HEALTH AND WELLBEING SERVICES SUPPORTING ABORIGINAL TERTIARY STUDENTS IN THE INNER EAST – *UNDERSTANDING THE PICTURE*

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Inner East Primary Care Partnership acknowledges the traditional custodians of the land on which our offices and pays respect to Elders past and present. We acknowledge the sorrow of the Stolen Generations and the impacts of colonisation on Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander People. We also recognise the resilience, strength and pride of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Note on language: Throughout this report, the term 'Aboriginal' is used to refer to all Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ACRONYMS AND DEFINITIONS

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
Abstudy	Centrelink payment that helps with costs for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians who are studying or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship.
AIME	Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience
ALO	Aboriginal Liaison Officer (operate in hospitals)
ATAPS	Access to Allied Psychological Services
ATSI	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander
CASA	Centre Against Sexual Assault
CCSS	Care Coordination and Supplementary Services. Program staff work with GPs to help improve access to their services, specialist services and allied health for Aboriginal people with chronic disease.
CHS	Community Health Service
DHHS	Victorian Department of Health and Human Services
EMPHN	Eastern Melbourne Primary Health Network
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage
IEP	Indigenous Enabling Program
IEPCP	Inner East Primary Care Partnership
IEU	Indigenous Education Unit
IKE	Institute of Koori Education (Deakin University)
ITAS	Indigenous Tutoring Assistance Scheme
KESO	Koorie Education Support Officer (operate in schools)
KLO	Koorie Liaison Officer (operate in TAFEs)
Koolin Balit	Victorian Government's strategic directions for Aboriginal health for 2012 to 2022
LAECG	Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group
LGA	Local Government Area
LIN	Local Indigenous Network
LLEN	Local Learning and Employment Network
MEGPN	Melbourne East General Practitioners Network
PIP Indigenous Health Incentive	Practice Incentives Program Indigenous Health Incentive aims to support general practices and Indigenous health services to provide better health care for Aboriginal patients, including best practice management of chronic disease.
RAJAC	Regional Aboriginal Justice Advisory Committee
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
VACCA	Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency
VAEAI	Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated
VAHS	Victoria Aboriginal Health Service
VCAL	Victorian Certificate of Applied Learning
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education
VET	Vocational Education and Training
Wurreker Strategy	The Vocational Education and Training (VET) strategy for Koorie students developed through VAEAI's partnership with the Victorian State Government.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are a high number of tertiary institutions in the Inner East region of Melbourne (comprising the Local Government Areas of Boroondara, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse). These are Monash University, Deakin University, Swinburne University, Swinburne TAFE, Box Hill Institute, Holmesglen Institute of TAFE and Federation Training.

The aim of this project was to develop an initial understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East including both Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary student support services and local community services. This project aimed to examine how Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) could assist with resourcing or supporting these agencies. It was anticipated that if Aboriginal students are well supported to participate and succeed in their studies, this will also ultimately benefit their longer term health and wellbeing.

This project involved collating information on tertiary institutions in the Inner East, conducting a review of relevant literature and consulting with the following to determine services provided to Aboriginal tertiary students and the gaps in service: Aboriginal and mainstream staff at tertiary institutions in the Inner East, mainstream community service workers, Aboriginal organisations and former Aboriginal tertiary students.

The literature review found that there is a positive correlation between level of education and social wellbeing for Aboriginal people, but there are a number of barriers which are faced by Aboriginal students impacting on their ability to enter and succeed at tertiary study. Having Aboriginal specific support on campus is very important and has positive impacts on student access, retention and success.

This project has found that whilst all tertiary institutions had Aboriginal workers, not all had a dedicated Aboriginal space and some campuses did not have an Aboriginal worker on site, leading to a gap in services for students attending those campuses. It was found that Aboriginal workers on campus provide a flexible and wide-ranging service to Aboriginal students which is very valuable to them.

There is a relatively low usage rate of mainstream tertiary and community services by Aboriginal students and the barriers to using these services is discussed. Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary services are keen to enhance and develop partnerships with local community services and a number of partnership opportunities are identified, which can be supported by IEPCP. Given that some campuses struggle to provide student services due to funding issues or limitations to services, partnering with other organisations is one way to fill gaps in services they may otherwise not be able to provide to students.

BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT FOR PROJECT

The idea for this project arose out of a conversation (S Missing 2015, pers. comm. 11 June) between Dr Harry Majewski, Chief Executive Officer of Inner East Community Health Service (IECHS) and the Inner East Primary Care Partnership (IEPCP) Executive team, regarding the challenges of conducting a Koolin Balit project in the Inner East region due to the low Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population (the term "Aboriginal" will be used from here on). Of the 591,098 residents in the Inner East, 1042 or 0.2% identify as Aboriginal (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2013). The IEPCP Executive team identified that there are a high number of tertiary institutions in the Inner East and were interested in determining if the IEPCP could provide better support to community organisations assisting Aboriginal students attending these tertiary institutions.

This project was funded by Victorian Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS) Koolin Balit funding. (Koolin Balit is the Victorian Government's strategic directions for Aboriginal health for 2012 to 2022). The Project Plan was approved by the Regional Manager Aboriginal Health, Southern and Eastern Metro Health, DHHS and a Project Officer was employed at 0.6 EFT from July – November 2015.

Project Aim and Objectives

The aim of this project was to develop an initial understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East region of Melbourne (comprising the Local Government Areas of Boroondara, Manningham, Monash and Whitehorse), including both Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary student support services and local community services. This project also aimed to examine how the IEPCP could assist with resourcing or supporting these agencies, with a focus on assisting agencies to work in partnership and collaboration to enhance the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal tertiary students. It was anticipated that if Aboriginal students are well supported to participate and succeed in their studies, this will also ultimately benefit their longer term health and wellbeing.

The objectives of this project were to:
- Gather information on the population of Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Identify the health and wellbeing services available to and utilised by Aboriginal students in tertiary institutions within the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Identify whether there is a need for improved links between local services to maximise the health and wellbeing of Aboriginal students in tertiary institutions in the Inner East region of Melbourne
- Explore what IEPCP could do to assist services supporting Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East
- Summarise project findings and issues identified, making recommendations for change where applicable.

METHODOLOGY

Tertiary institutions in the Inner East

Information on tertiary institutions in the Inner East was collated from the following sources:

- Tertiary institution websites
- Annual reports
- Interviews with tertiary institution staff.

Exact numbers of Aboriginal students were difficult to obtain due to lack of availability of data and the desire to focus on qualitative data rather than numbers.

Review of relevant literature

A search of journal articles relevant to the project was conducted utilising the Monash University library search function. The following search terms were used in various combinations:

- Indigenous education
- Young adults/Young people
- Indigenous Australia
- Australian Aboriginal young adults
- University student
- Student support services
- Australian Aboriginal tertiary students
- Australian Aboriginal university students service usage.

Further reports and relevant articles were identified from relevant websites e.g. Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Incorporated, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare and Australia Bureau of Statistics, and through contacts made during the project.

Consultations with key stakeholders

In order to understand the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East, a total of 32 stakeholders were interviewed by phone and face to face using semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative data (see Appendices for interview questions).

Staff from the following services were interviewed during the project (see Tables 1 to 4).

Table 1. Staff from Aboriginal support services in tertiary institutions who were interviewed.

Tertiary Institution	Staff members/Department
Box Hill Institute (Box Hill campus)	• Koori Liaison Officer • Manager, Student Support Services
Deakin University, Institute of Koorie Education (IKE) (Geelong campus)	• Coordinator, Student Services
Federation Training (Bairnsdale campus)	• Koori Liaison Officer, Eastern campuses • ITAS VET Worker
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Chadstone campus)	• Indigenous Education Consultant
Monash University (Clayton campus)	• Indigenous Student Recruitment Officer, Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit • Indigenous Academic Engagement Coordinator, Yulendj Indigenous Engagement Unit
Swinburne University/TAFE	• Project Manager, Indigenous Futures Collaboration Project

Table 2. Staff from mainstream support services in tertiary institutions who were interviewed.

Tertiary Institution	Staff members/Department
Box Hill Institute (Box Hill campus)	• Manager, Student Services
Deakin University (Burwood campus),	• Executive Director, Division of Student Life • Director, Equity and Diversity Unit • Manager, Student Access and Equity (Waterfront Geelong campus).
Federation Training (Bairnsdale campus)	• Manager, The Bubble (Student Services)
Holmesglen Institute of TAFE (Chadstone campus)	• Manager, Student Services
Monash University (Clayton campus)	• Manager, Campus Community Division, Counselling and Mental Health Programs
Swinburne University/TAFE (Hawthorn campus)	• Manager, Student Development and Counselling • Manager, Student Equity & Access Ability

Table 3. Staff from mainstream support services in the local community who were interviewed.

