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Director's Communiqué

Director's welcome

Welcome to my final edition of the Communiqué for 2020 which has undoubtedly been one of the strangest years of my and most people's lives. A communiqué is a statement or communication with a particular purpose. In 2020 we have learned a lot about communication and sharing in particular ways. The word 'Zoom' has entered the lexicon in ways we never intended or expected. In the old days I did most of my zooming in cars along the freeway... now it is the only way I can see my new baby grandson in London for the foreseeable future... and teams were something you joined to mostly play sports and other recreational activities.

So here is my final communication with a particular purpose. The most important of which is to thank you all once again most sincerely for your unstinting support. It has been gratifying in 2020 when you all have challenges of your own to face and work through.

I want to express my pride and admiration for the staff of the HealthInfoNet who have worked tirelessly to ensure that our services were delivered seamlessly and without interruption throughout the pandemic. We transitioned home then back to the office again and our users would not have noticed any drop in service provision or quality. That only happens when, yes, you have systems in place, but more so because you have a team of professional, dedicated and passionate staff who always do more than is required under the terms of their contract of employment. You may have heard me refer to the 'passion gap' before.

The passion gap is the gap between what we are paid to do and what we do because we are passionate about what we do. The staff of the HealthInfoNet has one of the most amazing collective passion gaps it has been my privilege to observe close up. And of course, the entire Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health sector has been sustained by a national passion gap of gargantuan and awesome proportions. A passion gap is essential but must not be exploited. Recent commitments to funding and to Indigenous leadership offer promise of nurturing the passions of the many wonderful people, organisations and communities throughout Australia to make a positive difference.

My thanks to our funding partners for your vote of confidence in us to deliver what the sector needs of us in difficult times.

To our Advisory Board, my personal and professional thanks. At our Zoom Meeting this year I was reminded yet again of the great privilege I have been afforded for the last 6 years to work alongside so many inspirational people and organisations.

To our partners; I have tried to maintain living, breathing, purposeful relationships guided by our shared aspirations, principles, values and commitments. I have thoroughly enjoyed catching up with many of you over the last few months. Thank you.

Our consultants are a network of highly skilled and respected health professionals throughout the country who generously make themselves available to ensure that our work maintains the highest standards that you have all come to expect from our work.

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@ Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet.

The Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands and waters of Australia and the Torres Strait. We respect all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people—their customs and their beliefs. We also pay our respects to Elders past and present, with particular acknowledgement to the Whadjuk people of the Nyoongar nation, the traditional owners of the lands where our offices are located.

And to our hundreds of thousands of users. What can I say... you are amazing. I can think of no better way to spend my time than working to support you in your everyday practice in any way I can.

To our friends and colleagues at ECU and Kurongkurl Katitjin, we strongly feel your support through the leadership of Professor Braden Hill. This support is crucial as universities throughout Australia grapple

with the challenges posed by the Covid-19 pandemic. Universities face real stress, but I am confident that they will rise to the challenge and emerge stronger as beacons of scholarly enquiry, freedom of thought, empathy and compassion for their students, staff and the wider communities they serve.

To you all, my sincere thanks and appreciation. I wish you, your loved ones, and friends a loving, safe and connected festive

season. I look forward to seeing you in 2021 in a Covid safe world where can all continue to do the vital work we love.

Please enjoy my final Communiqué for 2020.



