

Towards Cultural Security

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Introduction

The Wimmera Primary Care Partnership is currently addressing Aboriginal health inequality by assisting 20 of their partner agencies to assess levels of cultural competence. This includes auditing and monitoring changes to support agencies to work towards creating culturally secure environments. The goal is to improve Aboriginal people's access, experience and outcomes of mainstream agency's programs and services.

The project arose from Wimmera Primary Care Partnership's strategic planning workshops in 2009/10, where it was evident that there was a strong commitment from partner agencies to making services more culturally appropriate and inclusive. As a result, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership sought funding from the Department of Health, under the National Close the Gap campaign, to facilitate a project that focused on organisational change within mainstream agencies in the Wimmera.

Towards Cultural Security is part of the Department of Health's Implementation Plan for Closing the Gap in Indigenous health. It fits within the state and federal reform priorities of: *Primary health care services that can deliver*; and *Making Indigenous health everyone's business*.

Methods

In 2010, senior management of participating agencies signed formal statements of support for the *Towards Cultural Security* project. In doing so, they agreed to review their existing practices and cultural norms that may limit Aboriginal people from accessing their programs and services.

In 2011/12, agencies undertook cultural competency audits, which involved all staff completing electronic or paper based questionnaires designed by WPCP. Data collected from the audits was used to identify trends, strengths and opportunities to develop the skills and capacity of both staff and the agency to improve levels of cultural competency. The results were then used to develop action steps and were presented to management in the form of written and oral reports; however, it was at the discretion of each agency as to how many changes were implemented.

Second round audits are currently being rolled out to agencies to measure improvements in cultural competency by comparing results against the baseline data collected in the first round audits. This will reveal whether the agency has moved higher up the cultural competence continuum.

Results

The success of this project can be attributed to the willingness of agencies to undertake audits and commit to making long term change to improve Aboriginal health outcomes in the Wimmera. At April 2012, audit questionnaires had been distributed to 1095 respondents. A total of 456 responses were received. Agency completion rates ranged between 100% to 19%.

Success was measured by the following indicators, which have the capacity to benefit both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, mainstream agencies and local Aboriginal and Community Controlled Health Organisations:

- Increased service delivery
- Targeted program delivery
- Enhanced capacities of agencies to meet specific funding guidelines and service agreements
- Increased knowledge, skills and capacity of staff
- Increased number of collaborative partnerships between mainstream agencies, Aboriginal groups and local Aboriginal Cooperatives

Participating agencies: Dunmunkle Health Services, Grampians Community Health, Harrow Bush Nursing Centre, Hindmarsh Shire Council, Horsham Rural City Council, Rural Northwest Health, The Salvation Army, West Vic Division of General Practice, West Wimmera Health Service, Wimmera Health Care Group, Wimmera Regional Library Corporation, Wimmera Regional Sports Assembly, Wimmera Southern Mallee LLEN, Wimmera Volunteers, Women's Health Grampians, Woomelang and District Bush Nursing Centre, Yarriambiack Shire Council, Edenhope and District Memorial Hospital, Wimmera Primary Care Partnership.

Discussion

Ongoing consultation with local Goolum Goolum Aboriginal Cooperative in Horsham enabled the project to target specific issues and needs within the local Aboriginal community. This approach also contributed to increased levels of trust and the creation of positive relationships between the Co-op and participating mainstream agencies. In some instances, this resulted in the creation of partnerships, formal service agreements and the creation of Memorandum of Understandings.

Examples of positive steps taken by some agencies based on the results of their audits has included:

