

## **SESSION 1**

### **The political transformation of health research**

Conveners:

**Convenors: Kerry Arabena**

Visiting Research Fellow, AIATSIS <Kerry.Arabena@aiatsis.gov.au>

**Ruth Nicholls**

C/o Social Justice Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney  
<R.Nicholls@uws.edu.au>

**and Graham Henderson**

Visiting Research Fellow, AIATSIS <Graham.Henderson@aiatsis.gov.au>

### **RATIONALE**

The politics of research have transformed methods of inquiry about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, and knowledge systems. Since the introduction of ethical frameworks, and the growth in the number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, research is now undergoing a process of 'decolonisation'. Health research ethics and grant applications must now demonstrate on-going negotiation of research, collaboration, and participatory frameworks. Research must be ethically accountable to the communities who participate, and must seek to respect Indigenous epistemologies within its findings. The way in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers work collaboratively in response to this political and ethical transformation is complex. The 2007 conference is an opportunity to discuss the decolonisation of research within a multi-disciplinary and historical context. It is also an occasion to consider the implications of recolonisation through discussing the connection between political rhetoric and tangible health and social outcomes.

*Session comprises three parts with a total of ten presentations:*

<p><b>Part 1. Decolonisation and the politics of health research</b></p>
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**1. The Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health:  
A new approach to research development**

**Mick Gooda**

Cooperative Research Centre for Aboriginal Health

### **ABSTRACT**

The CRCAH provides a framework for the control of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In this paper I outline the framework which involves a mechanism for directing the development, funding, conduct, and

dissemination of research in ways designed to maximise the likely benefits of the research for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

## **2. & 3. The Torres Strait Islander Institute. Rehoboth: The Torres Strait 'Free Thinking' Symposium 2007**

**Phillip Mills**

Torres Strait Islander Institute

**Poi Pensio and team**

Queensland Health

### **ABSTRACT**

The essence of intellectual sovereignty is paramount in free thinking societies rich with strong social status and cultural identities, grounded in their world views. The "free thinking" symposium will establish a means for expressing our unique knowledges and thinking through an academic interaction of Torres Strait Elders with scholars to promote a 'free thinking' Torres Strait Islander society. The aims of the symposium are to: promote intellectual sovereignty - strength and unity in our identity; revitalise the philosophies, worldviews and experiences of Torres Strait Islanders; and to contribute to the betterment of ourselves, each other and our global families. I will discuss the "free thinking" symposium in the context of developing a framework for a Torres Strait Institute.

## **4. 'They were not distanced from their families and grew up in full knowledge of their backgrounds': the generational implications of the dormitory system**

**Brian McCoy**

Latrobe University <B.McCoy@latrobe.edu.au>

Discussant: **Gordon Briscoe** (AIATSIS and ANU) <gnbriscoe@bigpond.com>

### **ABSTRACT**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s the last of the mission dormitories in Aboriginal communities closed. After decades of institutional living, children were returned to the care of their parents and families. In 2000, the Australian Government Senate referred an inquiry to its Legal and Constitutional References Committee in relation to the recommendations of the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission Report, *Bringing Them Home*. The Senate asked the Committee to investigate 'the adequacy and effectiveness of the Government's response to the recommendations of the report'. In reference to those children who had grown up in mission or community dormitories the Government submitted that such children 'were not distanced from their families and grew up in full knowledge of their backgrounds'. In this paper the author, present when one mission dormitory closed in 1973, describes some of the background to the establishing of these dormitories and their later dismantling. He argues for a greater understanding of those who grew up in these dormitories and a better appreciation of their generational effects. Clearly, children were distanced from their families. They did not grow up in full knowledge of their backgrounds. Forty years later, people's health and wellbeing continue to be seriously affected.

## **5. Who chooses what evidence? Research and political constructions of people, place, and policy**

**Rosemary Aldridge**

University of Newcastle

### **ABSTRACT**

Research is inherently political, and how and what research "evidence" is used, and for what purpose, is no less contentious. Efforts to promote evidence-based or evidence-informed policy are fraught with assumptions about the quality and character of the "evidence". Who chooses what evidence is just one aspect of the research-public policy-practice spectrum enmeshed to date in colonial traditions. In this paper I discuss the idea of policy imagination, being that unwritten unspoken convention which prevails or comes to prevail in the public policy environment to prescribe the limits or possibilities of subsequent policy thinking and action, and the relationship between politicians,"evidence", policy imagination, and policy concerning the health and welfare of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.

### **Part 2. The politics of collaboration in research – case studies**

## **6. Keeping Aboriginal health research in Aboriginal hands: A case-study**

**Julie Tongs**

Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service

### **ABSTRACT**

Community-controlled Aboriginal health services are aware of the value and importance of research as a tool for improving their unique system of holistic health care to their patients, families, and the wider community. Keeping the research agenda under the control of local Aboriginal people can be difficult, despite recent improvements in ethical guidelines for research. Winnunga Nimmityjah Aboriginal Health Service has been involved in a number of research projects since its inception 18 years ago. I will describe in this presentation a recent research project we have lead in prison health involving 6 other organizations as research partners. Such research partnerships, with adequate funding support, appropriate governance and mutual respect, can result in outcomes that are productive, satisfying, and valuable for all partners and the various stakeholders they serve.

## **7. More than methodology: Community-based collaborative research**

**Ruth Nicholls**

C/o Social Justice Social Change Research Centre, University of Western Sydney  
<R.Nicholls@uws.edu.au>

### **ABSTRACT**

Following the demands of ethics guidelines which call for on-going negotiation, community participation, involvement in and control of research, this is a critique of community-based collaborative research methodology. By considering the complexity of inter-personal relations in the development of collaborative projects, researchers are reminded of the importance of reflexive positioning within collaboration and negotiation processes. I explore this positioning through conversations with community co-inquirers about ethics and values.

### **Part 3. Ethical transformations in health research**

## **8. Keeping research on track: A guide for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples about health research ethics**

**Terry Dunbar and Margaret Scrimgeour**

Charles Darwin University and University of South Australia

### **ABSTRACT**

Keeping Research on Track (KROT) aims to familiarise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with the key stages of the research journey. By understanding these stages it is hoped that community members will be in a stronger position to ensure that research activity will respect their shared values, needs and priorities. KROT is positioned as a vehicle for ensuring that the benefits from research will increasingly flow to Indigenous communities. In this presentation we will consider the recent history of Indigenous health research reform in Australia and provide practical suggestions for developing and maintaining ethical and collaborative relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and professional researchers.

## **9. The role of an independent Research Ethics Committee: Keeping researchers honest**

**Chrissy Grant**

AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee

### **ABSTRACT**

The AIATSIS Research Ethics Committee (REC) is a member of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) whereby we have obligations and responsibilities to

report on our activities. The REC in turn feels obliged to ensure that grantees are informed through our Guidelines and feedback from our assessment of grants on the culturally appropriate methods of carrying out their research in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. This presentation will highlight some of the issues both positive and negative that we have to consider in each grant round.

## **10. Using ethical guidelines to negotiate health research agreements and consent with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities**

**Terry Dunbar**

National Health and Medical Research Council

### **ABSTRACT**

In 2003 the National Health and Medical Research Council introduced guidelines relating to ethical conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health research. In 2006, after broad consultation a community companion publication to these guidelines was released. In this presentation it will be argued that the implementation of these guidelines provides a sound base for establishing negotiated research agreements between Indigenous peoples and researchers at the local community level.