Organisation	Staff members
Headspace, Hawthorn	• Centre Manager • Community Awareness Officer
Melbourne East General Practitioners Network (MEGPN), Burwood East	• Mental Health Nurse Team
Turning Point Alcohol & Drug Centre, Eastern Treatment Services, Box Hill	• Manager
Gateway Local Learning & Employment Network, Box Hill	• Executive Officer
EACH Youth and Family, Inner East, Nunawading	• Team Leader
Whitehorse Youth ConneXions	• Coordinator
Link Health and Community	• Health Promotion Manager

Table 4. Staff from Aboriginal support services in the community who were interviewed.

Organisation	Staff members
Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI), Northcote	• Metropolitan Melbourne Wurreker Broker
Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place, Croydon	• Manager • Youth and Health Officer

Aboriginal former students

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were conducted with three Aboriginal former nursing students who took part in the Aboriginal Nursing and Midwifery Cadetship through Monash Health. Names and contact details were provided by the Regional Manager Aboriginal Health, Southern and Eastern Metro Health, who had contacted all former students to check they were happy to participate in the project before the Project Officer made contact.

A Participant Information and Consent form was electronically distributed to all three participants, signed electronically and returned via email to the Project Officer. Interviews were conducted on the phone and ranged from 20 to 45 minutes. The Project Officer took handwritten notes which were then typed and emailed to participants for verification that the information contained was an accurate record of their responses. Themes were then extracted from the transcripts.

Literature review

Relevant reforms and policies

There are a number of reforms and policies which are relevant to Aboriginal tertiary students. Several of these are outlined below.

Council of Australian Governments and National Indigenous Reform Agreement

Educational attainment is correlated with a range of indicators of social wellbeing, therefore education has been a major focus in the strategy to 'close the gap' between the Australian Aboriginal and non-Indigenous populations. The Council of Australian Governments (COAG) has identified participation and attainment in vocational education and training (VET) and higher education as a progress measure for its Closing the Gap target of halving the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians by 2018 (Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision, 2014).

The National Indigenous Reform Agreement (NIRA) is one of six national agreements of COAG and is often referred to as the Closing the Gap Policy (COAG 2015). There are six COAG targets, with the following two relating to improving education and employment outcomes for Aboriginal people:

- halve the gap for Indigenous students in year 12 equivalent attainment by 2020; and
- halve the gap in employment outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a decade (VAEAI 2011).

Effective services are also a key component of the NIRA. COAG has specified that governments will reform service delivery systems to ensure that government funded services:

- deliver effective and accessible services that are taken up by Aboriginal people in urban and regional locations
- deliver culturally competent services that achieve good outcomes for Aboriginal people
- maximise linkages between Aboriginal-specific and mainstream services
- deliver service models that respond to high levels of mobility amongst Aboriginal people (SCRGSP 2014).

It is believed that achieving the above outcomes in education, employment and service delivery are a means of addressing one of the aspects of Aboriginal disadvantage (SCRGSP 2014; Dockery 2013).

Wurreker Strategy

The Wurreker Strategy is the Vocational Education and Training (VET) strategy for Aboriginal students developed through the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association Inc. (VAEAI) partnership with the Victorian State Government. VAEAI employs eight Wurreker brokers, with the Metropolitan Melbourne broker covering the Inner East area of Melbourne. Wurreker Brokers work with Aboriginal communities through Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs), training providers and industry groups to assess training needs and opportunities. The research conducted by the Wurreker Brokers informs the development of VAEAI's annual Koorie State Training Plan (VAEAI 2015).

Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council

The Indigenous Higher Education Advisory Council (IHEAC) established seven priority areas to advance the participation of Indigenous people in universities as follows (Universities Australia 2008):

- Priority 1: Encourage universities to work with schools and TAFE colleges and other registered training organisations to build pathways and raise levels of aspiration and confidence of Indigenous students.
- Priority 2: Develop a concerted strategy to improve the level of Indigenous undergraduate enrolment.
- Priority 3: Improve the level of Indigenous postgraduate enrolment, enhance Indigenous research and increase the number of Indigenous researchers.
- Priority 4: Improve the rates of success, retention and completion for Indigenous students.
- Priority 5: Enhance the prominence and status of Indigenous culture, knowledge and studies on campus.
- Priority 6: Increase the number of Indigenous people working in Australian universities.
- Priority 7: Improve the participation of Indigenous people in university governance and management.

According to Universities Australia (2008), the key areas for attention in these priority areas are improving the academic readiness of Aboriginal students, developing alternative pathways into higher education, providing academic and personal support for Aboriginal students once enrolled and improving financial support for students.

Aboriginal young people

Aboriginal young people comprise a small proportion of the total Australian youth population (3.7%), but represent 27% of the Aboriginal population; a higher proportion than for non-Aboriginal young people, which is 18% (AIHW 2011).This is due to higher rates of fertility and deaths occurring at younger ages in the Aboriginal population (AIHW 2015a).

Young Aboriginal Australians tend to have poorer health outcomes than non-Indigenous young people. The most common health problems in Aboriginal young people are mental health issues (e.g. anxiety and depression), substance use and injuries (AIHW 2011). Regarding mental health issues, a 2008 survey indicated that Aboriginal young people aged 18–24 years were more than twice as likely to report high or very high levels of psychological distress as non-Indigenous young people (33% compared to 14%) (AIHW 2011). The most common causes of psychological stress for Aboriginal young people were death of a family member or close friend in the previous year (32%), not being able to get a job (24%), serious illness or accident (20%) and alcohol or drug-related problems (15%) (AIHW 2011).

The links between education and health for Aboriginal people

A number of studies have shown a positive correlation between higher levels of education and social wellbeing for Aboriginal people. Not surprisingly, employment rates, income and financial security tend to show the highest correlation with higher levels of education (Biddle & Cameron 2012; ABS 2011). For example, full-time employment rates increased from 18% for Aboriginal adults with below Year 10 attainment, to 51% for those with Year 12 or a skilled vocational qualification, and 63% for those with a bachelor degree or higher (Universities Australia 2011). Higher education levels increase post-school options and life choices for Aboriginal people (Universities Australia 2011) and can also increase access to health-related services (ABS, 2012).

Higher levels of education also have a positive impact on other measures of wellbeing, such as social participation, self-reported happiness and the ability to have a say within the community (Biddle & Cameron 2012; ABS 2011). Impacts of education on health include increased self-assessed health, preventative service usage, improved health-related knowledge and ability to use this knowledge (Biddle & Cameron 2012; ABS 2012; ABS 2011). Non-Indigenous adults with lower levels of education have also been shown to be more likely to assess their health as fair or poor than those who had higher levels of education (ABS 2015). Higher levels of education in Aboriginal people are also correlated with lower smoking rates, less likelihood of living in overcrowded housing, less sedentary behaviour and lower rates of alcohol consumption and arrest (AIHW 2015a; ABS 2011).

Education statistics for Aboriginal people

Australian Aboriginal tertiary students are the most underrepresented minority group on Australian campuses (Day & Nolde 2009). Despite gains in Aboriginal education rates and success over recent years, a large gap still remains between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous outcomes, particularly at higher levels of education (ABS 2011).

Interestingly, Aboriginal students are more likely to enter higher education as mature aged students. Rather than going straight into tertiary education from school, many Aboriginal people go through periods of work, training and unemployment before entering TAFE or university (VAEAI 2011). This can mean higher levels of motivation as well as greater life experience, which can enable fulfilment of special entry requirements, but also means these students are likely to have more personal, family and cultural responsibilities (Brabham et al

2002), may have increased financial burdens (Naylor et al 2013) and may be less likely to have completed secondary school than younger people (McDonald 1987).

According to the 'On Track' annual survey conducted by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD) to monitor destination outcomes of school leavers, in 2014, 68% of Aboriginal Year 12 school leavers who completed the survey went on to education and training, compared to 78% of non-Indigenous school leavers (DEECD 2014b). Thirty three percent of Aboriginal students were studying a Bachelor degree compared with 55% of non-Indigenous students and Aboriginal students were more likely to be studying a certificate or diploma (25%) compared with non-Indigenous students (16%). Aboriginal students were also more likely to be completing an apprenticeship or traineeship (11%) compared with non-Indigenous students (7%) (DEECD 2014b). Box 1 and Box 2 below summarise the progress which is being made in closing the gap in education between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students, and the gaps which still exist.

