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Working 'better together': guaranteed successful meningococcal W mass vaccination clinics across South Australia

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Background

AHCSA is the peak body for Aboriginal health in SA and is committed to ensuring all Aboriginal people enjoy a high quality of health and wellbeing. In late 2017, an outbreak of meningococcal W in central Australia and in parts of South Australia (SA) affected mostly young Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Meningococcal disease is an uncommon but serious infection. The initial outbreak response led by SA Health offered community-wide vaccination to two regions where increased cases had been detected. Subsequently a time-limited SA Health-funded program was made available to Aboriginal people aged 1-19 years in regional and remote SA. Delivery of the vaccine program to the population at risk was largely the responsibility of primary care providers. Rural and remote Aboriginal health services are frequently under-resourced and required support to make these vaccinations accessible to Aboriginal people across SA.

Aim

Support the coordination and delivery of meningococcal ACWY vaccination programs in Aboriginal community controlled health services (ACCHSs) in regional/remote SA.

Method

AHCSA public health staff consulted with local ACCHSs, councils and schools regarding support needs to ensure people were aware of/had access to the vaccine during the funded program. Analysis of support requirements was completed for each region and funding sourced.

Results

AHCSA collaborated with Umoona Tjutagku Health Service and coordinated the Coober Pedy regional response. Vaccines weren't available prior to a three-day, AHCSA supported clinic where 130 people were vaccinated. At Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta, 32 people were vaccinated prior to four-day clinics where an additional 325 people were vaccinated. In Whyalla at Nunyara

Aboriginal Health Service, 154 clients were vaccinated prior to the AHCSA supported three-day clinics. A further 164 people vaccinated.

Discussion

The funded program in SA responded to increased numbers of Aboriginal young people with the Men W strain including two communities where an outbreak was declared. In this situation it is important to ensure as many people are vaccinated in a short time period which requires activities beyond 'usual' primary care. This required stakeholder partnership with local communities to increase capacity and ensure equitable access. Collaboration and planning resulted in successful mass vaccination clinics across SA. Working 'better together' with Aboriginal communities was imperative to ensure tangible access to this time-limited vaccine.

Presenters

Mary-Anne Williams has a BA in Nursing Science and a Graduate Diploma in Communicable Diseases. She has been employed at the Aboriginal Health Council of South Australia (AHCSA) since 2009. Her achievements during this time include: Inaugural Immunisation Excellence Award (University of SA), implementation of pandemic influenza infection control plans in twelve Aboriginal community-controlled health services in SA, co-author of the SA Aboriginal Pandemic Plan, and SA mass vaccination plan, development of 'Adult Health Checks Made Easy' resource (winner of a national Excellence in Indigenous Health Award for Improving Access to Primary Health Care). In addition, as a clinical educator Mary-Anne has assisted with delivery of Aboriginal Primary Health Care Certificates at AHCSA over the past six years. Mary-Anne is currently the coordinator of the Maternal Health Tackling Smoking Program at AHCSA, where there has been a reduction of 13.3% of pregnant Aboriginal women smoking since 2011 in SA. The aim of the program is to have healthy babies born to healthy mothers in smoke-free environments. Mary-Anne has a keen interest in all Aboriginal maternal health programs and currently is the representative for the National Aboriginal Community Controlled Health Organisation on the National Immunisation Committee.

Alicia Jackson is an Adnyamathanha woman, from the Far North Flinders Ranges which is located about seven hours north of Adelaide. Alicia is currently employed as an Aboriginal Health Practitioner with Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta, which is about a four-hour drive north of Adelaide. Alicia commenced employment as a medical receptionist at Pika Wiya Health Service in 2011; she then set her sights on training and completed her Certificate IV in Primary Health Care Practice in 2017. Alicia is committed and passionate about improving the health and wellbeing of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and ensuring that they are receiving the best possible holistic care. Alicia played a vital role within the Port Augusta community and surrounding areas, participating in the meningococcal ACWY mass vaccination clinics, which were undertaken at Pika Wiya Health Service in Port Augusta in 2018.