Cheers,
Neil



Professor Neil Drew

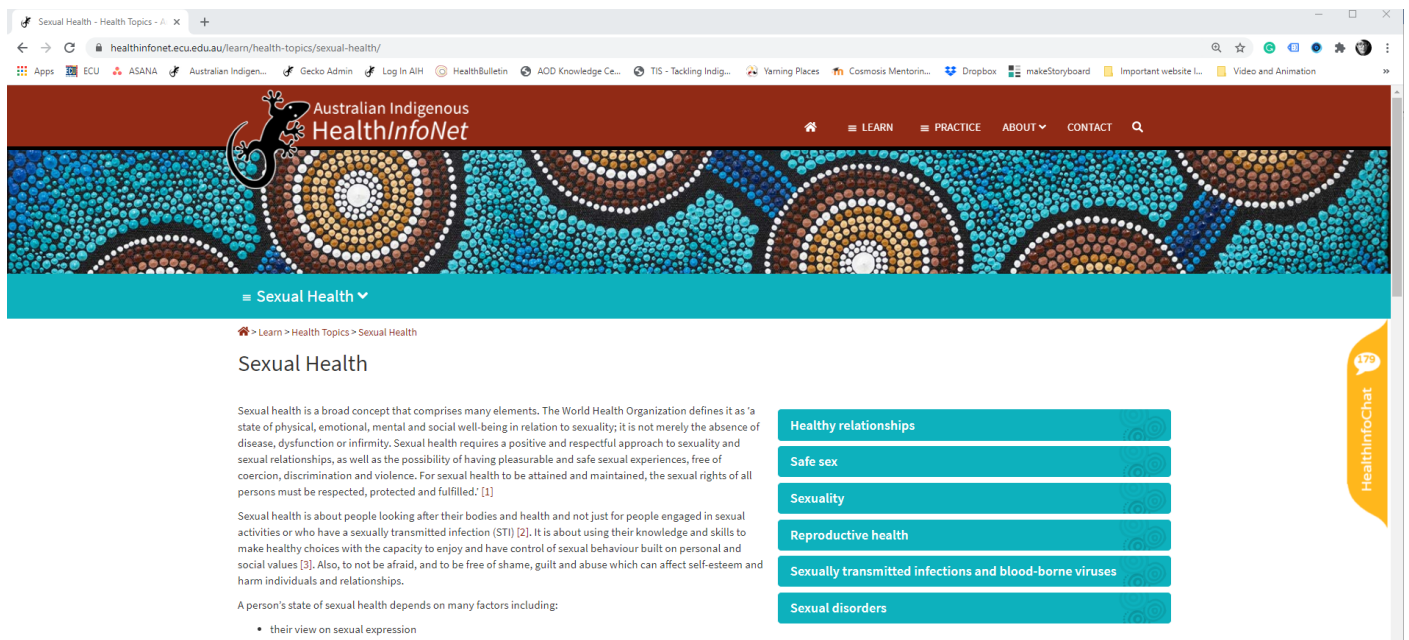
Advisory Board meeting

Our annual Advisory Board was a little different this year meeting on Zoom rather than face to face. While this was less than ideal, I was delighted that so many members were able to make it. I was also really pleased that we managed some complex and sometimes difficult conversations about our work and

how we may better serve the community. There have been some changes. Our Terms of Reference were revised to formalise some processes around membership, leadership, purpose and processes. We look forward to welcoming the new CATSINaM CEO Professor Roianne West to the Board in 2021. We also

welcome Professor Braden Hill PVC Equity and Indigenous who formally joins the Board under the new Terms of Reference as the senior Aboriginal leader at ECU. My thanks to Professor Caroline Finch from ECU who is stepping down in Braden's favour, for her contribution to the Board over the last 2 years.

New sexual health portal



In November, we launched the revamped and redesigned Sexual Health Portal. I am grateful to the Australian Department of Health for including this important topic within our scope of work in the new funding agreement. The Sexual Health Portal focuses on the aspects of sexual health that

impact Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander individuals and their communities. These topics include safe sex, healthy relationships, sexuality (diversity and inclusion), sexually transmitted infections and blood borne viruses, sexual problems and reproductive health.

The featured art on the new portal is from Kimberley based artist Bec Morgan and is titled 'Where the freshwater meets the saltwater'. Bec is a wonderful and talented artist who has exhibited all over the world.

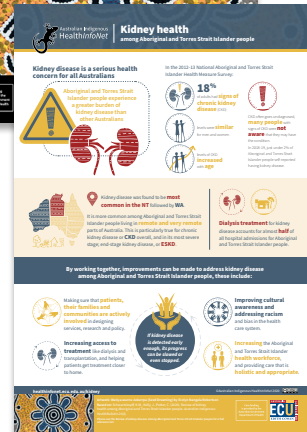
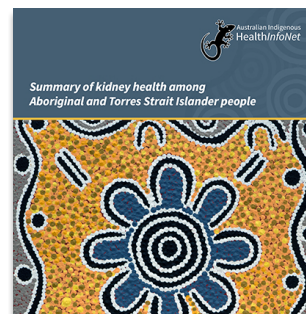
[Explore the Sexual Health Portal](#)

A review of kidney health

In October we released a new *Review of kidney health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*. Kidney disease is a serious health concern for people living in Australia with one in three adult Australians at an increased risk of developing chronic kidney disease (CKD). Australians diagnosed with CKD regularly suffer poor health outcomes and a compromised quality of life. CKD can be associated with other chronic diseases like diabetes and cardiovascular disease. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience an increased burden of kidney disease, particularly those living in remote communities.