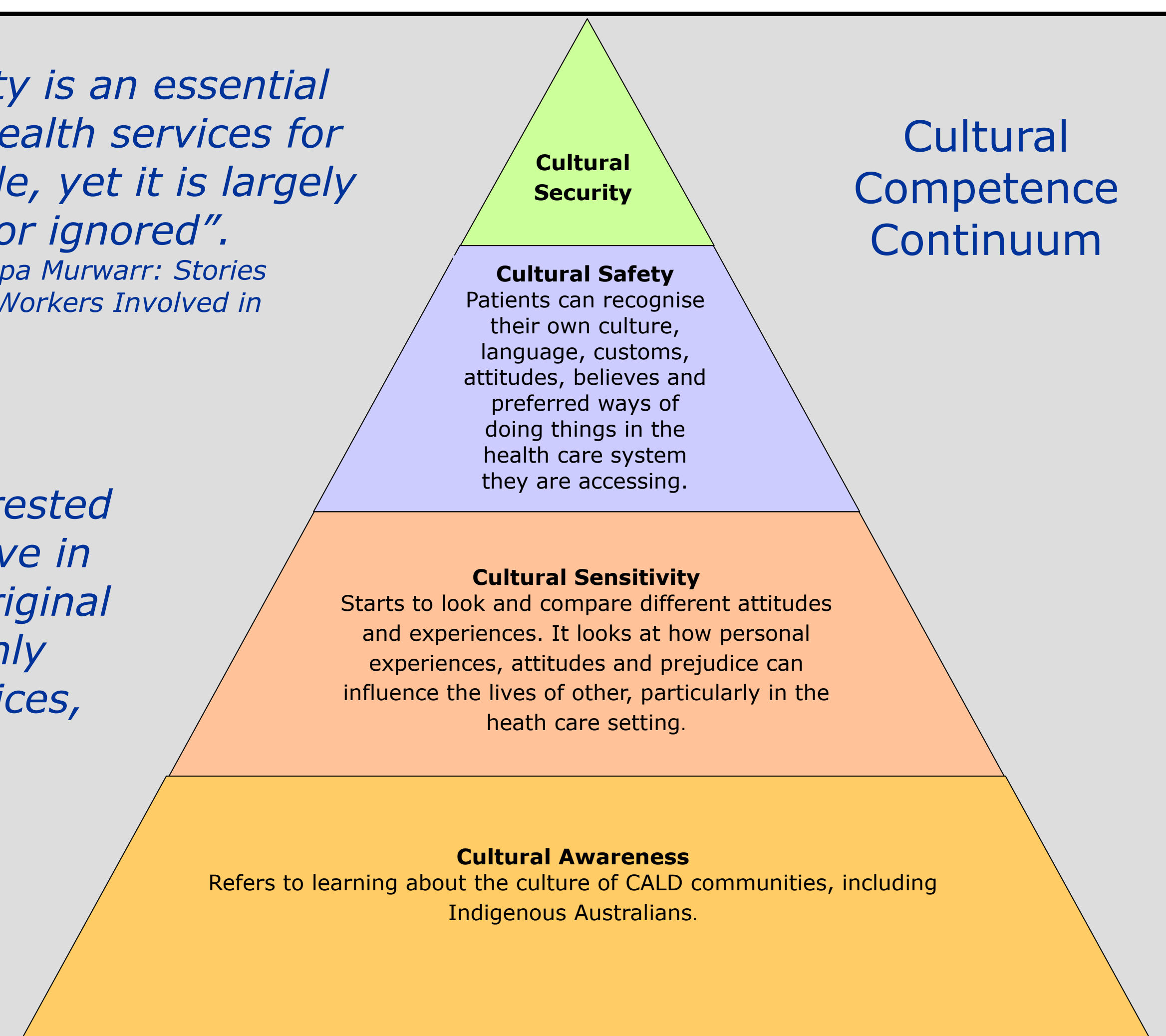
- Providing Aboriginal newspapers in waiting rooms
- Displaying Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander flags and signs acknowledging the Traditional Owners and welcoming all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to their organization
- Undertaking foundation level cultural competency training
- Developing Cultural Diversity Plans
- Reviewing working relationships with Aboriginal organisations to ensure they remain effective and targeted to local needs
- Supporting and mentoring Aboriginal workers undertaking traineeships

"Cultural security is an essential component of health services for Aboriginal people, yet it is largely misunderstood or ignored".

Julie Coffin (2002) Ngapa Murwarr: Stories from Aboriginal Health Workers Involved in Sexual Health Work.

"I am very interested in being proactive in supporting Aboriginal people to not only access our services, but influence range and delivery methods"

CEO, Community services organisation



Conclusions

A diverse range of cultural competency audits are currently in circulation, both within Australia and overseas. Several critiques of existing audits have been undertaken highlighting their strengths and limitations, and these were taken into consideration during the audit design phase of this project. This enabled the production of a tool which was simple, easy to use, cost efficient, and assessed the cultural competency of both individuals and organisations. Furthermore, the audit results were collated and presented in a report which made suggestions for improvement and offered support for action planning.

The vision of this project is that all Aboriginal people in the Wimmera region will be provided with culturally secure services from Wimmera Primary Care Partnership's partner agencies. However, to do so, Closing the Gap in Aboriginal health must be embedded in corporate philosophy and agencies must take a "whole of organisation" approach. The degree of change within agencies is dependent on the commitment of senior management to drive initiatives at the highest level.

Further information: www.wimmerapcp.org.au

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Note: On this poster, Aboriginal refers to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Aboriginal is used in preference to Indigenous; however, Indigenous is retained when it is part of a title of a report, program and quotation.