Box 1. Progress made in closing the gap in education between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students

- School retention rates for Aboriginal full-time students from Year 7/8 to Year 12 increased from 36% in 2001 to 49% in 2011.
- The Australian government target to halve the Year 12 attainment gap between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous 20-24 year olds by 2020 is currently on track.
- The number of Aboriginal students enrolled in government subsidised vocational training grew 49 per cent between 2008 and 2013.
- The proportion of government subsidised enrolments undertaken by Aboriginal students in higher level courses (Certificate III through to Diploma and higher level) has risen from 38 per cent in 2008 to 52 per cent in 2013.
- Traineeship enrolments by Aboriginal students increased by 32% between 2008 and 2013 and apprenticeship enrolments increased by 49% during this time.
- The percentage of Aboriginal Year 12 completers entering university increased from 22 per cent in 2008 to 39 per cent in 2013.
- Between 2002 and 2012–13, the proportion of Indigenous 17–24 year olds who were participating in post-school education or training and/or were employed increased from 32% to 40%. The equivalent non-Indigenous rate remained around 75%, leading to a narrowing of the gap.
- In 2013, the extent to which Aboriginal students completed or passed their VET course was 74.5 per cent, a 10 percentage point increase since 2004.
- The gap in the VET pass rate between Aboriginal students and non-Indigenous students decreased from 14.2 percentage points in 2004 to 8.7 percentage points in 2013.
- The number of Aboriginal students in higher education increased from 9,329 in 2007 to 13,723 in 2013, a rise of around 47%.
- From 2001 to 2012, the higher education success rate for Aboriginal students increased from 65 per cent to 73 per cent.
- The gap in the higher education success rate between Aboriginal students and non-Indigenous students decreased from 22 percentage points in 2001 to 14 percentage points in 2012.
- There is little difference between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students in regard to the level of degree completions.
- Once Aboriginal students obtain a university entrance score they go to university with about the same probability as non-Indigenous students.

Sources: AIHW 2015b; AIHW 2015c; DEECD 2014a; SCRGSP 2014; DEET Victoria 2015; Taylor et al 2012; Biddle & Cameron 2012; ABS 2012.

Box 2. Gaps remaining in education between Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students

- There are low levels of aspiration to participate in higher education among Aboriginal school students.
- The numbers of Aboriginal students who leave school eligible for university are low, due to lower Australian Tertiary Admission Rank (ATAR), scores than non-Indigenous students.
- High-performing Aboriginal school students often do not go on to higher education.
- The majority of Aboriginal VET completions are for Certificate I to III qualifications, meaning a significant number of Aboriginal students are precluded from gaining higher education admission via articulation through VET.
- Aboriginal students:
  - made up 4.6% of all enrolments in vocational education and training (VET) in 2010.
  - are eight times more likely to be enrolled in a VET course than a university course. Non- Indigenous Australians are two times more likely.
  - are less likely to participate in university compared to non-Indigenous people
  - made up 1.4% of all enrolments in university in 2010
  - are less likely to be admitted to university on the basis of their prior educational attainment compared to non-Indigenous students.
- Aboriginal university students:
  - are more likely to be female compared to non-Indigenous students
  - are more likely to be mature-age (aged 25 years and over) compared to non- Indigenous students.
  - are more likely to use an external mode of attendance compared to non-Indigenous students.
  - are more likely to drop out or fail units in their first year.
  - are more likely to have lower retention rates compared to non-Indigenous students.
- An increase of over 600% is required for the number of Indigenous PhD candidates to reach population parity.
- Aboriginal professionals are less likely to have a degree or higher qualification compared to non-Indigenous professionals.
- Aboriginal managers are less likely to have a degree or higher qualification compared to non-Indigenous managers.

Sources: Behrendt et al 2012; ABS 2012; Universities Australia 2011

TAFE as a preferred option for many Aboriginal students

TAFEs are the largest providers of VET education in Victoria. Other providers are Adult and Community Education (ACE) providers and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) (VAEAI 2011). For many Aboriginal students TAFE is a preferred option to university for tertiary study. Statistics from 2012 show the participation rate for Aboriginal Australians aged 15–64 years in TAFE and VET was 24.1%, compared to 3.2% for university. In comparison, in the general population, 12.5% of 15–64 year olds participated in VET and 6.2% participated in university (SCRGSP 2014).

Kippen et al (2006) found that the attraction of TAFE over university included TAFE being perceived as more welcoming, less formal, more flexible and more culturally aware than university. University was seen to be more 'alien' to participants unless they had attended or worked in this environment, and there was a perception of a lack of information about university courses being provided to the Aboriginal community (Kippen et al 2006).

The Department of Education and Early Childhood Development Victoria (2013) state that TAFEs provide a wider range of courses at varying levels, deliver more courses leading to specialist or in shortage occupations, focus on training for trades and deliver foundation level courses. A wide range of support options (VAEAI 2011) and the opportunity to "learn as you earn" (Hossain et al 2008) may also make TAFE more attractive than university to Aboriginal students.

Barriers to education for Aboriginal students

There are a large number of barriers faced by Aboriginal students studying at TAFE or university. These are outlined below.

Lack of aspiration and encouragement to study

Stuart & Gorman's (2015) Aboriginal secondary school study participants felt that their school teachers didn't expect Aboriginal students to go on to tertiary study. This can also be an issue for Aboriginal communities and families who may not have had anyone in older generations attend tertiary education (Taylor et al 2012). One participant stated it was the "norm" for non-Indigenous students to go on to further study whereas this was not an expectation for Aboriginal young people (Stuart & Gorman 2015). It has been found that even high performing Aboriginal secondary school students have lower aspirations to further study than non-Indigenous students (SCRGSP 2014).

Young Aboriginal people may not know anyone who has gone on to tertiary study, making the prospect for themselves even more daunting with less ability for families to provide social support (Biddle & Cameron 2012; Kippen et al 2006). University can also seem daunting due to the higher academic expectation (Hossain et al 2008). Behrendt et al (2012) found that a lack of information about support services and financial assistance for Aboriginal students was also a barrier to tertiary education.

Previous negative educational experience

Many Aboriginal people have had negative experiences with education in the past, often over generations, leading to a negative view of education as well as a negative self-concept (Kippen et al 2006; Boulton-Lewis et al 2000). One example is students facing ridicule or alienation from secondary education subjects such as science or mathematics (Day & Nolde 2009). Low levels of literacy and numeracy can also make it difficult for Aboriginal students to continue their education (Nguyen 2010).

Family issues and obligations, including caring responsibilities

As has been stated earlier, many Aboriginal tertiary students are mature age and therefore are often burdened by caring responsibilities of children and family members who also may have poor health or be unemployed (Hillman 2005; Brabham et al 2002). They may be required to work to support the family, therefore have less time and capacity to study (Kippen et al 2006). More Aboriginal women than men study and consequently many are sole parents, increasing the difficulty of juggling study with parenting (Brabham et al 2002). Obligations to the Aboriginal community are also common such as kinship obligations, the need to attend funerals and pressure to maintain regular involvement with the local community (Lindsay et al 2005).

The difficulty of leaving close-knit rural communities

Many tertiary students, especially university students, are required to travel or move to cities or regional centres to study (Taylor et al 2012). This can be a very isolating experience for students leaving close-knit rural communities and homesickness and difficulty in adjusting to TAFE or university life can lead to withdrawal from study (Sharrock & Lockyer 2008; Kippen et al 2006). Leaving family and friends and making new friends and connections can make

the adjustment to tertiary study difficult for those with a close connection to their community (Hillman 2005). Tertiary institutions can feel hostile, culturally foreign, cold and impersonal which can lead to a lack of feeling of belonging and student withdrawal (Day & Nolde 2009; Mceetya Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001; Foley 1996). Even when students do have an Aboriginal community close to their place of study they may not feel connected to them, leading to further feelings of isolation (Lindsay et al 2005).

Lack of study skills and supports

Sharrock & Lockyer (2008) state that some Aboriginal students are less prepared for their courses than non-Indigenous students, rate the quality of their teaching as low and report difficulties in achieving the required standard of work. Other barriers mentioned include poor support structures for academic and socio-economic issues, and poor relationships between ITAS tutors and students (Sharrock & Lockyer 2008; Lindsay et al 2005). Foley (1996) found that 50% of students did not know how to study or how to organise study techniques or routines, whilst Day & Nolde (2009) found three main barriers to academic success identified by students: difficulty writing essays and managing time, poor communication about resources available to them including support programs, and not knowing what was needed to succeed in their first year. Inadequate and insensitive orientation programs has also been mentioned as a deterrent to Aboriginal student success (Day & Nolde 2009).