The purpose of this review is to provide a comprehensive synthesis of key information on kidney health among Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and provide evidence to assist in the development and delivery of policies, strategies and programs.

We have produced a suite of tools to ensure the information from the review is accessible.



Kidney review and knowledge exchange products

Alcohol and Other Drugs Reference group meeting



HealthInfoNet AOD team with Perth based reference group members Dennis Gray and Anna Stearne (centre).

The AOD Reference group was a 'hybrid' meeting with some members attending face to face while others observed social

distancing via Zoom. This was an opportunity to plan for the coming year and update the reference group members on work

undertaken since the last meeting. As always, it was great to see the members who give so generously of their time and expertise.

Alcohol and Other Drugs workshop



Several of our AODKC team ran a workshop for AOD Worker Students at Marr Mooditj in Perth in September. This was an opportunity for them to have a thorough understanding

of the breadth of resources and information on the site, where to find these and the section which supports the workforce themselves.

New Consultants

In August, I welcomed our newest Consultants, Dr Anne-Marie Eades and Dr Dana Slape.



Dr Anne-Marie Eades

Anne-Marie is a Noongar woman from Minang country in South of Western Australia. She is a registered nurse with a PhD in Public Health. A public health and health service researcher specialising in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's health and wellbeing. Her research focus is on keeping family and community central to intervention's aimed at reducing health disparities. Anne-Marie is based at Curtin University in WA.

Dr Dana Slape is a Fellow of the Australasian College of Dermatologists and graduate of Western Sydney University. She is Australia's first Aboriginal dermatologist. She is passionate about managing chronic dermatological conditions across all age groups but is



Dr Dana Slape

particularly interested in children, adolescents and the elderly. Dr Slape is experienced in inflammatory diseases of the skin including eczema and psoriasis, but has also developed niche skills in skin diseases relating to infectious and autoimmune diseases, informed by extensive work across urban, rural and remote Australia, and the Pacific Islands.

I'd like to congratulate one of our Consultants, Professor Gail Garvey, who was recently awarded the Alumni Medal for Professional Excellence, the highest honour of the University of Newcastle's Alumni Awards. As many of you know most of her research career has focused on investigating cancer experiences and outcomes of Indigenous Australians.



