

Overcoming Aboriginal alcohol harm in Australia: Building on the evidence

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Introduction and Aims: In the fifty years since Aboriginal Australians became legally entitled to drink alcohol, a wide variety of initiatives have been introduced aimed at preventing or managing harms arising from alcohol misuse. However, these have not generated a strong evidence base on which to plan future interventions. Further, much potential evidence is becoming inaccessible as it is contained in grey literature such as reports to governments. To address these gaps, a team of researchers from the Menzies School of Health Research has recently compiled a sourcebook that brings together published and 'grey' literature on community-based interventions designed to prevent or treat alcohol-related harms among Aboriginal Australians.

Method / Approach: The sourcebook reproduces documents that meet at least one of three criteria: they made a seminal contribution at time of original publication; they have continuing relevance today, and/or they are becoming inaccessible. In addition, selected sources are accompanied by original introductory chapters covering seven main topic areas:

- Different ways of 'framing' alcohol problems among Aboriginal Australians;
- Aboriginal communities and the management of alcohol;
- Early intervention and treatment;
- Restricting supply of alcohol;
- Licensed clubs in communities;
- Community policing;
- Addressing FASD.

Key Findings:

In each of the topic areas listed above, achievements and continuing issues are identified and discussed. For example, in the 'early intervention and treatment' domain, continuing challenges exist as a result of the complex needs that Aboriginal clients bring to treatment services; these result in a need for multi-faceted interventions, that in turn generate difficulties in evaluating outcomes in a manner that respects the cultural contexts of interventions.

It is no surprise that it is the initiatives that are strengths-based, healing-informed, collaborative and grounded in Aboriginal ownership and understandings of health and wellbeing have experienced the most success.

Discussions and Conclusions: This workshop will draw on findings from the project to explore ways of building on the experiences of communities and community groups to date in addressing problems associated with alcohol.

Implications for Practice or Policy: The sourcebook and this workshop are intended to be useful for all those concerned with alcohol-related problems among Aboriginal Australians, including residents of Aboriginal communities, health service providers, policy makers, police and other law-enforcement agencies.

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