Financial stress, difficulty paying fees and lack of knowledge of managing finances

Financial difficulties are common for Aboriginal students, with Hillman (2005) finding 39% of Aboriginal students reported difficulties in paying course fees and other study-related costs such as textbooks, clinical placements, uniforms, and residential course requirements (Lindsay et al 2005). Foley (1996) found that 30% of students struggled to handle their financial affairs. Of even greater concern is the finding that 25% of Aboriginal students regularly went without food or other basic materials (Day & Nolde 2009). Day & Nolde (2009) also found that Aboriginal students were more likely to take out larger study loans and work more in paid employment than non-Indigenous students. Having to move from a rural area also increases costs associated with moving and paying for accommodation and transport to their institution (Taylor et al 2012; Hillman 2005). Those students who choose to remain living at home can face long travel times to and from their place of study, further increasing financial pressures (Day & Nolde 2009).

All Aboriginal participants of Stuart & Gorman's (2015) study stated that without financial support they could not complete their degrees in the required time, if at all. Hillman (2005) also notes that Aboriginal students may belong to more than one equity group. For example, apart from being Aboriginal, they may also be from a rural or isolated location, a low socioeconomic background or have English as their second language.

Lack of Aboriginal staff within tertiary institutions

Although there are more Aboriginal staff in tertiary institutions than previously, there are a lack of Aboriginal staff within the mainstream university system (Kippen et al 2006). For example VAEAI (2011) found that although all Victorian universities have an Indigenous Unit, Aboriginal employment falls well below the national average of 1%. This has impacts on the access, retention, participation, motivation and completion of tertiary study by Aboriginal people (Universities Australia 2011) as students lack adequate Aboriginal mentors and supports on campus (Lindsay et al 2005).

Lack of cultural safety and experiencing racism

Aboriginal students may struggle with the traditional Western education system which emphasises individuality, formal lecture/tutorial format, structure, inquiry and verbalising (Boulton-Lewis et al 2000; Kippen et al 2006). In contrast, Aboriginal learning is usually spontaneous and relies on repetition and listening (Boulton-Lewis et al 2000). Some tertiary institutions show a lack of flexibility in course delivery and requirements, with curriculum not

being culturally appropriate or safe for Aboriginal students (Sharrock & Lockyer, 2008; Nakata & Chin 2008; Boulton-Lewis et al 2000). For example, students may face a lack of understanding from staff regarding the need for time away from study to attend to family commitments such as funerals and illness (Lindsay et al 2005). A lack of visible cultural items such as Aboriginal flags on campus can also discourage study for Aboriginal students (Lindsay et al 2005).

Unfortunately racism is experienced by Aboriginal tertiary students, whether it be overt or more subtle (Mceetya Taskforce on Indigenous Education, 2001), with some students experiencing insensitivity and lack of respect from staff due to lack of cultural awareness (Kippen et al 2006). All of Stuart & Gorman's (2015) study participants stated they had experienced racist remarks during their course of study. Kippen et al (2006) believe that some universities continue to perpetuate institutionalised racism and that the perceived lack of information regarding university courses, support and cultural safety within some universities may be interpreted as systemic discrimination against Aboriginal people.

Support services for Aboriginal tertiary students

A number of support strategies have been set up within TAFE and universities since the mid-1980's to improve Aboriginal participation, access and outcomes in tertiary education (Nakata et al 2008). These strategies are aimed at assisting Aboriginal students to increase wellbeing and engagement with education, improve skills, connect with social supports and address financial and personal issues (Naylor et al 2013).

Strategies to increase participation in tertiary education include TAFEs and universities conducting outreach in schools, providing pre-entry university experience programs and utilising marketing strategies to encourage Aboriginal people into tertiary education (Naylor et al 2013). There are several different pathway options into TAFE and higher education, which make it easier for students without the usual prerequisites to participate. For TAFE, these include starting TAFE courses prior to completing Year 12, completing an apprenticeship or traineeship, or completing VET in schools as part of VCE or VCAL (VAEAI 2011). For Aboriginal students entering university without prerequisites, most Australian universities offer special and flexible admissions policies, foundation, bridging and enabling courses, specific programs and strategies and scholarships (Day & Nolde 2009; Nakata et al 2008).

Innovative modes of course delivery

Providing Aboriginal tertiary students with flexible modes of learning increases student success and retention (Sharrock & Lockyer 2008; Lindsay et al 2005). These include "block" mode delivery, where a number of weeks of teaching per year is completed on campus, with the student living off campus at home for the rest of the time. "Reverse block" mode delivery, is where students receive visits from teaching staff over the academic year where they live or work (Sharrock & Lockyer 2008). Combined with online and other flexible learning modes, this type of delivery allows students from rural areas to access tertiary education and is considered to be culturally supportive as it allows students to remain close to their family, community and country (Sharrock & Lockyer 2008).

Indigenous Education Units and Koorie Liaison Officers

Indigenous Education Units (IEUs) are available in all Australian universities and Koorie Liaison Officers (KLOs) are available in all TAFEs, and although they differ in their size and services they provide, they play a very important role in attracting, supporting and increasing retention of Aboriginal students (Stuart & Gorman 2015; Behrendt et al 2012; VAEAI 2011; Day & Nolde 2009; Kippen et al 2006). Tertiary institutions with multiple campuses may not have a physical unit available on each site (Behrendt et al 2012).

Services IEUs and KLOs provide to students include computer and internet access, lockers, tutoring, a safe and welcoming place to socialise with other Aboriginal students, connection with the local Aboriginal community, knowledge of institution special entry conditions, course information, supports and academic requirements, tutoring, mentoring and access to counselling, financial, social and welfare support and career advice (Stuart & Gorman 2015; Behrendt et al 2012; Harnett 2012; Trudgett 2009; Foley 1996; Miller 2005).

IEUs and KLOs may also provide first year orientation and support programs for Aboriginal students to assist them in the transition to higher education (Naylor et al 2013). These programs are very valuable to students, assisting them to develop friendships and a peer support network, as well as increasing Aboriginal student retention (Trudgett 2009; Sharrock & Lockyer 2008; Lindsay et al 2005). Some IEUs and KLOs also conduct teaching and research as part of their roles (Behrendt et al 2012) and many deliver Indigenous specific courses and provide cultural awareness training to tertiary institution staff (Miller 2005).

Some research has shown that unfortunately some IEUs in tertiary institutions are not being accessed by Aboriginal students on campus (Trudgett 2009; Miller 2005; Lindsay et al 2005). Causes of this include lack of knowledge of the IEU by students, high workload of IEU staff, lack of identification of Aboriginal students by staff, poor data collection on Aboriginal student numbers and Aboriginal students choosing not to identify (Trudgett 2009; Miller 2005). Lindsay et al (2005) found that not all study participants found their university IEU to be supportive of them as students, with some having negative experiences and others not being aware the Unit existed. Mainstream student services also provide support services for Aboriginal students (Naylor et al 2013).

Academic support

Academic support includes tutoring and literacy and numeracy support and is very important for Aboriginal students who, as previously discussed, are often less academically prepared for tertiary education than non-Indigenous students (Miller 2005). Academic support may be provided by an IEU, KLO, Aboriginal or mainstream academics on campus or built into courses (Stuart & Gorman 2015; Miller 2005). The Commonwealth Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Scheme (ITAS) provides funding for one to one tutoring and support for TAFE and university students who require help with subjects (Nakata et al 2008). ITAS is highly valued by Aboriginal students, especially where tutors have an understanding of their cultural background (Lindsay et al 2005). Academic support is also needed by students prior to admission to tertiary education, with students requiring information on fees, cost of books and accommodation, information on courses and support available and entry requirements (Hossain et al 2008).

Financial support

Financial support has been identified as a key support required by many Aboriginal students to help them succeed in their studies (Stuart & Gorman 2015). Abstudy is a Centrelink payment to assist with the costs for Aboriginal Australians who are studying or undertaking an Australian Apprenticeship (Department of Human Services 2015) and is commonly accessed by Aboriginal students (Miller 2005). Aboriginal students are more reliant on scholarships than non-Indigenous students and value highly Commonwealth and State government Indigenous scholarship schemes, text book bursaries and computer scholarships to assist them with financial concerns (Trudgett 2009; Lindsay et al 2005).