Next Gen HealthBulletin Journal

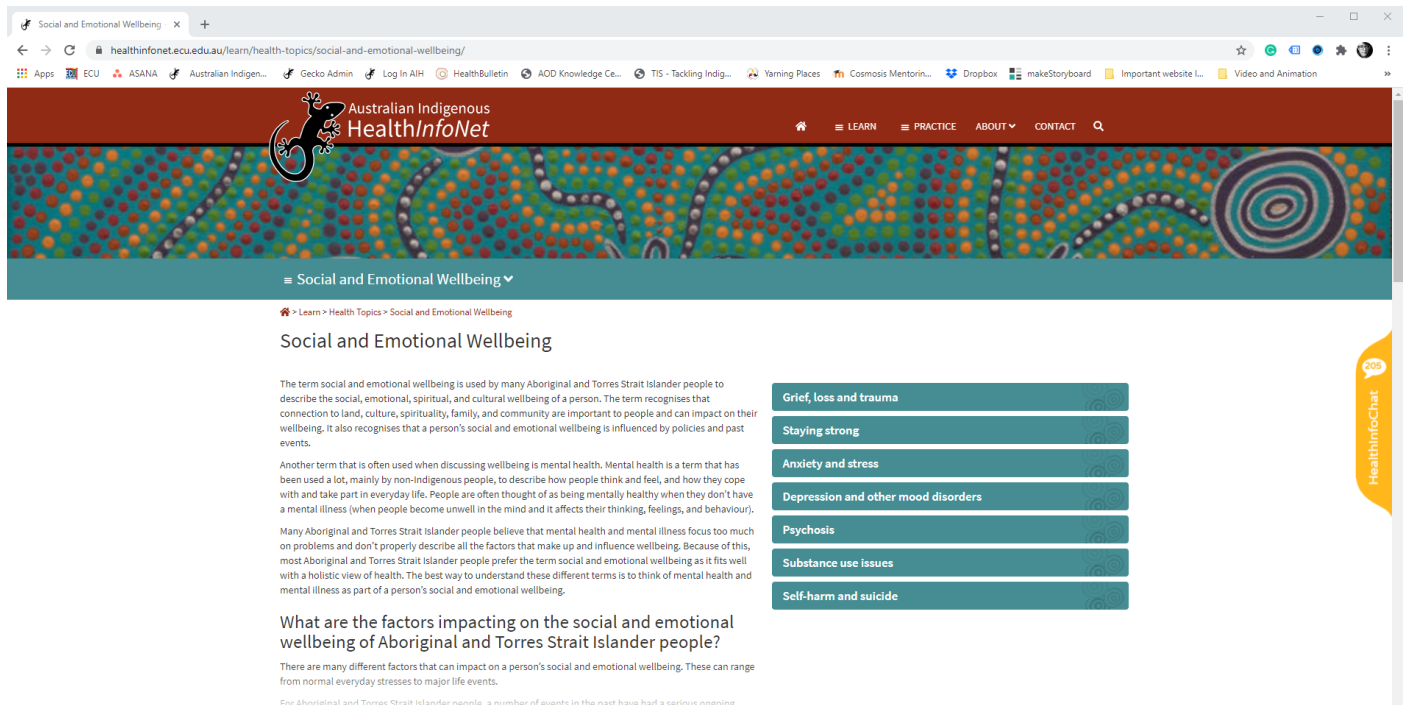
The next generation of the Australian Indigenous HealthBulletin has been developed over the past few months. The Journal has been redesigned with a new manuscript management system via the Edith Cowan University (ECU) [Research Online Repository](#).

We welcome submissions of original articles for inclusion in future editions of the HealthBulletin Journal. Submissions are invited from researchers, practitioners and health workers. We are seeking submissions that provide examples of research on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health, including policies, strategies and programs that have the potential to inform and support everyday practice.

Papers can be submitted [here](#). Please note in order to make a submission you will need to create a log in for ECU Research Online.

HealthBulletin Journal

Social and emotional wellbeing portal expanded



With funding provided by the Australian Department of Health, this section is designed to support the information needs of health workers, program managers, researchers, policy makers, students, and others with an interest in the social and emotional wellbeing of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their communities. If you are interested in timely and relevant SEWB information in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health.

The portal will continue to expand and will be shaped by consultation with community and

key organisations. I look forward to sharing more about this next year ahead of the official (re) launch.

Sign up to our SEWB newsletter here

The Lowitja Institute

We were invited by The Lowitja Board to join as an Associate Member Organisation. Associate Organisations are 'Non-Indigenous organisations committed to the purpose and values of the Lowitja Institute'. This is a great honour and privilege for us and is testament to the very strong collaborative relationship we have developed over many years.

Congratulations also to Roianne West (from one of our partner organisations) who was the winner of the 2020 Lowitja Institute Cranlana Award for outstanding research leadership. Roianne is also the new CEO of our partner organisation CATSINaM. I wish her every success in her new role.



Roianne West

Primary research news

Kurungkurl Katitjin, ECU's Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research, will undertake three research projects funded by the Government of Western Australia exploring aspects of the experience of Covid 19 for Aboriginal people and communities. Associate Professor Daniel McAullay said the projects would target different aspects of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities were affected by the pandemic.

Uncle Mick and I are Chief Investigators on a project exploring how natural helpers have activated online information about Covid 19 during the pandemic. This research will provide insight into not only knowledge provision but also how that knowledge is activated in communities.

Visitors to the HealthInfoNet



Uncle Mick Adams, Sandy Thompson, Charmaine Green and Neil Drew

I was delighted to welcome from Geraldton, Wajarri-Badimaya woman Charmaine Green and Advisory Board member Sandy Thompson to our offices in October. Visitors are far and few these days with COVID restrictions, so it was lovely to see them. Charmaine is completing her PhD on Aboriginal cultural knowledge transmission.

In November, one of our partner organisations, The Western Australian Council of Social Service (WACOSS), made a presentation to staff and joined us for a morning tea.



