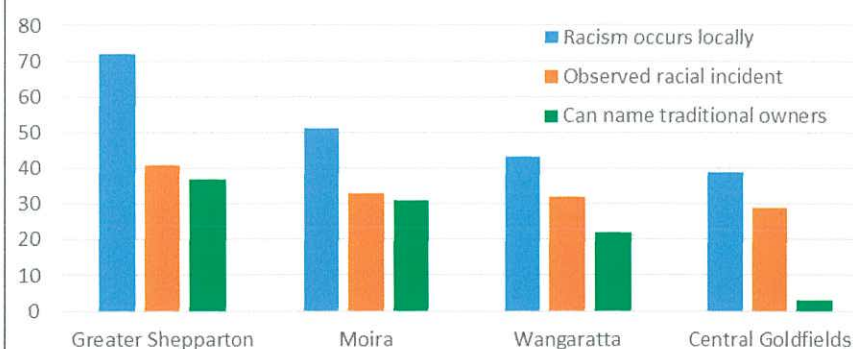
References:

Dunn, K.M. & McDonald, A. (2001) 'The geography of racism in NSW', Australian Geographer 32 (1), 29-44.

Paradies, Y., Harris, R., & Anderson, I. (2008) 'The impact of racism on Indigenous health in Australia and Aotearoa: Towards a research agenda', Discussion Paper No. 4, Darwin, Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health & Flinders University.



Figure 1: Responses to questions about racism and traditional owners



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