Cultural support

Cultural support is essential for Aboriginal students and may be provided by an IEU, KLO, Aboriginal teaching staff in tertiary institutions and other Aboriginal students on campus (Stuart & Gorman 2015). Having a strong attachment to culture improves education and training outcomes for Aboriginal people as it impacts on self-esteem, personal identity and community support (Dockery 2013). The provision of Aboriginal studies is also seen as a way to maintain and strengthen the culture and identity of Aboriginal students and help them

feel their culture is respected and valued by the institution (Trudgett 2009; Lindsay et al 2005). Having Aboriginal staff on campus is important for students and encourages role modelling and a welcoming place for Aboriginal students (Kippen et al 2006; Miller 2005).

Service usage by Aboriginal people

Some services are used at higher rates by Aboriginal people than non-Indigenous people. For example, in 2013–14, over 3.6 million GP services were claimed through Medicare for Aboriginal people. These services were claimed at 1.1 times the rate for non-Indigenous Australians, with Aboriginal Australians more likely to have long or complex GP consultations. Another example is the rate of community mental health service contacts for Aboriginal people; in 2012–13 it was 3.2 times the rate for non-Indigenous people (AIHW 2015a).

Other services are not used as frequently by Aboriginal people, for example dentists and doctors (SCRGSP 2014). According to SCRGSP (2014), in 2008 29.9% of Aboriginal Australians aged 15 years and over reported they had problems accessing one or more services in the previous 12 months. The reasons for having difficulty accessing services in non-remote areas were 'waiting time/unavailable in time' (14.4 per cent), 'cost' (9.6 per cent), 'not enough services' (8.7 per cent) and having difficulty understanding, or being understood by service providers (3.2%).

Other barriers to service usage for Aboriginal people include cultural barriers, such as a lack of cultural awareness of service providers, services being culturally inappropriate, racism, social inequality and social exclusion (SCRGSP 2014).

Findings from consultations with key stakeholders

Characteristics of the Inner East region of Melbourne

During interviews with tertiary institutions and mainstream community organisations, the low population of Aboriginal people in the Inner East compared to other areas was mentioned numerous times. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2013) there are 1042 people (0.2% of the population) who identify as Aboriginal in the Inner East, with the City of Monash being the Local Government Area (LGA) with the highest population of the four LGAs. One worker stated that population statistics of Aboriginal tertiary students may not be accurate as their home location may be recorded on the census as being where their family live, which may be in a rural or interstate area, rather than the Inner East. The Aboriginal population in Inner East was described by interviewees as both "transient" and "quite disparate".

Several workers stated that the majority of Aboriginal people in surrounding areas live in the Outer East region, for example in Ringwood. This means that there may be higher numbers of Aboriginal students studying at other tertiary institution campuses in the Outer East, for example Swinburne's Croydon and Wantirna campuses. It was also noted that Monash Berwick campus and Federation Training Gippsland campuses had higher numbers of Aboriginal students than their Inner East campuses.

It was noted that roles for Aboriginal workers in the Inner East can be challenging due to the low Aboriginal population, which can often be reflected in the funding that is allocated to agencies in this area, impacting staffing and resourcing. One interviewee stated that mainstream services may not have the 'critical mass' of enough numbers of Aboriginal people to run a service specifically for Aboriginal clients.

On campus support services provided to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East

There are seven tertiary institutions which have campuses in the Inner East; three universities and four TAFEs. Campuses and approximate Aboriginal student numbers are listed in Table 5. For some institutions, figures for individual campuses were not available.

Table 5. Tertiary institutions in the Inner East with approximate Aboriginal student numbers

Tertiary institution/Campus in Inner East	Approx. number of Aboriginal students
Universities	
Deakin University, Burwood Campus	100 (Burwood)
Monash University, Clayton campus	170 (all campuses)
Swinburne University, Hawthorn campus	80 (all campuses)
Technical and Further Education (TAFE) providers	
Box Hill Institute, Box Hill campus	105 (all campuses)
Federation Training, Chadstone campus	178 (all campuses)
Holmesglen Institute, Glen Waverley and Chadstone campuses	100 (Chadstone), 200 (all campuses)
Swinburne TAFE, Hawthorn campus.	165 (all campuses)
TOTAL	**Maximum of Aboriginal 998 students**

Aboriginal support services in tertiary institutions
Support services available on Inner East campuses

All campuses had an Aboriginal worker (e.g. Koori Liaison Officer) on site except Deakin University Burwood campus and Federation Training Chadstone campus. For these two institutions, Aboriginal support services were available on other campuses (Deakin Institute of Koori Education in Geelong and Federation Training, Gippsland campuses) and were available to students of Inner East campuses, although it appears usage was not high in these situations and promotion of the service could improve. Tertiary institutions may have Aboriginal workers who can support students, without necessarily having an Indigenous Education Unit. Only one institution (Monash University) had a dedicated Indigenous space on campus, with computer labs with email and internet access, a reference library and student lounges.

Aboriginal workers on campus provided assistance with tutoring (Indigenous Tutoring Assistance Scheme), study support, career advice, course pathways, cultural events, advice about fees, scholarships and grants, information about Centrelink payments including Abstudy, assistance for students who had a disability or were carers, emotional and practical support, and encouragement and referrals to other support services. Aboriginal workers also often provided cultural awareness training for institute staff. Social events for Aboriginal students were run, as well as cultural events e.g. during NAIDOC and Reconciliation weeks. Some institutions with an Indigenous Education Unit on campus had an elder in residence to provide cultural support to staff and students.

Aboriginal services on campus fulfil a wide range of needs and often provide services outside the bounds of the Western, 'professional' client relationship e.g. personal contact details of staff may be shared with students, workers may take students to appointments, workers may have contact with students' families in the Aboriginal community, may work out of hours and often provide a friendly, "family" type atmosphere for students. One Aboriginal worker described the service they provide to Aboriginal students as a "one stop shop". Aboriginal student support services are often very flexible and tailored to a student's needs, rather than only providing a fixed number and type of services. Some Aboriginal workers on campus proactively contact newly enrolled Aboriginal students to inform them of services

available to them on campus. One Aboriginal worker stated that Aboriginal students are more likely to attend an institution with an Indigenous Education Unit and that students often choose to attend the tertiary institution that is closest to them.

Promotion of institution to schools and community

Pre enrolment factors can affect a student's decision to study and where to study. For example most universities interviewed promote access to their institution by activities, student ambassadors, workshops and camps in secondary schools and community outreach events to encourage Aboriginal students and students from low socio-economic backgrounds to aspire to tertiary study. These events allow students to access information about tertiary study, make connections with workers and other students and ease the transition to tertiary study. Given the relative affluence of the Inner East region compared to other areas, schools in this area may be less likely to be approached by universities who use the Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage (ICSEA) to prioritise low socioeconomic schools to target. It was also noted that many Aboriginal students are mature aged compared to non-Indigenous students, therefore are not arriving at tertiary education straight from school.

Pathways to tertiary study

Given some Aboriginal students do not have the prerequisites, supports and study skills to step straight into higher education, there are a number of Pathway and Enabling programs into TAFE and university to assist Aboriginal students with study skills training and ease them into tertiary study with tutoring support and alternative pathways. Indigenous Education Units can liaise with and advocate to faculties regarding students with low ATAR scores who may not fulfil all prerequisites. One university is trialling a project where Aboriginal students can attempt a couple of units online, supported by a scholarship, rather than enrol in a whole course which can be intimidating. TAFE courses can be utilised as stepping stones to assist Aboriginal people to re-enter education or move to employment. For students who need to build prerequisite skills for Certificate III and IV level courses they can be enrolled in Certificate II level courses to enable and engage them into further study.

One university has found that online courses are popular with Aboriginal students and that online enrolments are increasing. Online courses can fit in with Aboriginal students' lives, which may include being a carer for a family member with a chronic illness, work and family commitments and living a long way from a tertiary institution. Institutions are then faced with the difficulty of supporting students from a distance.

Service usage by Aboriginal tertiary students

Aboriginal workers on campus indicated that Aboriginal students will self-refer to Aboriginal services on campus if they feel comfortable, but are also commonly referred by a teacher, support staff, community worker or family member.

One Aboriginal worker stated their service to Aboriginal students was "fairly self-contained" and workers managed most student issues themselves or by using on campus mainstream services, rather than referring to external services very often. Aboriginal tertiary support workers stated they refer to or liaise with the following on campus services:

- GP for:
    - Health issues
    - Medical certificates
    - Mental health plan for referral to a psychologist for counselling, once they have used up the maximum university counselling sessions
    - Special consideration
- Counselling
- Financial support

- Assistance with student enrolment.