Leela James (centre) from WACOSS

Conference participation

In October, we presented at the PHAA online conference on the topic of our bushfire resources in our environmental health section (Wilma FitzGerald) and our COVID-19 section (Michelle Elwell). Both were established promptly as a response to what was occurring earlier in the year and are part of our commitment to provide timely, accessible and relevant information to support the workforce.

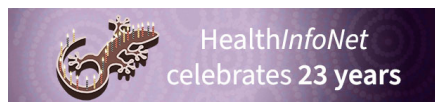
In November, we took part in the Rural Health West, South West Health Research Collaborative Forum in Bunbury. Jane Burns exhibited at the Forum.

In December, we are presenting online about our AOD Knowledge Centre (Avinna Trzesinski) at the Australia New Zealand Addiction conference and will run a virtual café. We also have a virtual stand at the Indigenous Allied Health Australia conference (Michelle Elwell).



Roz Walker, UWA, Emma Haynes, UWA, Nicole Bowser, South West Aboriginal Medical Service.

Celebration at the HealthInfoNet



We turned 23 in September and enjoyed a staff morning tea to acknowledge this anniversary.

Knowledge exchange via social media

Our activity and engagement across all of our social media channels is strong.

 **1.7%** growth in LinkedIn followers

 **11%** growth in Facebook followers to over 4000

 Over **7000** Twitter followers

 **9.4%** growth in YouTube followers with our CVD review video, the most watched in the last 3 months.

[Watch the CVD review video here](#)

Staff news

Darren Deves (Research Officer) joined us just days before the shutdown period, and we got to know him online before meeting him in person a few weeks later. Darren has responsibility for Diabetes, SEWB and the *HealthBulletin*.

In August, we welcomed Katie Cundale in the new role of Social Media Content Creator. Katie has a background in health and social media and is also currently contributing to the research area while a staff member is on leave for a few months.

In October Natalie Stoksik (Research Officer) joined us. Natalie is in her second year at ECU



Darren Deves



Katie Cundale

studying nursing. Natalie will be working on the WA State portal and will be mentored by Michelle Elwell who is one of our experienced Aboriginal research staff. I appreciate Michelle's commitment to working with our Aboriginal interns who are usually with us for a few years while studying at University.

In November we farewelled Monique Cumming (Admin Officer) who will be on maternity leave. Congratulations to Mon on the safe arrival of her daughter Zara. We look

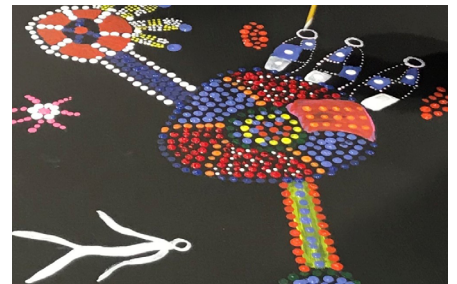
forward to welcoming Mon back in the new year.

I also want to acknowledge two former research staff. Paige Wood-Kenney won the 2020 NAIDOC Perth Awards Youth of the Year in September which is a wonderful achievement, and I've passed on our congratulations to her. Gemma West is currently in the Pilbara region of WA working with Foodbank as part of the Food Sensations for Schools program. The program is a hands-on nutrition education program and aims to improve knowledge and skills to encourage healthy eating and cooking for healthier bodies, minds, and futures.



Natalie Stoksik

Staff staying connected



Our staff have been very creative this year in terms of staying connected with each other and coming up with many in-house wellness activities. As we sign off soon for 2020, I'd like to share some of the online activities initiated by our team. *Monday Mindfulness* was an opportunity to share something positive

about our weekend. *Twisty Tuesday* was a 10 minute online desk yoga class. *Wellness Wednesday* was a 10 minute meditation session and *Throwback Thursday* was a photo opportunity with a different theme each week e.g. old technology you once had, fancy dress outfits, best holiday pic, bucket list item etc.

We also enjoyed a creative and contemporary art activity led by Uncle Mick. It was an opportunity to come together to learn about and appreciate Aboriginal culture and how the animals and images are connected to the storylines and spiritual wellbeing of Aboriginal peoples.

Christmas and New Year period

Our websites will be live but our offices will be unattended from 21 December and will re-open on 4 January next year. Our best wishes for a safe Christmas and New year period.