



Australian Indigenous Health Promotion Network Workshop

Working Towards an Indigenous Model of Health Promotion

The Australian Indigenous Health Promotion Network (AIHPN) workshop was held on the 23rd of April 2006 as part of the 16th National Health Promotion Conference in Alice Springs. Around 65 Indigenous and non-Indigenous health professionals with a diverse range of experience in Indigenous health participated in the workshop.

Aim

Using the framework of the Ottawa Charter (WHO, 1986), the aim of the AIHPN workshop was to provide an opportunity for participants to discuss Indigenous health promotion in the context of the Charter's activities and suggest components of an Australian Indigenous health promotion model.

Process

Five groups were formed around each of the topic areas and a facilitator was nominated from the group to chair each session. A set of questions was developed by the AIHPN reference committee to assist discussion (see appendix 1 for topic areas). Each session ran for 20 minutes. At the completion of the session, facilitators rotated to the next group to incorporate all of the participants' views on each topic area. Remarks were collated from all sessions. Once all comments were recorded on butchers' paper, facilitators listed 5 priority points which were fed back to the wider group at the end of the workshop. The contents of this report have emerged as a result.

Workshop participants identified community ownership, empowerment, consultation and partnerships as essential elements in all areas of Indigenous health promotion.

Building Healthy Public Policy

Healthy public policy needs to acknowledge, include and accommodate Indigenous people. This means having policies that are flexible, equitable, accessible and responsive to Indigenous culture. Healthy public policy for Indigenous communities will be developed when Indigenous health professionals and communities contribute to each stage of development and implementation. This includes identifying the underlying issues and needs of the community; planning of and decision making about the proposed course of action; overseeing the implementation of such public policies and the final stages of evaluation and feedback. In particular the translation and implementation of healthy public policy can be improved in Indigenous communities not only through the active involvement of and consultation with Indigenous health professionals and communities but also through effective and ongoing partnerships that enable Indigenous control and so that communities have ownership of the policies that will have an impact on their health.

Strengthen Community Action

Community action for Indigenous people means taking ownership and control over what happens in their communities, as well as making empowered and informed decisions. Community action means working with communities to prioritise the needs of the community and to ensure that these needs are addressed. Community action is necessary to address every aspect of community life – holistically – rather than focusing on individual aspects of health.

Indigenous health professionals can strengthen community action by engaging and consulting communities in culturally appropriate ways; forming partnerships; building the capacity of communities to ensure that they are empowered to make their own decisions; showing respect and support for the community and ultimately bridging the gap between Indigenous health professionals and the community.

The implementation of community action in Indigenous communities can be improved by identifying the grass roots issues and involving the community in all stages of the process. Community action needs to be meaningful and culturally appropriate for Indigenous communities. This involves recognising the skills of the

community and developing these skills by providing training and education that will empower community members to become more informed decision makers.

Creating Supportive Environments

Supportive environments mean having a safe and sustainable environment for Indigenous people. In particular this involves having healthy workplaces that support and encourage workers and that include positive practices such as debriefing and supervising staff, providing mentoring and recognising the importance of gender balances.

Indigenous health professionals play an important role in developing community skills to create supportive environments for health. Indigenous health professionals can develop these skills by providing accredited training, workforce development and opportunities for career advancement of Aboriginal Health Workers. Indigenous health professionals can also empower communities by developing youth skills and leadership qualities as well as building on existing strengths of family and kin.

Develop Personal Skills

Indigenous Australians need personal knowledge and skills for health. This means improving literacy and health literacy, particularly maternal education, and having an understanding of the health system, medical terminology and available resources.

Indigenous health professionals can contribute to the development of communities' knowledge and skills by building on existing capacities needed for health promotion, empowering communities to act and play a greater role in the health system and by providing support mechanisms such as "buddying" systems, networking and counselling. Skills development needs to incorporate training that is culturally specific to Indigenous people.

Reorient Health Services

Reorienting health services means changing the mainstream medical model to ensure it is appropriate for and respectful of Indigenous people. This involves strengthening Indigenous presence in the health workforce (including management, public health and health care), communicating with communities, integrating service delivery,

collaborating between disciplines within the health system, and measuring outcomes in Indigenous terms.

Health service delivery in Indigenous communities can be improved by strengthening community control and developing Indigenous models of access and care, educating Indigenous people in remote areas about health and health care, increasing the number of Indigenous health professionals engaged in the delivery of health care services and increasing access by bringing specialists to the community.

The reorientation of health services should take place in conjunction with improved education in schools on health and health benefits and cultural awareness of medical professionals and non Indigenous people.

Conclusion

The workshop provided a unique opportunity for health professionals to discuss health promotion in an Indigenous context. Generally it was perceived that there are nuances between mainstream health promotion as expressed in the Ottawa Charter, and Indigenous health promotion. The workshop identified the need to expand and progress the debate about the elements that are vital to include in an Indigenous health promotion model. The following recommendations are an opportunity to further explore this initiative:

Recommendations

1. That an Indigenous Health Promotion model be developed as a framework to guide health promotion policy, practice and research.
2. That this model be based on the priority findings from the Australian Indigenous Health Promotion Network workshop in Alice Springs. The essential elements of the model are:
 - community ownership and leadership
 - empowerment
 - consultation
 - partnerships

3. That there be a high level of consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health promotion professionals in developing the model.
4. That there be a further workshop/forum to discuss and progress the model.
5. That the Australian Indigenous Health Promotion Network and partners work towards putting the Indigenous Health Promotion model on policy agenda

APPENDIX 1 - Questions to assist group discussion

Build Healthy Public Policy

1. What does 'healthy public policy' mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
2. How can the impact of healthy public policy be enhanced for Indigenous communities?
3. What mechanisms are you aware of that would assist this?
4. How can Indigenous health professionals and communities contribute to the development of healthy public policy?
5. What Indigenous cultural attributes need to be a part of the decision making processes to develop healthy public policy?
6. What steps need to be taken to incorporate a cultural context in healthy public policy development?
7. How can the translation and implementation of healthy public policy be improved in Indigenous communities?

Create Supportive Environments

1. What does 'supportive environments' mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
2. How can Indigenous health professionals develop their communities' skills to create supportive environments for health?
3. What Indigenous cultural attributes need to be a part of the decision making process to create supportive environments?

Strengthen Community Action

1. What does 'community action' mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
2. How can Indigenous health professionals strengthen community action?
3. What is the cultural context in which community action takes place?
4. How can the implementation of community action in Indigenous communities be improved?

Develop Personal Skills

1. What personal knowledge and skills do Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people need for health?
2. How can Indigenous health professionals contribute to building the knowledge and skills that people and communities need to become and stay healthy?
3. What cultural sensitivity needs to be incorporated as part of skills development?

Reorient Health Services

1. What does 'reorienting health services' mean to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people?
2. How can health services be enhanced for Indigenous communities?
3. How can the provision of health delivery in Indigenous communities be improved?
4. What is the cultural context around this issue?

References

World Health Organisation. *Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion*. Geneva, WHO; 1986.