

## Online resource to empower Indigenous communities to reduce harmful substance use

**Avinna Trzesinski**

Australian Indigenous Health/InfoNet, Edith Cowan University, WA

### Abstract

**Objective:** To describe the process of creating an online resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and Elders about alcohol and other drugs (AOD) that is evidence based and culturally appropriate.

**Background:** The harms associated with substance use are greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous people. The aim of the online resource (Community portal) is to provide evidence based and culturally appropriate AOD information to empower those working to reduce harmful AOD use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

**Methods:** Community consultation was undertaken to determine the needs of the target audience. Focus groups were held in three locations around Australia, and a national online survey conducted. A national Reference Group and collaborating centres provided advice and guidance. The content of the portal is based on the results of the consultations.

**Results:** Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members wanted information presented in an easy accessible format, in plain language and with visual content. Information considered important was: facts about AOD; help for communities, families, young people, and offenders; social and emotional and cultural wellbeing; and successful stories.

**Conclusion:** The Community portal was developed with input from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It is a culturally appropriate online resource that provides evidence based information about AOD with the aim to empower Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working to reduce harmful AOD use in their communities.

**Recommendation:** Use community consultations and strength-based approach for the development of AOD resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

### Objective

To describe the process of creating an online resource for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and Elders about alcohol and other drugs (AOD) that is evidence based and culturally relevant, using a strength-based approach.

### Background

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people experience disproportionate levels of harm from AOD compared with other Australians.<sup>1,2</sup> AOD use contributes a significant amount of the total burden of disease and injury for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.<sup>3</sup> Minimising AOD related harm can reduce the risks of injury, chronic diseases, mental health and social problems, and improve overall health and wellbeing.<sup>2,4</sup>

Using the Internet to provide evidence based AOD information to audiences who may not be reached through other media is identified as a strategy in the *National drug strategy 2010-2015*.<sup>5</sup> A key strategy of the *National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health plan 2013-2023* is to 'improve access to health information including eHealth, recognising that for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, language or lack of transport may be an additional barrier to accessing health services'.<sup>6,p17</sup> The Internet is a major source of health information in modern society,<sup>7</sup> and there is a move toward services, support and information being provided in a digital format.<sup>8</sup> The Internet is also seen as an emerging tool for providing information for hard to reach groups.<sup>5</sup> The expansion of the Internet in rural and remote regions of Australia is increasing, providing more opportunities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to access a variety of information services and social media platforms.<sup>9,10,11,12</sup> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are increasingly using

information and communication technologies (ICT) and it has been found to promote empowerment, social participation and improvements in Indigenous health.<sup>10,13</sup>

Community members are often involved with the prevention and treatment of those with AOD problems.<sup>2,14</sup> Community and family relationships can play an important role in achieving better outcomes for an individual.<sup>14</sup> These family and community members may also need help to assist those with an AOD problem.<sup>15</sup>

Interventions that are delivered in culturally meaningful ways have been found to be more effective than mainstream services (2). In the development of resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, a strength-based approach can improve outcomes.<sup>16,17</sup> This can be achieved by:<sup>2,16</sup>

- working in partnership and consulting with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people
- providing information in the context of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander understanding of health and social and emotional wellbeing
- focusing on positive outcomes and what is working (success stories)
- using culturally relevant and credible information.

The Australian Indigenous Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre Community portal aligns with objectives from the *National drug strategy 2010-2015* by aiming to improve knowledge of AOD issues, reduce stigma, improve community understanding and attitudes, and support community based initiatives.<sup>5</sup>

## Methods

The following steps were integral to the development of the Community portal content and format:

- establishment of a national Reference Group
- collaboration with, and obtaining advice and guidance from Reference Group members and collaborating centres
- engagement with, and feedback from community members and AOD workers through focus groups and an online survey.

## Recruitment

Development of the Community portal began with the recruitment of community members and AOD workers for focus groups, through networks of the Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet*, its collaborating centres, the National Drug Research Institute (NDRI), National Centre for Education and Training on Addiction (NCETA) and National Drug and Alcohol Research Centre (NDARC) and the national Reference Group members.

An online survey was conducted to gain feedback from a national audience. The aim of the survey was to find out: what drugs are of most concern to the community; how and where people access information about AOD; who needs most support; and what type of information and resources would be most useful for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and Elders in a Community portal.

## Engagement

Four focus groups were conducted between May and August 2014 and held in three locations across Australia; Sydney, New South Wales (NSW); Adelaide, South Australia (SA); and Perth, Western Australia (WA). Participants were identified and recruited from the Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet*, collaborating centres and Reference group networks. Participants included community members, as well as health professionals, of which some were involved in delivering AOD services. The focus groups aimed to ascertain the information needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members and Elders about alcohol and other drugs.

