

## Frontier stories: nursing and midwifery politics, policy and practice over time

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The provision of health care in the Northern Territory is characterised by geographical, climatic and cultural diversity. The goal of improving the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal people is core business for nurses and midwives. However, the work of nurses and midwives does not occur in isolation. The interaction between politics, policy and practice both encourages and stifles innovation; influencing health service models, health outcomes, and recruitment and retention of the health care workforce. There is also a sense of history repeating itself, the same mistakes being made over and over, old models resurrected, and successful models having only short lifespans.

This paper presents research based on the oral histories of Northern Territory nurses and midwives. The oral histories are unique in that they contribute data from health professionals who have spent the majority of their working lives in the Northern Territory. The stories have been analysed to identify recurring themes that are relevant to the current context of health care delivery for remote and Aboriginal populations.

The new knowledge generated from analysing these stories provides an insight into how professional practice is influenced by the politics and policy of remote and Indigenous health. The findings are heartening: they demonstrate that individual health professionals can use their influence to improve decision making, or make good of poor decisions at the political and policy level. The lessons learnt from the reported experiences of nurses and midwives translate more broadly across professions and are relevant both today and for the future.