

Healing the past by nurturing the future

Perinatal support for Indigenous parents who have experienced complex trauma

What is this project about?

This project aims to develop perinatal (pregnancy to two years after birth) strategies for identifying and supporting Indigenous parents who have experienced complex trauma in their own childhoods.

Why has this project been funded?

Complex trauma can have profound and ongoing impacts on development and physical, social and emotional wellbeing. The long-lasting relational effects may be triggered during parenthood, causing emotional distress and impeding the capacity of parents to nurture their children, leading to intergenerational transmission of trauma. Conversely, growing evidence shows that the transition to parenthood offers a unique life-course opportunity for healing and preventing intergenerational transmission, even after severe trauma.

Yet, despite these opportunities for healing, particularly during frequent scheduled contacts with health care providers; and the risk of triggering due to the intimate nature of perinatal care - there are currently no systematic perinatal strategies for identifying and supporting parents who have experienced complex trauma themselves.

This project will begin to address this critical gap.

How will the project be conducted?

We will use a community-based participatory action research approach to:

1. Map relevant services and community-based key stakeholders.
2. Co-design protocols to ensure a culturally and emotionally safe project environment.
3. Conduct systematic reviews of evidence to inform the co-design processes.
4. Facilitate co-design workshops in Victoria, South Australia and the Northern Territory with key stakeholders to develop screening and support strategies.
5. Develop, validate and field test a screening tool for use with Indigenous parents.
6. Conduct safe and engaging research with families to understand parents' experiences of complex trauma, generate ideas about potentially helpful support strategies, and discuss acceptability of proposed strategies.
7. Discuss the feasibility of the proposed screening and support strategies with service providers.

Who is involved in the project?

This project is funded by the Lowitja Institute and the National Health and Medical Research Council. In addition to many years' experience working for communities, the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal team have extensive expertise in psychology, psychiatry, perinatal care, parenting, Aboriginal health and all types of research (see attached). The peak body (or nominated community-controlled organisation) in the Northern Territory, South Australia and Victoria are invited to be partners in this project. Community-based key stakeholders (from all jurisdictions) identified through service mapping will be invited to participate in the co-design workshops.

What is being asked of community organisations if they decide to become a partner?







Partners in the project will be asked to nominate staff to participate in co-design workshops, and/or to support the testing of the draft tool and/or to provide guidance in the proposed screening and support strategies of the tool and/or in the implementation of it.








What are the benefits?

Benefits for community organisations and members being involved with this project includes two way learning by:

- Developing a rich understanding of the impact of complex trauma for parents.
- Contributing to practical screening and support strategies for communities by communities.
- Building research and clinical expertise, including opportunities to be involved in publications and development of other resources.
- Working with a safe, friendly and supportive team.

For more information please contact Catherine Chamberlain, Senior Research Fellow, La Trobe University on 0428 921271 or c.chamberlain@latrobe.edu.au

<p>Project team</p> 	<p>Dr Catherine Chamberlain, midwife/Senior Research Fellow, LaTrobe University Is a descendant of the Trawlwoolway People (Tasmania), with over 25 years' experience in reproductive and child health, including program and hospital service management, policy implementation, guideline development, evidence-based practice and research.</p>
	<p>Dr Graham Gee, Registered psychologist, Victorian Aboriginal Health Service Specialises in Aboriginal mental health and social and emotional wellbeing, particularly resilience and recovery from trauma among Aboriginal people.</p>
	<p>Prof Stephanie Brown, Head of healthy Mothers Healthy Families Research Group, Murdoch Children's Research Institute is a maternal and social epidemiologist with extensive experience leading large mother and child studies, including studies involving Aboriginal women and children, and families of refugee background.</p>
	<p>Prof Kerry Arabena, Chair for Indigenous Health and Director of the Indigenous Health Equity Unit, University of Melbourne is a Torres Strait Islander woman and trained social worker. Her work has made significant contributions in gender issues, social justice, human rights, access and equity, service provision, harm minimisation, and citizenship.</p>
	<p>Prof Judy Atkinson, Southern Cross University & Patron We-Alli Trust is a Jiman / Bundjalung woman. Judy is a national leader in intergenerational and relational trauma, and healing or recovery for Indigenous, and indeed all peoples. Though nominally retired, she continues working with communities in educational – healing work, what she calls educaring.</p>
	<p>Prof Jan Nicholson, Inaugural Roberta Holmes Professor at La Trobe University. Jan has made significant contributions to understanding the parenting and family factors influencing the provision of effective preventive and early intervention, including approaches to protecting and promoting parent mental health and parenting.</p>
	<p>Dr Deirdre Gartland, Senior Research Fellow, Murdoch Childrens Research Institute. Deirdre is co-leader of the research program focusing on Health, Wellbeing and Resilience across the Life Course. She has a particular focus on social adversity and building the evidence needed to better support vulnerable families.</p>
	<p>Prof Helen Herrman, Professor of Psychiatry, Orygen, National Centre of Excellence in Youth Mental Health and Centre for Youth Mental Health, The University of Melbourne Helen is currently President of the World Psychiatric Association. Her work focuses on community mental health care, promoting mental health and the mental health of marginalised groups, including homeless people, prisoners, & youth living in out-of-home care.</p>
	<p>Ms Karen Glover, South Australian Medical Research Institute. Karen is a Mein:tnk and Wotjobaluk woman with over 30+ years' experience working in the government and non government Aboriginal health and community services sectors, including in policy, planning, service development, management and advocacy.</p>
	<p>Dr Yvonne Clark, Psychologist, University of Adelaide is a Kokatha and Wirangu Aboriginal woman from South Australia. Yvonne's experience spans clinical, community, social and academic psychology, predominately with Aboriginal people (in particular with families, children and young people).</p>

	<p>Dr Fiona Mensah, biostatistician, Murdoch Childrens' Research Institute Fiona's research focuses on child development and family resilience. She has worked with Aboriginal families and children, families of Refugee background, and families experiencing psychosocial adversities.</p>
	<p>Dr Caroline Atkinson is an Aboriginal social worker and leader in the area of intergenerational trauma in Indigenous Australia. She developed the first culturally sensitive, reliable and valid psychometric measure in Australia that determines PTSD in Australian Aboriginal peoples.</p>
	<p>Ms Shawana Andrews, University of Melbourne is an Aboriginal Palawa woman with a background in social work and public health, including Aboriginal and paediatric health. She currently works as Lecturer in Indigenous Health and an Aboriginal Fathering Project, examining the experiences of parenting in the context of family violence.</p>
	<p>Dr Sue Brennan is a Research Fellow at Cochrane Australia, Monash University, where she produces and facilitates the use of systematic reviews in health policy decision-making.</p>
	<p>Professor Helen McLachlan, La Trobe University is a midwifery leader with expertise in research translation and collaborations. She is currently lead investigator on a partnership project with VACCHO and four Victorian maternity services aimed at improving maternity care and health outcomes for Aboriginal mothers and babies.</p>
	<p>Miss Tanja Hirvonen, Flinders University, is a Jaru and Bunuba woman, and grew up in North West Queensland, Mount Isa. Tanja is a clinical psychologist who specialises in social and emotional wellbeing, health professionals' self-care and transgenerational trauma.</p>
	<p>Dr Sandra Campbell, midwife/research fellow, James Cook University Apunipima Cape York Health Council is an Aboriginal researcher with a professional background in nursing and midwifery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in Queensland, the Northern Territory and Victoria.</p>