## Data collection and analysis

### National online survey

The survey was conducted from 4 June to 1 August 2014 and data was collected from 102 respondents. Of the respondents, 46 were non-Indigenous. For the purposes of this project, only the 56 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents' data was included. The data was summarised into a report and compared with information from the focus group findings.

### Focus groups

The focus groups were held in a culturally appropriate location in a quiet spacious room. Each focus group took an average of two hours and was recorded with written consent, as well as scribed by a designated person.

Data was generated from 32 participants from four focus groups. It included urban, rural and remote perspectives. Each group was asked the same set of 9 questions; however, the semi-structured nature of the discussions enabled information to emerge freely from conversations between individuals in the focus groups. The focus groups explored ideas about what type of information and resources could be provided and what were considered the most important and relevant issues.

The transcripts of audiotaped focus groups, scribed notes, and survey summary report were compared and critically analysed by a member of the research team. Key themes were identified using a theoretical approach to thematic analysis.<sup>18</sup> Coding was done manually due to the small size of the group and responses were de-identified upon request of the participants.

## Results

Information priorities and themes were identified from the findings of the online survey and focus groups. Only themes that remained within parameters of the project were used. These shaped the content and format of the Community portal. Valuable guidance and cultural knowledge was provided by the national Reference Group, which represents a wide range of organisations and communities.

### Online survey

There were a total of 56 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander respondents with representation from all Australian states and territories and geographical areas. Forty-two per cent (42%) indicated they got information about AOD from the Internet. Ninety per cent (90%) wanted information on where to go for help and different types of drugs, and 80% wanted information about treatment options and local programs and projects. Other suggestions were to provide success stories and information about local support groups.

### Focus groups

The focus group participants provided information on: the main substance use issues in their community; where they accessed information about alcohol and other drugs; what issues were important; and what type of information and resources would be useful to them and their community for an online resource.

Participants indicated that:

- all drugs were of concern but the biggest problems were harms related to alcohol, cannabis, and tobacco use
- the use of emerging drugs like ice (methamphetamine), the misuse of prescription drugs (pharmaceuticals) and sniffing of volatile substances was an issue for some communities
- accessing appropriate and evidence based information about alcohol and other drugs was important
- young people (young men, women, and offenders) and families impacted by alcohol and other drugs needed the most support.

Participants wanted information on:

- different drug types, where to go for help, and treatment options
- mental health and substance use, alcohol and pregnancy, and youth-specific issues.

Other priorities and themes identified were a preference for:

- the use of Aboriginal symbols and terminology
- the use of plain language
- the use of visual content (pictures/images)
- the use of audio visual content
- provision of factsheets and service listings
- sharing of successful stories and programs for community empowerment
- the use of real community role models.

### Limitations

Due to the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, providing a national online resource means that it is difficult to provide localised information to meet community specific needs. We have aimed to address this by featuring programs from a cross section of communities. It was noted by focus group participants that evidence based information about AOD is universal.

Limited time and funds prohibited conducting focus groups in each state, and in regional areas. We aimed to address this limitation by collecting data from a national survey.

### Future directions

The aim of the Community portal is to provide evidence based and culturally relevant information for community members and Elders about alcohol and other drugs, to enhance local initiatives in reducing harmful substance use in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. An evaluation after 6 months of implementation is planned, to determine effectiveness and acceptability among communities. Feedback from the evaluation will inform enhancements and new developments.

### Conclusion

The harms associated with substance use are greater for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people than non-Indigenous people. A strength-based approach and community consultation were undertaken to determine the needs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in relation to AOD information. The community indicated a preference for AOD information presented in an easy accessible format, in plain language and with visual content. Information considered important was: facts about AOD; help for communities, families, young people, and offenders; social and emotional and cultural wellbeing; and the sharing of success stories and programs. The Community portal was developed with input from the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. It is a culturally appropriate online resource that provides evidence based information about AOD with the aim to empower Elders and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people working to reduce harmful AOD use in their communities.

### Recommendation

Use community consultations and strength-based approach for the development of AOD resources for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

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### Presenter

**Avinna Trzesinski** is a research officer at the Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet*, based at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. The Health *InfoNet* is a free to access web resource that contributes to 'closing the gap' in health between Indigenous and other Australians by developing and maintaining the evidence base to inform practice and policy. A member of the team since 2011, Avinna has research responsibilities including the Australian Indigenous Alcohol and Other Drugs Knowledge Centre resource, Indigenous eye health and CQI. Avinna has a Bachelor of Science (Health Promotion) from Curtin University and is currently undertaking a Masters of Public Health at University of Western Australia.