Aboriginal tertiary support services also commonly refer to or liaise with local community services. One worker stated that students should get support where they live, as they are best supported when connected to their local Aboriginal community. Koorie Liaison Officers commonly assist students to link in with the service by liaising with the worker at the external agency and sometimes taking the student to their appointment. Aboriginal tertiary support service workers who were interviewed had referred Aboriginal students to the following external agencies:

- Aboriginal Co-operative (e.g. for alcohol & drug, health, medical, dental, counselling services)
- Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)
- Community and Aboriginal Housing
- Community Health Service
- Council/Shire
- Crown Casino - Indigenous Engagement Program
- Dental e.g. Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (VAHS)
- Department of Justice/Youth Justice Workers
- Indigenous Units in other tertiary institutions
- Job Network
- Koori Court
- Koori Education Support Officers (KESOs) in local schools
- Koorie Liaison Officers (KLOs) in other institutions
- Land and Water Corporation
- Melbourne University - Careers pathways e.g. jobs, placement
- Mental health services
- Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (e.g. food bank, Youth and welfare services, Student placements) (several institutes refer to MMIGP)
- Sports centres
- The Foyer Youth accommodation service (Holmesglen Foyer)
- VAEAI and Wurreker Broker
- Victoria Police.

Mainstream support services in tertiary institutions

All universities had a medical centre on campus, whereas only two of the four TAFEs had access to medical services on campus (Swinburne TAFE which is co-located with Swinburne University and Holmesglen Institute has a part time GP available during term time). Only one institution (Monash University) had a dental clinic on campus. Other mainstream services provided on campus and available to all students for the tertiary institutions interviewed included:

- Accommodation support
- Careers and vocational counselling
- Childcare
- Complaints and grievances
- Computer access
- Counselling and mental health
- Disability services
- Educational counselling
- Emergency relief and food bank
- Financial counselling and assistance
- International student support
- Language, literacy, numeracy support

- Legal advice
- Parent support
- Referral services
- Safety and Security
- Spirituality and multi-faith services
- Student equity
- Student lounges and cafeteria
- Student recreation and activities
- Student Rights Officers
- Study skills
- Transport assistance
- Welfare support, information and referral
- Younger student support.

There were low usage rates by Aboriginal students of mainstream tertiary support services, for example university counselling services. This may reflect the low numbers of Aboriginal students, the fact that several mainstream tertiary support services did not ask students their Aboriginal status (although this information can be accessed through student records if required) and potentially a reluctance to disclose Aboriginality. It also may reflect a hesitancy of Aboriginal students to use mainstream supports, particularly where there may be an Aboriginal service on or off campus they may feel more comfortable accessing. In an effort to address this issue, one university counselling service employed an Aboriginal psychologist to work within their Indigenous Education Unit for a number of years. Surprisingly, there was very little uptake of this service. The manager of the counselling service believes this may have been because Aboriginal students prefer to drop in and have an informal conversation with Aboriginal staff rather than the more 'medical' or 'clinical' model of seeing a professional such as a psychologist, which may feel more confronting.

Mainstream tertiary support services were asked which community services they refer Aboriginal students to or liaise with. One worker stated that tertiary institutions can be quite "insular" and operate as their own "microcosm", therefore may not refer out to community services very frequently. Given the low usage rate of mainstream tertiary support services by Aboriginal students, Table 6 lists the services which staff referred all students to. Half of the off campus services referred to are mental health services.

Table 6. On and off campus services referred to by mainstream support services in tertiary institutions (all students).

On campus services	Off campus services
• Disability Unit • GPs • Mental Health Nurse • Student Loans	• Centrelink • Community Health Service • Crisis Assessment Team • Emergency Relief • Family Violence service • Financial counselling • GPs • Headspace (several refer to) • Housing • Jesuit Social Services – Support after Suicide service • Legal advice • Mental Health Nurse • NEAMI • Primary mental health team • Private psychologists through GP Mental Health Plan • Reconnexion

Support services provided to Aboriginal students by mainstream community organisations in the Inner East

The majority of mainstream community organisation staff interviewed stated that they had low numbers of Aboriginal clients using their service. In contrast, Headspace and Turning Point have seen an increase in Aboriginal clients over time. Generally most mainstream community organisations prioritise Aboriginal clients and charge reduced or no fees to encourage service usage.

Several staff of mainstream community organisations interviewed stated that Aboriginal people are less likely to self-refer to mainstream services than non-Aboriginal people. Reasons given why Aboriginal people may be reluctant to use mainstream services included feelings of shame, negative views of Government services due to past history and conflict with other Aboriginal people using the service. It was noted that word of mouth about services is very important in the Aboriginal community and this can affect whether a service is utilised or not.

Transport can be an issue and access to services can be increased by having a support person or worker encourage an Aboriginal person to use the service and provide transport. Cross referral from one program to another can work well e.g. one local Community Health Service had a number of Aboriginal clients entering the service through their oral health programs, as oral health workers were encouraged to cross refer to other services where they identified other issues.

During this project, mental health issues were identified as being very common in tertiary students. One Aboriginal worker felt that opening hours of mainstream mental health services should be extended to include after hours to be more accommodating for the times students are available.

There were very few Aboriginal workers employed in the mainstream community services interviewed, which can be a barrier to Aboriginal people accessing the service. One Community Health Service found that having a dedicated Aboriginal worker on site for a period of time increased referrals of Aboriginal clients by approximately 50%. Aboriginal workers can be seen to have more credibility than non-Aboriginal workers by the Aboriginal community. Interviewees also stated that Aboriginal people are more likely to use and feel comfortable using an Aboriginal specific service.

Mainstream community services were asked how services can be more culturally appropriate and encourage Aboriginal people to use their service. The responses were as follows:

- Ensuring services are culturally safe before promoting the service
- Employing Aboriginal staff
- Providing cultural awareness, cultural safety and cultural education to staff
- Providing staff training on Aboriginal health and engagement
- Making the physical environment a welcoming one for Aboriginal people e.g. having Aboriginal posters, artwork and flags visible
- Prioritising Aboriginal clients and exempting them from paying fees
- Conducting outreach to make Aboriginal people aware of the service
- Transporting Aboriginal clients to the service
- Providing secondary consultation to staff seeing Aboriginal clients to ensure they are providing culturally appropriate services.

Mainstream service workers stated that where Aboriginal clients used their service, they were referred by the following agencies:

- Aboriginal Health Team at Healesville (Eastern Health)
- Aboriginal Liaison Officer (ALO) in hospitals
- Case worker with Department of Health & Human Services
- Local Aboriginal Co-operative
- Ngwala Willumbong (an outreach service with alcohol and drug workers)
- Practice Incentives Program (PIP) Indigenous Health Incentive registered General Practices
- Schools
- South Eastern Melbourne Medicare Local.

Mainstream community services were asked where they refer Aboriginal tertiary students (or Aboriginal clients where they are not students) to for issues their service cannot address. The following services were noted:

- Aboriginal Health Team (Eastern Health), Healesville
- Aboriginal specific Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) provider in Box Hill
- Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, Lilydale
- Care Coordination & Supplementary Services (CCSS)
- Case management for chronic disease
- Centre Against Sexual Assault (CASA)
- Closing the Gap registration for ages 16+ to access unlimited counselling sessions
- Community counselling agencies
- Dandenong & District Aborigines Co-operative
- Eastern Community Legal Centre
- General Practitioner (GP) (most common response)
- Indigenous Education Unit on campus

- Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place
- Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative (Aboriginal outreach service with alcohol and drug workers in St Kilda)
- Practice Incentives Program (PIP) Indigenous Health Incentive registered general practices
- Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency (VACCA), Preston, Ringwood, Dandenong.

Aboriginal support services in the community

There are no Aboriginal specific services or elders group located in the Inner East region, therefore staff from the Victorian Aboriginal Education Association (VAEAI) in Northcote and Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place in Croydon were interviewed.

VAEAI is the peak Aboriginal community organisation for education and training in Victoria, providing advice on Koorie education issues, monitoring education trends and advocating for the needs of the community. All Vocational Education and Training (VET) institutions are required to submit a Wurreker Plan every 6 and 12 months to VAEAI outlining how they will increase participation of Aboriginal people in post-secondary education and workforce, identify and address issues. Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Groups (LAECGs) are voluntary bodies made up of a broad range of local Aboriginal community members committed to improving the education opportunities of Aboriginal people in their local community, including Aboriginal TAFE and university workers. LAECGs provide a locally based link between Aboriginal communities and education institutions.

Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (MMIGP) opened in 2005 when a number of the local Aboriginal community agreed on the need for a place to gather together and run Indigenous cultural activities that would meet the needs of Aboriginal community members in the Eastern Metropolitan Region. MMIGP provides social inclusion opportunities for members of the community such as a choir, play group, culture group, food bank, Planned Activity Group and community art. MMIGP do not provide specific services to tertiary students although they take students on placement though from local TAFEs and universities including Box Hill TAFE, Swinburne and Monash. The majority of these students are non-Indigenous.

Experiences of Aboriginal former students

Interviews conducted with three Aboriginal former nursing students provided information on the services that Aboriginal students found helpful during their studies. It would have been preferable if interviews were conducted with both TAFE and university students in the Inner East and a larger sample size was used, but due to time constraints this was not possible.

Two of the students went to university straight from school, whereas the third attended as a mature age student. All students were female. Two lived in Melbourne and attended university on campus, whilst the other lived in regional Victoria and travelled to Deakin University, Institute of Koorie Education in Geelong, for block study for 1-2 weeks each month. The three nursing students interviewed had studied at four institutions (one student studied at two institutions). Table 7 below shows the universities they attended and whether Aboriginal services were on campus.

Table 7. Presence or absence of Aboriginal services on campuses former students attended

University & campus	Aboriginal services on campus
Deakin University, Burwood campus	No Aboriginal services on campus
Deakin University - Institute of Koorie Education (IKE), Geelong	Yes – IKE is an Aboriginal specific campus
RMIT, City campus	Yes - Ngarara Willim Centre for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
RMIT, Bundoora campus	No, but access to Ngarara Willim Centre services from city campus

The students who had access to Aboriginal support services (which were dedicated Indigenous Education Units) on or off campus were extremely happy with the services and valued the support they were given. They felt they could take any question or issue to staff who were always happy to assist. The students utilised the following services provided by Aboriginal staff at university:

- Being interviewed by unit staff, rather than mainstream staff, for entry into their course
- Orientation for Aboriginal students
- Scholarships for Aboriginal and non-Indigenous students
- Indigenous Tutorial Assistance Service (ITAS)
- Study support
- Accommodation (available onsite at IKE)
- Cultural support
- Advocacy and referral to other services
- Counselling and emotional support
- Special consideration if there were issues at home e.g. extensions for assignments and time off
- Use of computers and printers.
- Assistance with placement at a rural hospital, including organising and paying for flights and accommodation.

One student felt disappointed she did not have any access to Aboriginal support on campus, as support was offered to Aboriginal students at another campus of the university. Tutoring was a particular need, which she had to pay for privately, despite ITAS being provided to Aboriginal students on another campus free of charge. She had also attended a university with an Indigenous Education Unit on campus and found the contrast between the two was stark in terms of the services provided to her. Despite the lack of Aboriginal support services, this student was able to successfully complete her degree.

The student attending IKE had all her needs met by staff there. The other two students used the following on campus mainstream services:

- Counselling service
- Student services for study support
- Disability Support Services
- Nursing Faculty for special consideration after illness.

The services and supports that the Aboriginal students believed helped (or would have helped if not available to them) to successfully complete their studies included the following:

- A proactive Aboriginal service who contacts students on enrolment to introduce themselves and provide information about their services.
- Having an Aboriginal service on campus, or providing equivalent services to students on other campuses if not on campus.

- Intensive and personal 1:1 or group support for first year students from Aboriginal workers.
- Tutoring provided by ITAS to improve grades and confidence, decrease stress and provide emotional support. If this is not available, providing financial assistance to purchase private tutoring.
- Mentoring of students throughout their course, including keeping in touch to see how students are doing and whether they need any assistance.
- Making students aware of the services available to them, doing so in a personal way and referring students to services e.g. walking through them services during orientation and information sessions, as opposed to giving printed material. Students may not use services otherwise.
- Allowing students to remain living at home whilst studying so they have easy access to their family, support network and community and continue working or caring for family members e.g. by flying in to block study, going to a campus close to home, carpooling or completing online study.
- Services on campus being culturally sensitive and providing a welcoming environment e.g. by displaying the Aboriginal flag.
- Scholarships and grants (both Aboriginal specific and non-Aboriginal specific) to help ease financial stress.
- Linking students with Aboriginal services for support and connection to community.
- Flexibility for Aboriginal students e.g.
    o Childcare for parents
    o Going to rural areas to teach students instead of students going to the institution
    o Relaxed classroom environment
    o Delivery of training tailored to Aboriginal students.

The external services students used during their time at university included the Centrelink Abstudy phone service, private tutoring (where ITAS was not available) and a Koori Employment agency near one student's home town so she could sit an off campus exam.

The following issues faced by Aboriginal students which can be barriers to accessing and completing study were identified by interviews with Aboriginal and mainstream workers in tertiary institutions, community agencies and former students:

- Mental health issues are common in all tertiary students.
- Some Aboriginal students have to relocate from interstate or rural areas or travel long distances from home and have no family near where they study. This can lead to students missing home and wanting to go "back to country". Lack of public transport in the area can also be an issue.
- Health issues.
- Housing affordability (the Inner East is mostly an expensive area).
- Community conflict.
- Family violence.
- Substance abuse.
- Financial issues and having low socioeconomic status.
- Confusion around the tertiary system and requirements.
- Education and academic difficulties, e.g. not having a sufficient level of education to pass a TAFE course, therefore failing which can lead to mental health issues.
- Getting 'lost' in a big campus and feeling displaced.
- Youth offending and contact with the police.
- Teenage pregnancy.
- Lack of support.
- Family responsibilities.
- Caring responsibilities.

- Lack of tutoring support.
- Work responsibilities e.g. block training can make it harder to fit around work.
- Wanting to work and have an income (e.g. traineeships are popular because students can work and study).
- Parents haven't completed any tertiary education.
- Some people may be reluctant to identify as Aboriginal e.g.
  - not want to be seen as marginalised or different
  - not want to be questioned of challenged on their Aboriginality
  - have issues of self-identity
  - may want to fit in and not attend Aboriginal specific events on campus if they are in the minority
  - tertiary institutions may need proof of Aboriginality e.g. a letter from community members
  - students may identify as Aboriginal later in life.

Gaps in service for Aboriginal tertiary students

Several staff interviewed mentioned recent TAFE cuts which have led to decreases in staff numbers, resulting in a decrease of services provided on campus to students. One interviewee stated this has resulted in less training opportunities being offered to Aboriginal people by TAFE providers than previously. Several interviewees commented that they believed students at university have access to better services and are better supported than TAFE students, due to the availability of more funding.

Some tertiary institutions are without Aboriginal workers on all campuses e.g. Deakin University, Burwood campus and Federation Training, Chadstone campus. Theoretically students from these campuses can access support from Aboriginal workers on other sites, but given the distances between campuses, this can be difficult and may not occur much in reality. For example, the Koori Unit in Federation Training in Gippsland stated they have never had contact with an Aboriginal student from the Chadstone campus. Other campuses have Aboriginal workers but not a dedicated Aboriginal space on campus e.g. Swinburne University/TAFE.

Given the lack of Aboriginal specific community services in the Inner East, students who are referred to or want to attend an Aboriginal specific service need to travel out of the area. Services outside the area which students may be referred to include Mullum Mullum Indigenous Gathering Place (Croydon), Dandenong and District Aborigines Cooperative (Dandenong), Victorian Aboriginal Health Service (Fitzroy), Boorndawan Willam Aboriginal Healing Service, (Lilydale), Victorian Aboriginal Child Care Agency, (Preston, Ringwood, Dandenong), Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative (St Kilda) and the Eastern Health Aboriginal Health Team (Healesville).

Other gaps in service for Aboriginal tertiary students identified by interviewees included:

- Housing issues, including a lack of availability of housing close to the institution, high cost of housing, lack of financial assistance for and lack of housing and homelessness services.
- A need for ongoing, low cost counselling in the community which students can access if they have utilised the maximum on campus counselling sessions.
- A lack of coordination of services, with services operating in silos.
- A need for more promotion and outreach by mainstream services to the Aboriginal community.
- Mainstream services could be more culturally aware and safe to increase usage of their service by Aboriginal people.

- Health services on some campuses are limited e.g. no or only part time medical services, no allied health services.
- A need for more Aboriginal careers services.
- Lack of transport to services, which can be a barrier for Aboriginal people attending appointments
- Lack of options for provision of material aid for students.
- Decrease in the number of drop in youth centres.
- Lack of intensive case management services.

