

Characterising heart disease and stroke risk in Aboriginal women to inform health service and system responses

Overview of PhD candidacy

Background

Heart disease and stroke (cardiovascular disease) are the leading causes of death for Aboriginal people, and account for over one quarter of the life expectancy gap. A recent Australian survey found that almost two in three Aboriginal women live with some form of heart disease or stroke. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women are more likely to have multiple risk factors and subsequently experience premature onset of disease compared to non-Indigenous women.

There is a critical need to better explain the clinical, behavioural and psychosocial risk factors of heart disease and stroke, understand how primary health care services provide heart and stroke risk factor assessment and management, and how these risk factors contribute to worse health outcomes for Aboriginal women.

Overview of research

This research aims to further understand the heart and stroke risk profile for Aboriginal women living in South Australia and central Australia, to improve the way that health services provide care now and in the future.

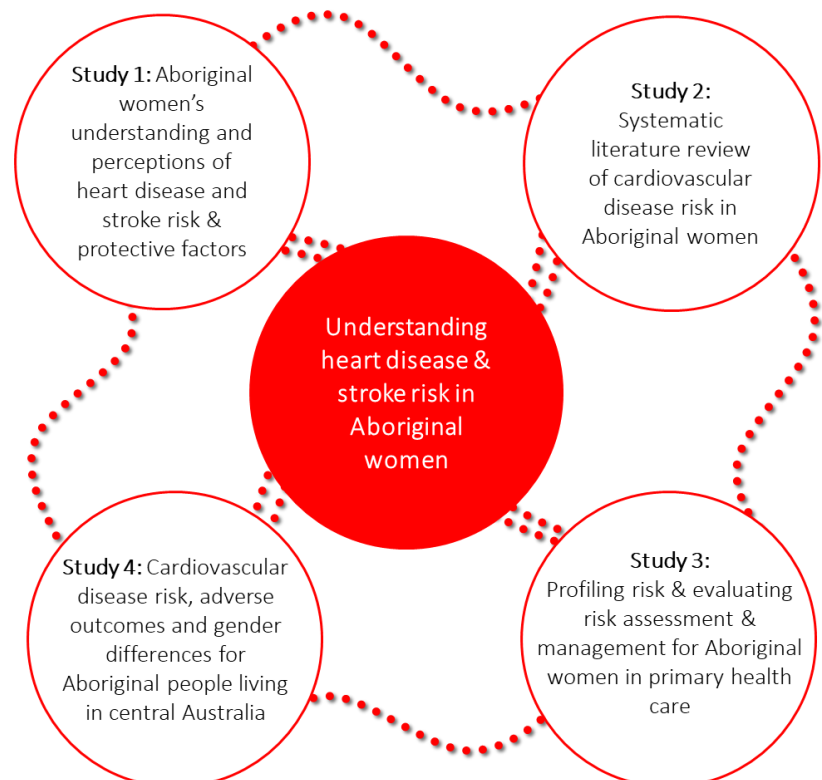
The research is being conducted in partnership with Aboriginal communities across South Australia and central Australia. A partnership approach is being used in each study to enable Aboriginal women and those working in services to directly contribute to the research, guide recommendations, and support communication of the findings back to communities and services.

As part of the partnership approach, there is oversight by an Advisory Panel consisting of Aboriginal women with personal and/or professional experience with heart disease and stroke, as well as clinicians and representatives from service providers. The Panel provides advice, guide and have input across the research.

Given the complexity of risk for heart disease and stroke in this population, the research seeks to address four specific questions:

1. What is Aboriginal women's perceptions of heart and stroke risk and protective factors?
2. What is the profile of risk factors for heart disease and stroke for Aboriginal women?
3. What is the quality of assessment and management of heart and stroke risk provided to Aboriginal women?
4. What is the impact of individual risk factors on health outcomes for Aboriginal women?

The research program is being undertaken as four distinct studies.



Study One: Aboriginal women's understanding and perceptions of heart disease and stroke risk & protective factors

This study seeks to explore Aboriginal women's perceptions of risk, risk factors and protective factors for heart disease and stroke, in the context of their lives, families and communities. Consultation is being undertaken in partnership with existing women's groups, and will be held across South Australia and central Australia in 2017-2018.

Study Two: Systematic literature review of cardiovascular disease risk in Aboriginal women

This study reviews existing Australian literature to examine the risk profile of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, understand the quality of risk assessment and management by primary health care providers, and understand contributors to disparities in cardiovascular health outcomes for Aboriginal women.

Study Three: Profiling risk and evaluating risk assessment & management for Aboriginal women in primary health care

This study will work with primary health care services which provide care to Aboriginal women in South Australia and central Australia, to understand the profile of risk in Aboriginal women and how these services provide risk and disease assessment and management. The study involves Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Services and mainstream private General Practices. The review will be undertaken and reported in 2017-2018.

Study Four: Cardiovascular disease risk, adverse outcomes and gender differences for Aboriginal people living in central Australia

This study will use data that has been collected in partnership with communities in Central Australia between 2008 and 2017, as part of previous studies led by Professor Alex Brown. These studies collected information on the heart health status of 622 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women living in Central Australia over five to seven years. This information will be used to understand what risk factors are carried by Aboriginal women living in Central Australia, and follow the women over the period to understand which women are hospitalised or die from heart disease and stroke. This will be analysed to understand which women have poorer outcomes for heart disease and stroke, and whether individual risk factors play a role in this. The study will also consider the role depression is a risk factor for heart disease and stroke in Aboriginal women in Central Australia. Analyses will be undertaken and reported in 2018-2019.

Duration

January 2017 – December 2020

Ethics

Ethics approval has been provided from the University of South Australia Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), the Aboriginal HREC in SA, and the Central Australian HREC.

For more information



PhD Candidate

Katharine McBride

P: 08 8128 4241 or 0401 612 664

E: Katharine.McBride@mymail.unisa.edu.au

Primary supervisor

Professor Alex Brown

P: 08 8128 4000

E: Alex.Brown@unisa.edu.au

Katharine is a non-Aboriginal woman who has worked in the area of heart and stroke health for 8 years, and specifically with Aboriginal people in SA for the last 4 years.