Current links between Aboriginal and mainstream support services in tertiary institutions and local services

A number of the mainstream community services interviewed are already working with tertiary institutions. For example:

- Headspace Hawthorn see students from Swinburne Uni/TAFE, Deakin University, Burwood campus and Box Hill TAFE. They also present the Active Minds program (an early intervention program aimed to increase the mental health knowledge of football club members and raise awareness of youth mental health amongst young men in community sporting clubs) to five football clubs, including the Swinburne Football Club.
- Turning Point has met with Deakin University regarding supporting students with drug & alcohol issues.
- Gateway LLEN provided a breakfast club for Box Hill TAFE students in the past, resourced by Whitehorse Council Youth ConneXions.
- Mental Health Nurse Team, Melbourne East General Practitioners Network (MEGPN) work with Monash, Deakin and Swinburne universities to provide counselling to students and staff with severe and persistent mental disorders during periods of significant disability.
- EACH Nunawading Youth and Family, Inner East see tertiary students; seeing more TAFE than university students.
- Link Health and Community have connected with Monash University's Elder in Residence regarding referring students to Link Health and Community, primarily for oral health services.

Potential partnerships between Aboriginal and mainstream support services in tertiary institutions and local services

Staff from Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary institutions utilise local community services and are keen to further increase their knowledge of and develop partnerships with community services. Staff of community support services would like to increase use of their services by Aboriginal people, including Aboriginal tertiary students. As a result of information gathered during interviews, the following potential partnerships were identified:

- Counselling services on campus are not necessarily ongoing, therefore partnerships between tertiary institutions and low cost community counselling services could be valuable.
- Tertiary support service staff would like to know more about health and wellbeing services in the local community, therefore opportunities could be created for increasing tertiary staff knowledge of these services and their referral pathways.

- Tertiary support service staff would like closer relationships with mental health services in the community to refer students to, therefore partnerships could be created between tertiary institutions and local mental health services.
- Tertiary support staff would like to refer students to allied health services that are not available on campus e.g. GPs and dentists, therefore partnerships with local Community Health Services would be valuable.
- Tertiary institutions would like to be able to refer students to services to assist them with substance abuse issues and housing services, especially for students from remote areas to locate suitable accommodation near campus. One example of a potential partnership regarding this issue is for IEPCP to partner with the Holmesglen TAFE Indigenous Education Consultant to promote the Holmesglen Youth Foyer accommodation service to increase Aboriginal student usage.
- Tertiary institutions would like to be able to refer students to services to assist them with substance abuse issues, therefore they could partner with Ngwala Willumbong Co-operative and Turning Point.
- Headspace Hawthorn are keen to partner with schools and tertiary institutions to support Aboriginal students, as well as other local agencies such as IEPCP and Eastern Melbourne PHN. Headspace also have Aboriginal-specific mental health resources (Yarn Safe) they can provide to other services to distribute to Aboriginal young people.
- Box Hill Institute would like to partner with:
  - Healesville Aboriginal Health Services
  - VET in schools
  - KESOs in the local area.

As part of this project, Inner East Primary Care Partnership set up and attended a meeting between Link Health and Community (Link) and Holmesglen Institute to explore potential partnership opportunities between the two organisations to support Holmesglen students, including Aboriginal students, and increase awareness of both services. This resulted in identification of the following services which could be provided by Link to Holmesglen students and staff:

- GP services at Link Glen Waverley, Oakleigh and Clayton sites when Holmesglen part time GP service unavailable
- Referrals of students to Headspace Youth Clinic service, which operates from the Link Glen Waverley site
- Time limited counselling services at all Link sites
- Provision of Link information and staff to attend health and wellbeing events on campus as required.

Headspace Hawthorn provided the Project Officer with 'Yarn Safe' Aboriginal support resources and Headspace contact details for distribution to interested organisations, as they are keen to partner with other organisations to assist Aboriginal students. The Project Officer distributed this information to interested organisations as well as provided some organisations with the contact details of tertiary institutions workers in the Inner East.

Headspace Hawthorn recommended key stakeholders meet together to discuss how to engage with Aboriginal young people, to map Closing the Gap projects and share information on each other's services. Apart from tertiary institutions, other suggested services which could be involved include Eastern Melbourne PHN Aboriginal team, Aboriginal primary mental health services in the region, Closing the Gap workers, Access to Allied Psychological Services (ATAPS) workers and Care Coordination and Supplementary Services Program (CCSS) workers.

As a result of this recommendation, staff who were interviewed were asked whether they were interested in participating in a forum with tertiary institutions and community organisations with the above aims. All organisations expressed interest in such a forum (depending on available staffing at the time). Workers felt it would be an opportunity to learn about other services, share their own work and make connections with other workers, especially for those new to the region. Gateway LLEN and VAEAI stated they would be happy to help with planning the event, for example by publicising the event to local service providers in their network and inviting Aboriginal community members.

PROJECT OUTCOMES

The 'Health and wellbeing services supporting Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East – Understanding the picture' project, funded by Koolin Balit has achieved the following outcomes:

- Identified the support services available to Aboriginal tertiary students studying in institutions in the Inner East, including those available to students both on and off campus.
- Increased understanding of the health and wellbeing services available to Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East.
- Identified the gaps in service for Aboriginal tertiary students in the Inner East.
- Incorporated input from Aboriginal former university students into a project that aims to improve services for Aboriginal tertiary students.
- Encouraged local community services to think about how they might improve referral rates of Aboriginal people to their service.
- Identified an opportunity for tertiary instructions and local community services in the Inner East to partner with each other to improve services for Aboriginal tertiary students and reduce duplication of service.
- Provided an opportunity for Inner East Primary Care Partnership to support the creation and sustainability of partnerships between tertiary institutions and community organisations in the Inner East.

Future funding

In October 2015, IEPCP was awarded further Koolin Balit funding by the Department of Health and Human Services Eastern Metropolitan Region for 2015-17 to continue this work to support Aboriginal tertiary students. This funding will support a Project Officer for 12 months at 0.6 EFT. There was a recommendation by the selection panel that this project links closely with General Practitioners and the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) to support sustainability of project findings.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- IEPCP and its partners facilitate at least one forum involving staff from Aboriginal and mainstream tertiary support services and local health and wellbeing services to increase awareness of respective services and allow for the opportunity for networking and discussion regarding potential partnerships.
- The Project Officer employed to further this project in 2016 consult with members of the Local Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (LAECG) to obtain input into the project and facilitate partnerships.
- The Project Officer employed to further this project in 2016 liaise with local GPs in the area, utilising the networks established by Melbourne East GP Network and Eastern Melbourne PHN to ensure GP services are accessible to Aboriginal tertiary students.
- Tertiary institution campuses without any visible Aboriginal service on campus explore making the campus more culturally safe for Aboriginal students.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 – SERVICE PROVIDER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

NOTE: These questions were varied slightly depending on the service being interviewed.

1. What assistance does your service provide to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students?
2. Do you have many Aboriginal clients?
3. Are they living away from home?
4. Who are they mainly referred by?
5. What are their ages/gender?
6. For what reasons do they use your service?
7. What other services do you refer Aboriginal students to?
8. Do you have any Aboriginal staff?
9. Do you know how many Aboriginal students are on campus?
10. Do you do any promotion to schools in the area? Target Aboriginal students specifically?
11. Do you have any partnerships/relationships with other organisations to support Aboriginal students?
12. Are there any partnerships/relationships between your service and other organisations you think would be helpful to support Aboriginal students?
13. Do you do any promotion to schools in the area? Target Aboriginal students specifically?
14. Have you identified any gaps in services for Aboriginal students?
15. Are you interested in participating in a forum with other tertiary institutions and community organisations?
16. Any other comments?

APPENDIX 2 – FORMER STUDENT INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Institute studied at?
2. Years studied/Course?
3. Did you attend as a young person or mature age student?
4. What on campus services did you use during your studies, if any?
   a. *Aboriginal services:*
   b. *Mainstream services:*
5. What off campus services did you use during your studies, if any?
6. How did you find out about these services? (Did anyone refer you?)
7. What was your experience of these services?
8. Did you have any difficulty accessing these services?
9. Were there long waiting times?
10. If you didn't use any services, why was this?
11. Are there any services you feel you would have benefitted from that weren't available?
12. How can services be more culturally appropriate? / What would make you want to use them?
13. Were there any Aboriginal staff (apart from Aboriginal workers)?
14. Any other comments?
15. Other information: